

THESIS

AN URBAN FIELD OF DREAMS:
PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL AND THE FRUTION OF NEW – OLD DENVER

Submitted by

Preston Miller

Department of History

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2013

Master's Committee:

Advisor: Ruth Alexander

Co-Advisor: Robert Gudmestad

Greg Dickinson

John Didier

Copyright by Preston Miller 2013

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

AN URBAN FIELD OF DREAMS:

PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL AND THE FRUITION OF NEW – OLD DENVER

This thesis examines how Coors Field framed the evolution of Denver’s cultural geography and common identity between 1980 and 2010. I focus on the ballpark’s connection to the process of “placemaking” as it unfolded between two adjacent “Old Denver” neighborhoods: North Larimer - a multicultural enclave that became the “Ballpark Neighborhood” - and the Lower Downtown historic district, whose founders bemoaned Denver’s subsequent transformation into “Sports Town USA.” As a contested icon, Coors Field affected notions of place, image, and inclusion for these neighborhoods and the city at large. Given this volatile context, I argue that its fruition highlighted what the Retro Ballpark Movement could and could not do for postmodern urban America. Many observers have heralded this ballpark project as an urban panacea, but an analysis of how ordinary Denverites perceived the new kind of city it left in its wake exposed a growing rift between baseball’s working class mythos and the upscale nature of contemporary ballpark projects. Despite its instant success as an economic anchor, Coors Field ultimately contributed to the homogenization (or “Disneyfication”) of “Old Denver” - a trend that clashed with baseball’s democratic promise and previous notions of this downtown area as a diverse and authentic enclave. Utilizing local periodicals and government documents, I look at how this facility sprang from the hopes, dreams, and qualms of myriad individuals; the finished product representing a new dawn for some and a recurring nightmare for others. The narrative follows, as a central protagonist of sorts, Karle Seydel, an influential urban designer and neighborhood activist who should be recognized as the grassroots “Father of Coors

Field.” Seydel championed the project as a means to save North Larimer, guided its design, and dealt with its consequences. I wanted to offer a people’s history of the “Blake Street Ballpark,” and thus his experiences and opinions (as well as those of his allies and opponents) will guide my analysis of how an urban field of dreams contributed to Denver’s reinvention as a new - old “city of leisure.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	
The Blake Street Ballpark	1
CHAPTER 1	
The Field of Dreams	14
CHAPTER 2	
The Birth of Coors Field and the Rebirth of North Larimer: Retro Ballparks and Notions of Urban Redemption	56
CHAPTER 3	
Coors Field and the Ascendant City of Leisure	96
CONCLUSION	
A 24 Hour City	129
WORKS CITED	136

INTRODUCTION

The Blake Street Ballpark

The home crowd, sparse and somewhat disinterested, issued a perfunctory cheer as Todd Helton rounded second base and slid into third. I followed along, clapping halfheartedly, my mind taking in the sights and sounds of Coors Field, Denver's baseball cathedral. The verdant grass, the warm glow of the infield dirt, shouts of joy and despair mingling with the clarion calls of hotdog vendors making their rounds — this was a typical American ballpark in all its glory, I thought, a democratic enclosure cloaked in the majesty of the national pastime. It was the summer of 2002, my first in the Centennial State, and the Colorado Rockies — now entering their tenth season as an MLB franchise — were on their way to a disappointing fourth place finish in the National League West. Well beyond the glory days of the “Blake Street Bombers,” who reached the playoffs in 1995, this was a franchise in decline, and two years later they would lose 95 games — an effort that equaled the futility of their inaugural season. Their lackluster play did not seem to matter that day, however — It felt like we were all there to soak in the ambience of the American game, win or lose, on a beautiful afternoon in Downtown Denver. I noticed that many fans even eschewed Rockies gear or colors, the stands filled instead with older rooters adorned with faded Chicago or St Louis hats. It was a listless atmosphere, to be honest, but this was the beginning of my unyielding interest in the Colorado Rockies and their bastion of baseball, Coors Field. The fruition of the latter eventually became somewhat of an obsession: With the team's level of play stagnant, my mind wandered to the circumstances behind their open air cathedral, the Blake Street Ballpark, the brick and steel monolith that sat, snug and organic, in one of the oldest neighborhoods in Downtown Denver.

