

BUSH STADIUM
(Perry Stadium)
(Victory Field)
1501 West 16th Street
Indianapolis
Marion County
Indiana

HALS IN-6
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

BUSH STADIUM

HALS NO. IN-6

Location: 1501 West 16th Street, Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana
Bound on the north by West 16th Street, on the west by factories along Riverside Drive, on the south by Waterway Boulevard, and on the east by Harding Street.
Lat. 39.787824 Long:-86.188837 (Home Plate, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84).

Significance: Bush Stadium contributes to the broad patterns of history in the area of recreation because of its association with baseball in Indianapolis during the 20th century. Bush Stadium was constructed in 1931 to host Indianapolis's Minor League team, the Indianapolis Indians. Prior to being renamed Bush Stadium, the ballpark was first known as Perry Stadium and then Victory Field. It served as a significant venue for both segregated and integrated baseball. Through the 1930s, different Negro League teams played at Perry Stadium, including the ABCs (1932, 1938, 1939), American Giants (1933), Athletics (1937), and Crawfords (1940). The Indianapolis Clowns played there from 1944 to 1962. The Indianapolis Indians integrated in 1952.²

Bush Stadium is also significant for its association with the lives of Norman Perry and Owen "Donie" Bush, both contributors in naming the stadium. The Perry family operated the Indianapolis Power and Light Company (IPL), which was adjacent to the stadium that predated Bush, Washington Park. IPL supplied the light towers at Washington Park, and they were moved to Bush Stadium in 1932. Jim Perry, Norman's brother, owned the Indianapolis Indians, but suffered a fatal accident in 1929. Norman took over as the team owner, constructed the new ballpark, and named it "Perry Stadium" in honor of his brother. The "PS" in the bas-relief carvings symbolizes the stadium's original name.³

Indianapolis native Owen "Donie" Bush played professional baseball for the Detroit Tigers for fifteen years (1908-1922) and later managed four professional teams. Throughout his career, he would round up major and minor leaguers to play against the Indianapolis ABCs during the postseason. This was an annual highlight for many Indianapolis baseball fans. In 1967, the stadium was renamed "Bush Stadium" in honor of Bush and his contributions to Indianapolis baseball.⁴

Bush Stadium is also significant for its architectural style and innovative design and construction. Bush Stadium is a classic steel and reinforced concrete ballpark. After visiting the newly constructed stadium, Thomas Hickey, president of the American Baseball Association, stated that Bush was the finest ballpark ever, when compared to other league parks. The local architecture firm of Pierre and White designed the beauty in Bush Stadium while Osborn

Engineering Company ensured that it was structurally sound. Pierre and White were well known among Indianapolis circles for their trademark Art Deco designs. The gate pavilion with its large bas-relief carvings sparked interest in this firm, which went on to design a number of other significant buildings in Indianapolis such as the Indiana State Library and Historical Building. The Osborn Engineering Company of Cleveland, Ohio, was well known for building other significant steel and reinforced concrete ballparks such as Detroit's Tiger Stadium, the Bronx's Yankee Stadium, and the reconstruction of Boston's Fenway Park.⁵

The design of Bush Stadium was well ahead of its time due to its many modern amenities for fans, players, and officials. Tunnels between the dugout and locker rooms kept players separate from the fans and umpires. Spectators enjoyed raised seat heights and lights for night games. On the second floor of the gate pavilion, team managers had offices, a kitchen, and dining rooms with fireplaces. The entire structure of the gate pavilion and grandstands opened up to a large playing field, with the right and left field walls 350 feet away from home plate. Bush Stadium was also the first ballpark in Indianapolis to be surrounded by large amounts of parking. Subsequently, many fans traveling to and from the ballpark drove through the surrounding African American community.⁶

Description: Name--The park was originally named Perry Stadium and was later renamed Victory Field in support of the war effort during WWII. In 1967, it was changed to Bush Stadium in honor of Indians owner Owen Bush.

Construction Date--1931. Opening day was September 5, 1931.

