

A HISTORY OF LABATT PARK

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The site where Labatt Park now sits was likely to have been used for recreational games, such as the precursor to baseball "rounders" which came to London with the British garrison and the United Empire Loyalists in the early 1800s.

In 1868, the London Tecumsehs Baseball Club was founded by London china merchant W.J. Reid. Nine years later, Cleveland-born oil tycoon Jacob Englehart, who was the Tecumsehs president and principal owner, moved the team to Tecumseh Park. In 1877, the Tecumsehs played in the International League, although they played (and defeated) the Boston Red Stockings (now the Atlanta Braves) in an exhibition game. Later that season, the Tecumsehs defeated the Pittsburgh Alleghenies 5-2 to win the International Association pennant. Offered membership in the National League after the season, the Tecumsehs declined. In 1883, Tecumseh Park was damaged when the Thames River flooded. The flood destroyed the Park's original grandstand. Originally home plate was located in what is now the Parks' centre field. The replacement grandstand was built facing east towards downtown London, and home plate was moved to approximately the same location as it is today.

Amateur and professional bicycle races were held in the park beginning in 1893, and in 1895, the Park was the site of the first motion picture display in London's history, an event organized by the London Bicycle Club.

The Tecumsehs would play at Tecumseh Park during their stints in the International Association, International League, the Canadian League and the Michigan-Ontario League. The Park would also play host to the London Alerts and the London Cockneys of the International League.

The 1920 Tecumsehs (86 wins and 32 losses) were placed 53rd on a list of the Top 100 Minor League Baseball Teams of all-time, and were only narrowly defeated 5-4 by a Ty Cobb-led Detroit Tigers before 3000 people in a September 15th, 1920 exhibition game at Tecumseh Park. The Tecumsehs would place first in the Michigan-Ontario League in both the standings and in attendance, when 100,686 people watched the Tecumsehs play over the course of the season.

In 1921, the Tecumsehs would win the Michigan-Ontario Baseball League Championship, defeating Bay City, Michigan 1-0 on September 21st and two weeks later, came back from a 3-1 deficit to win a best-of-seven series against the Central League Champions from Ludington, Michigan.

In May of that same year, the Tecumsehs hosted a losing effort in an exhibition game against the Pittsburgh Pirates, managed by London's own George (Mooney) Gibson, who also played in the game. The Pirates won 8-7 in front of 1500 people. The Tecumsehs of the early 1920s included future Major Leaguer Charlie Gehringer, who would become a Major League Hall of Famer as a Second Baseman.

In 1923, the London Colored Stars, a Negro baseball team played in Labatt Park, winning 15 of 19 games. With the Tecumsehs gone after the 1924 season (only to return in 1928), the London Indians took their place in the Michigan-Ontario league in 1925.

On December 21st, 1936, the City of London took ownership of the Park, which had been purchased by the Labatt family and donated to the city and it was renamed Labatt Park.

LABATT MEMORIAL PARK