As the years passed by, I started to follow the Rockies in earnest, developing a tacit respect for the small-market resolve of the boys in black and purple. Coors Field continued to pique my interest, and it seemed like something new caught my attention on every visit: The open concourse, the varying shades of brick, the statue of Branch Rickey standing below its clock tower façade. After awhile I began to explore its environs, discovering in the process the charm of “Old Denver,” the footprint of the original city where the streets run parallel to the Platte River. This was the ancestral mining camp, the old haunt of eager prospectors and starry eyed settlers — the stage, if you will, for the formative myths of the Wild West. Later it gained renown as the industrial heath of the ascendant “Queen City of the Plains,” with smelters and railroads heralding the dawn of a new era. But then, like so many inner-city communities in the latter half of the twentieth century, it declined, its former glory overshadowed by notorious dive bars and flophouses.

Yet as I walked along the South Platte - a flat and languid waterway Mark Twain famously referred to as a “yellow...melancholy stream” – I noticed how this part of the Mile High City seemed to be entering a new phase of life once again. Cranes towered over the ballpark area; advertisements for upscale lofts dotted reclaimed brick warehouses; and legions of happy fans and yuppies frequented nascent microbreweries, restaurants, and coffee shops in the increasing popular Lower Downtown or “LoDo” area. What is occurring here, I wondered? What was the new arc of Downtown Denver, a place with such a multifaceted heritage and complicated socioeconomic past? And what does this evolution say about the history of urban America in general?

I went to college, these questions still tugging at my sleeves, and the inexplicable happened: the lowly Rockies won 21 of their last 22 regular season games, swept two playoff

series, and punched a ticket to the 2007 World Series. It was a remarkable run. The team came together at the right time, bolstered by new stars like pitcher Ubaldo Jimenez and MVP candidate Matt Holiday. My family, like so many other Coloradoans, was swept up by the “Rock-tober” mania. We went to playoff games, laid claim to our favorite players, and would have gone to the World Series had the Rockies not been swept by the Boston Red Sox in 4 games. After years of finishing in the basement of the NL, Rockies pride extended to the state at large, and the moment seemed right to reflect on the significance of professional baseball to Colorado and her queen city. *Sports Illustrated* columnist Rick Reilly was among the many sporting bards that covered the World Series of 2007, but instead of focusing on the players, he championed the impact of Coors Field on the downtown area. “No city was transformed more by baseball than Denver,” he claimed, after discussing how Lower Downtown (or LoDo) was a “dirty dilapidated, old business district” in the 1970s and 80s. Emphasizing the redemptive power of sport, he attributed its reversal to the Blake Street Ballpark, a civic anchor which allowed LoDo to “(blossom) into a garden of restaurants and lofts and shops and 4,300 housing units.”¹

His article delved into the relationship between professional sports franchises and urban development, a topic that quickly became the focus of my academic life. The more I researched Coors Field, the more it seemed to have influenced of all those changes I had noticed in Downtown Denver over the years: the “ballpark lofts,” the sports bars, the surge of “yuppies” calling LoDo home. Fresh off an aborted foray into the auspices of the Brooklyn Dodger’s move to Los Angeles – in which I studied the move’s impact on both communities – the often mythical union between the home team, the old ballpark, and the American city was of intense interest. And here it was; a dynamic example of baseball and urban development in my very backyard! Questions arose, and a thesis project was born. Whose visions made Coors Field and the new

¹ Rick Reilly, “Mile High Madness,” *Sports Illustrated Magazine*, October 29, 2007.

“LoDo” a reality? Why did this paradigm emerge in Denver in the mid-1990s, and did it displace other conceptualizations of the downtown area? And finally, did baseball transform Denver seamlessly, as Reilly suggests, or was there more to this story?