Demolition Date--Still standing.

Architect/Builder-- Architect: Pierre and White of Indianapolis, Indiana
Engineer: Osborn Engineering Company of Cleveland, Ohio

Cost--\$350,000

Materials-- Reinforced concrete, steel, brick masonry, and Indiana limestone.

Seating Capacity-- 14,500

Layout-- The stadium is surrounded on three sides by parking and the east side by Harding Street. It is enclosed by a twelve-foot-high brick wall adorned with ivy and capped with limestone. The main entrance to the park is located at the southwest corner. Fans entered through a grand Art Deco gate pavilion of Indiana limestone with bas-relief carvings of Perry Stadium and Indianapolis Indians motifs. Club offices with a kitchen and dining room are located on the second floor of the gate pavilion. The reinforced concrete grandstands wrap

around home plate (located at the southwest corner of the park) and run along the first (south) and third (west) base lines. Concrete bleachers extend along the right field foul line. Steel posts hold the steel-frame metal roof above the grandstands and support the box seats above. Concessions and restrooms are located behind the grandstands, while players and umpires have separate locker rooms connected to the dugouts by tunnels. The original scoreboard was located along the left field wall, but was later replaced by an electronic board on the right field wall. Currently the structure is suffering from lack of maintenance, and the City of Indianapolis uses the site to store junk cars. On June 16, 2011, the city announced plans to redevelop the site into loft-style apartments. Preliminary plans keep the art deco façade and much of the brick wall surrounding the site.

Dimensions-- Left Field: 350 feet, Center Field: 395 feet, Right Field: 350 feet.

Special Features-- The six steel light towers were moved to Bush Stadium from Washington Park in 1932. Drainage tile was installed under the playing field to maintain a dry playing surface.

Historic adjacent land use-- The Park was constructed on agricultural land on the city's western edge, and adjacent to the White River.

Current adjacent land use-- Bush Stadium is currently surrounded by small-scale manufacturing and commercial uses to its east and west, with the White River to its south, and Kuntz Soccer & Sports Complex to its north.

Teams-- American Association Baseball Club, the Indianapolis Indians. Negro League Indianapolis ABCs, American Giants, Athletics, Crawfords, and Indianapolis Clowns.

History: African American baseball teams have been recorded playing ball in Indianapolis since 1867. At the turn of the century, the African American population in Indianapolis was growing along with America's interest in the game of baseball. In 1890, 11,000 African Americans lived in Indianapolis, and by 1910 that number had more than doubled to 23,000. Indiana Avenue on the northwest side of downtown became the middle-class African American section of the city. This area near the confluence of the White River and Fall Creek was also industrial. The Indianapolis Water Company had an extensive canal and water works system throughout the northern section of the region while the Indianapolis Power and Light and the railroad companies worked out of the southern section. Additionally, this area is located between downtown and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which boosted Indianapolis to a major automobile metropolis.⁷

Society flourished during the twentieth century as industrial and technological

advances allowed people more time for recreation. Baseball provided a wholesome form of entertainment. However, African Americans were not permitted to play ball with whites on organized teams during this time. As social and economic situations improved, many local African American businesses began to establish local baseball teams.⁸

In 1902, the Indianapolis ABCs (named for the American Brewing Company) emerged out of this African American community and began playing at Northwestern Park. Just as the ABCs were forming, Indianapolis constructed Washington Park; its first large-scale wood baseball park located approximately 1.3 miles directly west of downtown and south of the community.⁹

In 1914 Indianapolis baseball entered the national stage. In addition to the American Association Indianapolis Indians, the Indianapolis ABCs had developed as a premier professional black team, and the Indianapolis Hoosiers were the 1914 Federal League Champions. Federal League Park was constructed southwest of downtown Indianapolis for the Indianapolis Hoosiers, but the Indianapolis ABCs played many home games there during 1914 and 1915 because Northwestern Park was too small to handle the growing crowds of fans. The Federal League collapsed after 1915, and Federal League Park was demolished in less than three years after its construction in order to build a modern freight station in an effort to relieve downtown congestion.¹⁰