There is a great deal of literature concerning the role of sports in American society, including a hearty selection on the history and implications of stadium construction. In his 1976 classic, *Sports in America*, James Michener asserted that America had entered the “Age of the Stadium,” comparing its lavish sporting grounds to the pyramids of old.² Many economists and social historians have reacted to the proliferation of stadiums, which has continued apace after Michener’s work. Their studies often focus on the forms of inducement that cities lavish on a limited number of professional franchises. Michael N. Danielson notes, for example, how the “competition for teams, a zero sum political game in which one places gain is another’s loss, severely limits collective action in dealing with professional sports and undermines national legislative efforts to regulate relocation and expansion.”³ Works of this nature (and there are many) attempt to uncover why communities make so many sacrifices for professional sports franchises. Stadiums are the great bargaining chips in Danielson’s “zero sum political game,” and scholars across a wide variety of fields have attempted to delineate the societal implications of these modern coliseums.

But while this line of argument is useful in understanding the economic circumstances behind Coors Field – including Denver’s efforts to woo the MLB - this thesis is more interested in the cultural evolution of stadium construction; including, more specifically, the history of ballparks as tools used to shape urban space. Writing about the impact of major league sports in Minnesota in 2000, for example, Jay Weiner offered an analysis of how playing grounds could

² James A. Michener, *Sports in America* (New York: Random House, 1976).

³ Michael N Danielson, *Home Team: Professional Sports and the American Metropolis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 16.

represent a city's personality or *identity*, including its hopes for the future: "The symbol of (its) arrival on the national scene was an erector set of a stadium, plopped in the middle of a rural suburban nowhere. It was known as Met Stadium. It helped define a Twin Cities of another era."⁴ The idea that a stadium could "help define" a community - in essence symbolizing its identity - is central to this thesis. Robert C. Trumbour has argued that "the stadium has supplanted the ancient cathedral as the most visible and recognizable structure in many communities,"⁵ and I will demonstrate why the fruition of Coors Field was a critical component of a larger process of urban reinvention, one that eventually recast Denver's downtown area as a nexus of culture and entertainment.

In short, I want to offer a history of Coors Field that reflects its pertinence to the evolution of Denver's cultural geography and identity. It was designed as a "retro ballpark," meaning its aesthetics mirror those of its early 1900s predecessors; the so called generation of "jewel box" parks that includes Brooklyn's Ebbets' Field, Chicago's Wrigley Field, and Boston's Fenway Park. The retro craze began in the early 1990s with Baltimore's Camden Yards, and the nostalgic architecture that demarcates these facilities is, in part, a reaction to the sterile nature of the ultramodern sporting domes of 1970s and 80s. This movement transcends aesthetics, however, and a look at its origins can tell us a great deal about the evolution of the modern American city. A few scholars have approached this recent phenomenon with an eye for urban history, but Daniel Rosenweig's recent monograph, *Retro Ballparks: Instant History, Baseball, and the New American City*, represents a giant leap forward for scholars interested in the deeper history and cultural significance of nostalgic ballparks. Rosenweig argues that they

⁴ Jay Weiner, *Stadium Games: Fifty Years of Big League Greed and Bush League Boondoggles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) xxiii.

⁵ Robert C. Trumbour, *The New Cathedrals: Politics and Media in the History of Stadium Construction* (Syracuse: University of Syracuse Press, 2007).

arose as symbols of stability in a post-Fordist environment of urban decay, demographic transience, and economic insignificance. These facilities are “virtual signposts for the decade,” he claims, “the centerpieces of efforts to renew the American city previously torn apart by racial riots, suburban flight and the exodus of capital.”⁶ He concludes that retro ballparks are, above all else, themed consumer destinations, “dramatic symbols, manifestations in brick and steel of the need to cleverly choreograph an experience attracting and satisfying a still expanding suburban population...”⁷ They are effective urban anchors, in summation, because of their connection to a glorified past, a mythic time when cities and the American game flourished hand in hand. Thus, Rosenweig writes, these “new urban ballparks serve as dramatic texts articulating American utopian longings invested in the national pastime.”⁸

I will not pretend that Rosenweig’s analysis leaves any room for theoretical challenges; indeed, his conceptualization of the symbolic significance of retro ballparks provides an important framework for this project. The fruition of Coors Field did mark the ascendancy of a new, post-Fordist emphasis on the consumer; one culminating in what Sharon Zukin has deemed “the city of leisure.”⁹ This is an archetype for postindustrial urban growth which extols the utility of cultural attractions like festival marketplaces, waterfront fairs, and big league sports teams. It emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, according to historian Jon Teaford, as a strategy trumpeted by a new generation of “canny politician-executives” desperate to shed the specter of decline.¹⁰ The issue of relevance was a prime concern in urban circles as America transitioned to

⁶ Daniel Rosenweig, *Retro Ballparks: Instant History, Baseball, and the New American City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005) 84.

⁷ Rosenweig, 84.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁹ Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990) 306-7.

a suburban nation in the aftermath of World War II, and professional sports franchises represented invaluable municipal icons in this context.

Baseball, as Rosenweig suggests, maintains a special relationship with urban America, one hardened by its longstanding claim as the national pastime. The sport grew up during a time of rapid industrialization and consolidation; that definitive era when a nation of farmers began to seek new livelihoods amidst the hustle and bustle of the modern metropolis. During this volatile yet formative period, it became an escape for weary factory workers and a measure of Americanization for immigrants. Baseball's mythology is rife with references to young street urchins following their heroes through knotholes, playing stickball in crowded street corners, and dreaming of playing in the big leagues with the likes of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. It is said to be a quintessentially American game, one that represents a sort of "golden age" mentality regarding the traditions of the past and the hopes for the future. Consequently, the Retro Ballpark Movement is an attempt - after a "dark age" where stadiums were located away from the heart of the city - to recover the physical and spiritual link between the old ballpark and its vibrant urban environs. It is no coincidence that this reclamation began after the popularization of historical preservation and districting as a means to highlight the individuality of older urban spaces in a time of modernization and demographic transience. Heritage, claims historian Judy Morley, is now a tool of power, and the fruition of Coors Field is a prime example of how civic leaders sought to renew downtown through the "utopian longings" Rosenweig attributes to baseball.¹¹

This thesis relates the impact of professional baseball on Downtown Denver, an experience which I believe is unique in myriad ways. To say that every case is different sounds like an attempt to dance around the theoretical underpinnings detailed above; but it is true, and

¹¹ Judy Mattivi Morley, *Historic Preservation and the Imagined West: Albuquerque, Denver, and Seattle* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

thus this project will focus on how Coors Field represented the dawn of a new identity for the Mile High City in particular. Rosenweig (who uses Cleveland's Progressive Field as his main example) does well to sum the implications of the retro ballpark movement as a whole. He aptly captures how it is responding to a postmodern "sense of loss," and details the inherent tension between its authentic promise and the "choreographed" experience it provides suburban consumers. His analysis often hinges on the psychological however, as he frames Progressive Field and its environs (an area referred to as the "Gateway") as an exercise in behavioral "control and release."¹² From the moment he details his first visit to Camden Yards in his introduction (he finds it to represent a "cheap grace") to the concluding chapter detailing the link between this experience and that of the fictional Nick Shay, the protagonist in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, Rosenweig's work is one of enlightened cultural criticism.¹³ So while his intellectual framework serves to guide my narrative, I hope to offer a people's history of Coors Field, one that highlights how a wide range of Denverites approached the project. It was a controversial undertaking to be sure, and this thesis will reveal how the debates that framed the site selection process, its integration into the neighborhood, and its impact on downtown's urban fabric all offer the historian a window into one city's evolving sense of self.