Washington Park continued to be the premier ballpark in Indianapolis until Perry Stadium was constructed in 1931 as the new home for the Indianapolis Indians. It hosted home games for the ABCs, American Giants, Athletics, and Crawfords. Perry Stadium was renamed victory field during World War II to support the war effort. During the mid-1940s and 1950s it also hosted games for the Negro National League barnstorming team of the Indianapolis Clowns. The Clowns mixed professional baseball with comedy to provide entertainment that attracted fans during a time when integrated professional baseball was drawing attention away from the Negro Leagues.¹¹

Perry Stadium was renamed “Victory Field” during WWII to support the war effort and was later named Bush Stadium in honor of Indianapolis native Owen “Donie” Bush, who played professional ball for the Detroit Tigers. Bush often organized teams of major and minor leaguers to play post-season exhibition games against the Indianapolis ABCs.¹²

During the late 1900s, the neighborhood around Bush Stadium has decayed along with the stadium. In 1995, the stadium was in such poor shape that the City of Indianapolis chose to build new Victory Field (north of Federal League Park and East of Washington Park), also between downtown and the White River. In 1997 Bush Stadium was converted into the 16th Street Raceway, but is now owned by the City of Indianapolis Department of Parks and Recreation as a

vehicle storage location for the “Cash for Clunkers” federal economic stimulus program in 2009. Current proposals call for redeveloping Bush Stadium into commercial and residential uses.¹³

Lost Parks: Locations and Descriptions

Northwestern Park¹⁴

Northwestern Park was located approximately 1.8 miles northwest of the city center in a redeveloping industrial area. The park was bound on the north by Brighton Boulevard, on the west by the Indianapolis Water Company Settling Basin, on the south by West 17th Place, and on the east by Brighton Boulevard (later Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Street). The site is currently a United Parcels Services (UPS) distribution center.

Name--Northwestern Park was named for its location near Northwestern Avenue, a major road that led northwest out of downtown along the Indianapolis Water Company Canal.

Construction Date--Unknown, but fully operational prior to 1905.¹⁵

Demolition Date--Unknown, but demolished prior to 1937.

Architect/Builder--Unknown

Cost--Unknown

Materials--Wood

Seating Capacity-- Unknown, however it is known that by 1915 games for the Indianapolis ABCs drew more fans than the park could accommodate. 3,000 fans attended an ABCs game in 1914, and soon after over 500 more seats were added.

Layout-- The entrance was located at the southeast corner of the park, behind home plate and closest to downtown. Grandstands were located along the third base line (south), and it is unknown if permanent seating was available along the first base line or the outfield.

Dimensions--Unknown

Adjacent Land Use--The Indianapolis Water Company canal and blue collar neighborhoods were located nearby.

Teams--Indianapolis ABCs

Washington Park¹⁶

Washington Park was located approximately 1.3 miles directly west of the city center. The park was bound on the north by Washington Street, on the west by the Indianapolis Power and Light Company, on the south by railroad tracks, and on the east by a vacant field. The Indianapolis Zoo now occupies the site.

Name--Washington Park was named for its location on West Washington Street.
Construction Date--1905. Opening day was April 3, 1905

Demolition Date-- C.1935. The park was no longer needed after construction of Bush Stadium.

Architect/Builder--Unknown

Cost--Unknown

Materials-- The park was construction of wood with some steel. Wood and steel columns supported a wood roof and box seats above the grandstands.

Seating Capacity--Originally the park seated 11,000 fans. In 1909, the grandstand roof was raised fifteen feet to accommodate an additional 4,000 seats, including 1,000 rooftop box seats.

Layout--The park entrance was located at its northwest corner, adjacent to old Washington Street. Inside the stadium a single level of grandstands wrapped around home plate and lined the first (west) and third (north) base lines with dugouts below grade. Uncovered bleachers ran along the left field foul line. Wood bleachers also wrapped around the entire outfield wall with the scoreboard located at the corner of right field.