Coors Field, Reilly's appraisal aside, actually took root just beyond the fringe of Lower Downtown in a distinct urban neighborhood known as North Larimer or North Downtown. By the time of the ballpark's completion in 1995, Lower Downtown (which had gained the chic brand "LoDo" in the 1980s) was already a fashionable historic district. North Larimer, on the other hand, was often considered the last, unsavory remnant of downtown's notorious skid row; a bowery that had been pushed northwards, above twentieth street, by the success of other

¹² Rosenweig, *Retro Ballparks*, 45.

¹³ *Ibid*, 45.

developments. This thesis will demonstrate how the ballpark impacted the identity of these two downtowns – one a “dilapidated old warehouse district” reinventing itself as a urban bohemia, the other a jaded working class neighborhood looking to recover from a wrenching postindustrial fate. It will follow, as central protagonists of sorts, Karle Seydel and Eddie Maestas, two North Larimer Denverites who campaigned, against formidable odds, for the city to build its first major league ballpark in their backyard. Seydel was an impassioned urban designer who, after coming to North Larimer in the late 1980s for academic reasons, was quickly consumed by the Coors Field project, becoming its most ardent and prolific champion. Maestas was a longtime resident of the area, a man who his neighbors deemed the “Mayor of Larimer” for his efforts to bring attention to a “forgotten part of Denver.” Together they formed a remarkable partnership, becoming the “Father” and “Godfather” of the Blake Street Ballpark, respectively. They believed that Coors Field offered their neighborhood a future firmly rooted in the material and cultural grandeur of the national pastime. Not all Denverites shared their optimism for this project, however, including many of LoDo’s pioneers. This group, which for a time included Denver’s greatest preservationist-developer, Dana Crawford, claimed that a torrent of rowdy baseball fans and kitschy sports-themed watering holes would destroy their vision of Lower Downtown as a quiet, unassuming center for the arts. Many of their fears would come to fruition in the wake of the ballpark project, which precipitated a redevelopment boom of epic proportions. As the nature of the Downtown Area changed, eschewing the ambience of a laid back urban village in favor of a frenetic incarnation of Zukin’s “city of leisure,” there was a sense, among this faction and other skeptical Denverites, of paradise lost.

The evolving relationship between Coors Field and its environs is a story of “placemaking,” a concept that refers to the process of fashioning a new identity for a community

by utilizing its cultural, social, and economic asserts.¹⁴ I argue that its fruition, which began as a ploy to win a major league franchise, highlighted what a nostalgic ballpark could, and could not do for Downtown Denver as an urban anchor. As an iconic source of civic inspiration, it succeeded, thanks largely to the mythos of the national pastime and its community's passion for sport. But as a neighborhood institution, it was somewhat divisive, and one must look to the tension between baseball's democratic promise and the realities of upscale redevelopment efforts to understand why. Rosenweig points out that the Retro Ballpark Movement is an example of how people have seized upon "working class notions of authenticity" in an increasingly modern, perhaps alienating world.¹⁵ Indeed, Seydel and Maestas had hoped that baseball's material and cultural underpinnings would help consecrate the very best aspects of North Larimer's working class identity, making it a distinct and *authentic* ballpark neighborhood. This was more of a romantic appreciation of baseball's cultural import than a true consideration of the economic and social forces it would conjure, however. Reilly's 2007 contention that baseball allowed *LoDo* to blossom is very telling, and this thesis will show that the homogenous nature of the post-Coors Field urban growth blurred any former distinctions between the two downtown neighborhoods. The idea that North Larimer – which became Denver's "Historic Ballpark Neighborhood" – was different, by any means, from the rest of the downtown area prospering under the "city of leisure" archetype faded after the installation of Coors Field, and references to this area disappeared in the local vernacular by the time Reilly put pen to paper. It had a future at least, but the primacy of "LoDo" as a downtown brand shows us how notions of identity and community – or place even – are difficult to invent, even through the magic of the American game.

¹⁴ The Project for Public Spaces, "What is Placemaking?," PPS Website, [Http://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/](http://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/) (Accessed January 15, 2013).

¹⁵ Rosenweig, *Retro Ballparks*, 84.

This dissertation relies on a bevy of primary and secondary sources, the most of important of which is Karle Seydel's collection of papers housed at the Denver Public Library. Other sources include relevant periodicals, academic articles, and historical monographs. My goal is to show how various Denverites, from mayors Federico Pena and Wellington Webb to neighborhood activists like Seydel, Maestas, and Crawford, shaped the destiny of the Coors Field project and, by extension, the "new" Downtown Denver, between the late 1980s and early 2000s. I have divided this narrative into three chapters which reflect the Blake Street Ballpark's evolution from a bargaining chip to a contested symbol of downtown Denver's future as upscale entertainment district.

Chapter one will describe how Denver's lengthy campaign to secure a major league franchise pushed the notion of a downtown ballpark to the forefront of its urban strategy. For decades, city leaders and local boosters pursued a team to no avail, but in the late 1980s the MLB began to discuss expansion, and Denver emerged as a frontrunner to receive a new franchise. A new ballpark seemed to be the final price of admission into the league's hallowed ranks, and Mayor Pena's administration moved to sell the megaproject to the public. This led to a hasty debate over the utility of a team and the issue of public financing, but once voters passed a measure in support of the ballpark proposal, a host of new questions entered the discussion: Where should it be located? What should it look like? What about the size of the field and the number of seats? Suddenly, the nature of the ballpark and its future neighborhood was a matter of grave importance, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to install a sporting shrine in the right place at the right moment. The debates over its nature, function, and location – debates which pitted suburban against urban and traditional versus modern, for example – revealed different conceptualizations of how a ballpark could benefit the people of Denver. When the city's

stadium district finally chose North Larimer, it became evident that beyond housing Colorado's first professional baseball team, Coors Field would anchor a tenuous inner city neighborhood. It was a bold, thoroughly contested experiment, and this chapter will weave together an account of Denver's history, its efforts in urban revitalization, and its quest for professional baseball in an attempt to explain why Coors Field emerged as the centerpiece of the city's new urban policy.

Chapter two is an analysis of how city leaders and other invested individuals sought to maximize their new ballpark's returns. Coors Field came to represent an urban panacea through its design, social function, and cultural sway, but it needed to be integrated in such a way that most benefited the city. The "new-old" ballpark was now the prized possession of North Larimer, an old neighborhood looking for a new deal, and I will detail the process of reinvention that allowed it to become Denver's "Historic Ballpark Neighborhood." Coors Field helped obscure some of the more unsavory aspects of its past, consecrated many of its good memories and positive icons, and lent a sense of stability and tradition to the area as a bastion of the American game. It also precipitated a deluge of private investment and development, forcing the city to deal with issues like vagrancy, physical decay, and crime. Karle Seydel designed its façade, served on various neighborhood organizations, and fought to ensure that the ballpark forged a symbiotic relationship with North Larimer. He became, essentially, a veritable expert in ballpark design and integration, and this chapter will follow his efforts in an attempt to understand how one activist took ownership of the Retro Ballpark Movement. His "Field of Dreams" was a veritable nightmare to its opponents, however, and as sports bars, nightclubs, and other entertainment venues started to pour into the downtown area, many Denverites began to question the disappearance of the neighborhood's intimacy.