Dimensions--Left field 360 feet, Center Field 500 feet, Right field 360 feet.

Adjacent Land Use--The park was surrounded by industry. Often the railroad switchmen parked a line of freight cars adjacent to the right field fence and allowed youngsters to watch the game from atop the parked cars.

Teams-- The American Association Baseball Club, the Indianapolis Indians played more than 2,300 games between 1905 and 1931. The Indianapolis ABCs played frequent games between 1917 and 1926, including the first Negro National League game on May 2, 1920.

Federal League Park¹⁷

Federal League Park was located approximately 0.8 miles southwest of the city center and was bound on the north by Greenlawn Cemetery, on the west by a slaughterhouse, on the south by Oliver Avenue, and on the east by Kentucky

Avenue. The site is currently a vacant lot adjacent to the diamond Link Chain factory.

Name-- Federal League Park was also called Greenlawn Park for the cemetery that previously occupied the site.

Construction Date--1914. Opening day was April 23, 1914.

Demolition Date--1917. The park was demolished to construct a modern terminal freight station.

Architect/Builder-- Builder was Pease, a local contractor.

Cost--More than \$100,000

Materials--The grandstands were constructed of steel, concrete, and heavy timber to resist fire.

Seating Capacity--The Park could hold between 20,000 and 25,000 fans.

Layout--The park entrance was located at the northeast corner, closest to downtown. Here a covered macadam passageway led fans to the northwest corner of the stadium to enter the park behind home plate. The grandstands were 252 feet long on the first base line and 268 feet long on the third base line. They were 60 feet wide by 70 feet high covered by a green metal roof to provide shade for the entire grandstands. The dugouts were lined with concrete and sunk four feet below grade.

Dimensions--Left field 280 feet, Center Field 400 feet, Right field 310 feet.

Special Features--The playing surface was constructed on a bed of cinders to shed water. Additionally, many amenities were included for the comfort and pleasures of the fans, including nice men's and ladies' lounges equipped with telephones for long distance calls, rooms with gas heaters, and refreshment stands with refrigerator rooms.

Adjacent Land Use--The park was surrounded by a slaughterhouse to its west, Greenlawn Cemetery to its north, Kentucky Avenue to its east, and River Avenue to its south.

Teams-- The Federal League Indianapolis Hoosiers and the Indianapolis ABCs.

Only Bush Stadium remains. However, under the National Register of Historic Places Criterion A, Northwestern Park, Washington Park, and Federal League Park, would have been eligible for the National Register of Historic Places due

to their significant contributions to the broad pattern of history. Northwestern Park has a rich history as an almost exclusively African American ballpark; however, very little detailed information is available. Washington Park and Federal League Park were both built for white teams and leased to black teams. For example, Northwestern Park was the home field of the Indianapolis ABCs, but this black team also played at Washington and Federal League Parks. Federal Park served as the home of the 1914 Federal League Champions, the Indianapolis Hoosiers, but was also home field for the 1915 and 1916 ABCs. Washington Park was the site of the first Negro National League Game on May 2, 1920. The ABCs defeated the Chicago Giants, 4-2, with 6,000 fans in attendance.¹⁸

Under the National Register of Historic Places Criterion B, these three ballparks would be eligible due to their association with significant African Americans who were affiliated with the national pastime. Indianapolis native Oscar Charleston rose to stardom due to his superior athletic ability and was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1976. Charleston was very loyal to Indianapolis and played for the ABCs off and on from 1915 through 1923. He was referred to as “The Black Ty Cobb,” “The Black Tris Speaker,” and “The Black Babe Ruth.” Charleston played for the ABCs for most of seven seasons: 1915-1918, 1920, and 1922-1923. In 1940, he returned to Indianapolis as manager of the Crawfords, and in 1954 he led the Clowns to the Negro American League pennant.¹⁹

Charles Isham Taylor was the most influential person in the landscape of Black baseball in Indianapolis. In 1914, Taylor bought a half interest in the Indianapolis ABCs. He was talented at recruiting skilled athletes like Oscar Charleston. Taylor ran a quality organization that developed outstanding players, a number of whom went on to manage other Negro League teams. Taylor was instrumental in forming the Negro National League and served as its first vice-president in 1920 and 1921.

Sources:

¹. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Indianapolis, volume 5, page 578, 1915-1950; Google Earth; “Plan to convert Bush Stadium into apartments moving forward,” *Indianapolis Star*, June 11, 2011.

². William Madden, Suzanne Fischer, and Paul Diebold, “National Register of Historic Places Inventory–Nomination Form, Bush Stadium,” 1995; W. C. Madden, *P. S. Remembering Bush Stadium: Home of the Indianapolis Indians* (Noblesville, IN: Madden Publishing, 1995), 1, 3, 12; Paul Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs: History of a Premier Team in the Negro Leagues* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997), 25; David B. Reddick and Kim M. Rogers, *The Magic of Indians’ Baseball: 1887-1987* (Indianapolis: Indians, 1988), 53.

³. William Madden, Suzanne Fischer, and Paul Diebold, “National Register of Historic Places Inventory–Nomination Form, Bush Stadium,” 1995; Madden, *P. S. Remembering Bush Stadium*, 3, 12; Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 108, 109.

4. Madden, P. S. *Remembering Bush Stadium*, 12; Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 56, 63.
5. William Madden, Suzanne Fischer, and Paul Diebold, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory–Nomination Form, Bush Stadium," 1995.; Madden, P. S. *Remembering Bush Stadium*, 1, 5.
6. "Evolution of Baseball in Indianapolis," *Indianapolis Star*, April 9, 1932; Madden, P. S. *Remembering Bush Stadium*, 4.
7. Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 5-8; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Indianapolis, volume 5, page 578, 1915-1950.
8. Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 5-8.
9. Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 14-19.
10. Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 53; "Federals Have a Modern Park," *Indianapolis Star*, April 20, 1914; "Traction Lines Buy Federal Ball park," *Indianapolis Star*, November 30, 1916.
11. Madden, P. S. *Remembering Bush Stadium*; "Evolution of Baseball in Indianapolis," *Indianapolis Star*, April 9, 1932.
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13. "Evolution of Baseball in Indianapolis," *Indianapolis Star*, April 9, 1932; "\$22 Million Development on Deck for Bush Stadium," *Indianapolis Star*, June 16, 2011.
14. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Indianapolis, volume 4, page 375, 1914; Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 20.
15. Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 18.
16. "Evolution of Baseball in Indianapolis," *Indianapolis Star*, April 9, 1932; *Indianapolis News*, August 20, 1931; A. B. Kling, "Will Enlarge Park: Local Plant to be a Whopper," *Indianapolis Star*, September 20, 1908; Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 73; Chris Baas and Angie Gibson, "86° 10' 54" W, 39° 46' 1" N: Using Geographic Information Systems to Document Historic Sporting Landscapes," *Journal of Sport History*, volume 38, no. 3, Fall 2011 (forthcoming).
17. Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 53, 73; *Indianapolis Star*, April 12, 1914, 4; "Federals Have a Modern Park," *Indianapolis Star*, April 20, 1914, 6; "Traction Lines Buy Federal Ball Park," *Indianapolis Star*, November 30, 1916, 1; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Indianapolis, volume 1, pages 1, 2, 57, 1914.
18. Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 53, 85.
19. Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs*, 129-135; Dick Clark and Larry Lester, *The Negro Leagues Book* (Cleveland: Society for American Baseball Research, 1994), 53, 65.

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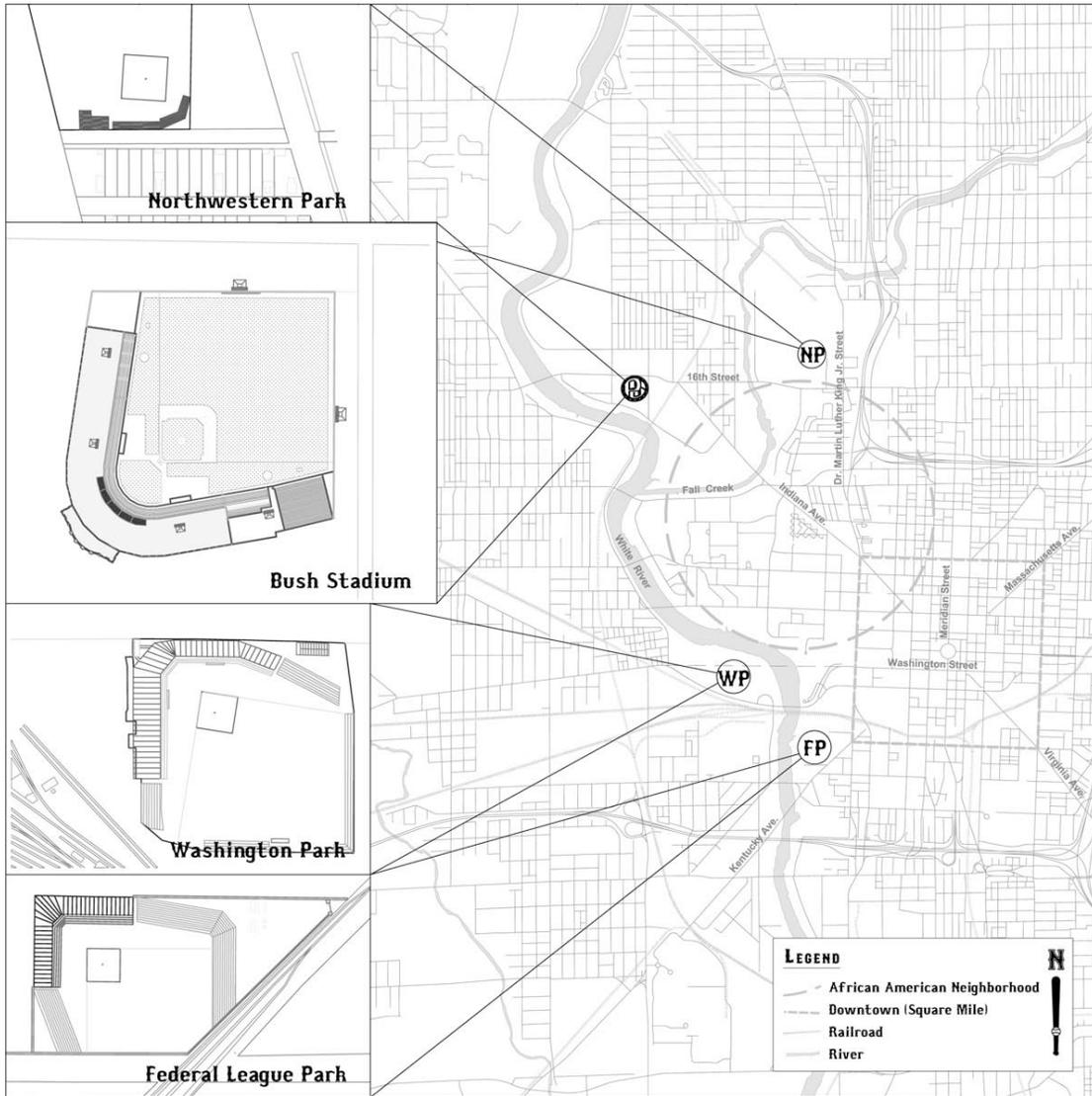
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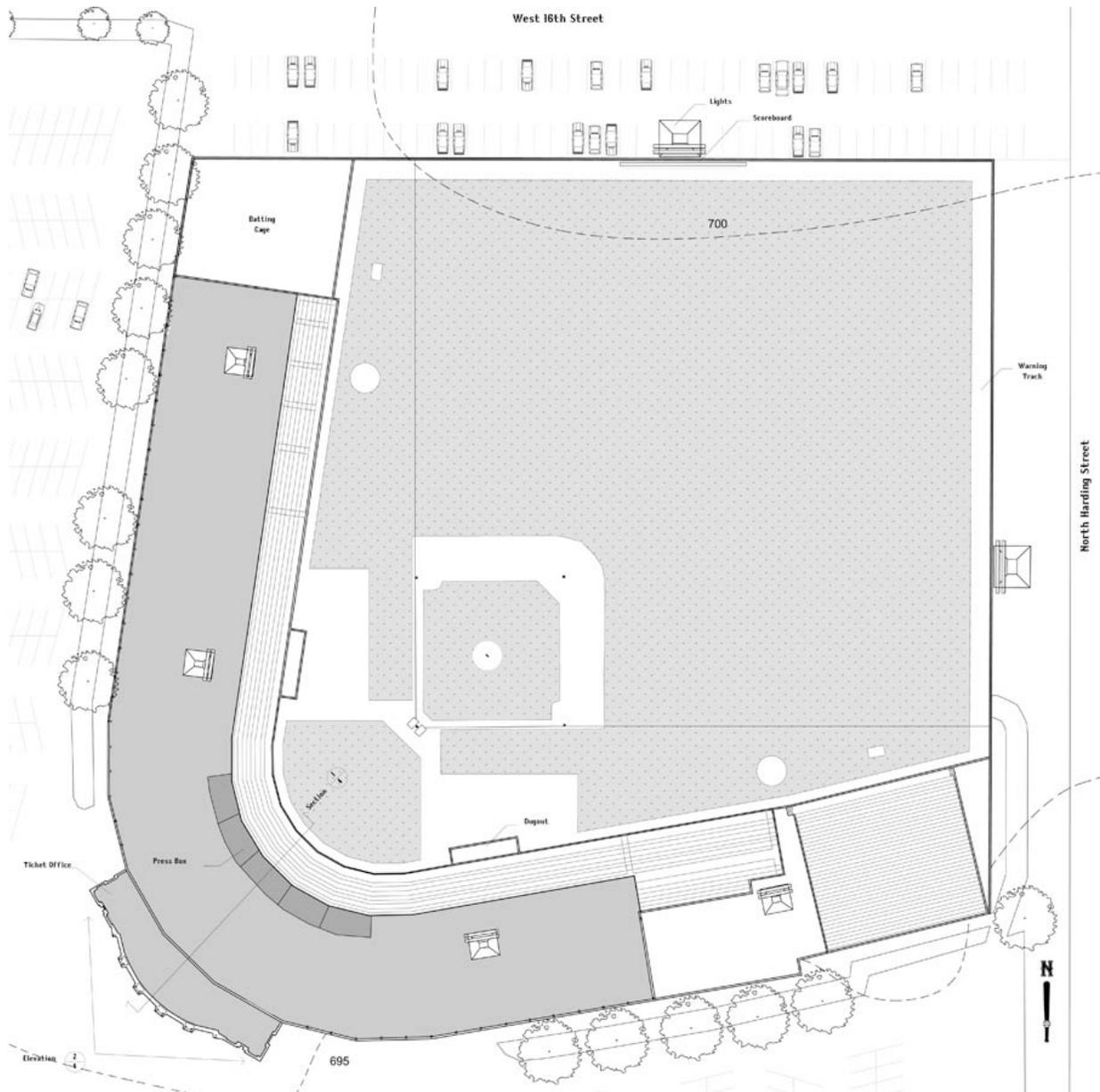
Map of Indianapolis, Indiana, depicting ball park locations (Boot, Blomeke, Coverstone, Doane, Grover, James, and Williams, July 2011).



Perry Stadium Bas-relief Carving (Kyle J. Boot, July 2011).



Bush Stadium Facade (Kyle J. Boot, July 2011).



Plan view drawing of Bush Stadium (Boot, Blomeke, Coverstone, Doane, Grover, James, and Williams, July 2011).