Chapter three will investigate how individuals perceived Denver's transformation into a "city of leisure" in first fifteen years of Coors Field's existence, 1995-2010. While many heralded Denver's ascendancy as "Sports Town USA," others questioned the homogenous nature of its upscale process of redevelopment. The city may have gone from "cow town to wow town," in the words of one journalist, but significant tensions emerged as a result. Some argued that this was a classic case of gentrification, for example, and historian Phil Goodstein went as far as to say that the city targeted the poor during this time.¹⁶ Socioeconomic displacement is difficult to measure, but I will approach this issue through the opinions and observations of myriad Denverites. This chapter is more concerned with *cultural* gentrification, particularly Sharon Zukin's claim that "the continuous reinvention of communities" precipitates the death of urban authenticity.¹⁷ I argue that the vision of Coors Field as a working class institution was largely a mirage, one built on baseball's rhetorical underpinnings. It gave North Larimer a future, to be sure, but the urban paradigm that followed was somewhat incongruous with this neighborhood's former role as a diverse merchant's corridor. The ethos of upscale development eventually blurred the distinctions between LoDo and the nascent "Ballpark Neighborhood," leaving what many have called a consumer's playground in its wake. But to say that Denver lost its soul, as Zukin has argued with New York City, is to ignore the efforts of Seydel, Maestas, and the other merchants, residents, and activists that contributed to its transformation.

¹⁶ Phil Goodstein, *A People's History of Denver Volume II: DIA and other Scams* (Denver: New Social Publications, 2000), 224.

¹⁷ Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

CHAPTER 1

The Field of Dreams

During the 1985 Major League Baseball (MLB) season, Pete Rose surpassed Ty Cobb's all-time hits record of 4,192, and two Midwestern teams, the St. Louis Cardinals and the Kansas City Royals, competed for the World Series. Down three games to one and facing elimination in this seven contest – which sports writers dubbed the “I-70 Series” in reference to the interstate highway connecting the competitors - the Royals rallied to a thrilling comeback victory, clinching game 7 on the shoulders of ace pitcher Bret Saberhagen. But while Kansas City celebrated its first World Series championship, several municipalities without a “home team” wondered if the MLB would ever allow them to enter the big leagues. The want of professional baseball seemed especially pronounced in Denver, Colorado - another I-70 metropolis - where any mention of the World Series at this time would elicit as many impassioned demands for expansion as flowery recaps of Saberhagen's game 7 heroics. The Mile High City of the late 1980s boasted the National Basketball Association (NBA) Nuggets and the National Football League (NFL) Broncos, but the absence of professional baseball, the “national pastime,” contributed to a perception that it was still not a “Major League City.” Denverites watched the 1985 season unfold after decades of near misses, and MLB commissioner Peter Ueberroth drew their ire that April when informed the *Denver Post* that he opposed expansion because no vacant city deserved a new professional franchise. Though he refused to discuss Denver's case in particular, he cited Colorado's failed 1976 Winter Olympics bid as a marker of the state's reluctance to play ball with the sporting establishment. “I think you've got a governor out there that threw the Olympics out,” he remarked, emphasizing his disbelief. “He just threw them

out.”¹⁸ Any state that rejected such a golden opportunity to take center stage, the baseball magnate reasoned, would never support an MLB franchise.

The commissioner’s indictment stung. Like many of its contemporaries, Denver had struggled to remain relevant in the face of postindustrial decay, surging inner-city crime rates, and the ascendancy of a more decentralized, suburban pastoral vision of progress. Its quest for major league baseball was a matter of civic pride and urban redemption in this uncertain context, a way to overcome the stigma of blight and reclaim a degree of cultural relevancy. Ueberroth may have equated the MLB to the Olympics in terms of civic responsibility, but for many Denverites (and Americans in general) the two sporting institutions were incomparable. The Olympics is an old and venerable tradition, but it is a fleeting honor that celebrates internationalism through sport. Professional baseball, on the other hand, is older than the modern Olympics and represents, as the “national pastime,” a quintessentially American game. Its mythology is also deeply woven into the historical fabric of the American city. Baseball grew up after the Civil War as a working class escape from the toils of industrial life, and rooting for the “home team” is said to bring diverse and transient urbanites together, fashioning a community through sport. By precluding Denver from this narrative, Ueberroth took aim at what many Denverites perceived as their right - be it economic, social, cultural, or historical – to enjoy the great sense of tradition and civic optimism many attribute to his sport.

His comments would provoke many impassioned defenses of the Mile High City’s civic worth from local leaders, boosters, and hopeful baseball fans alike. Their resolve hardened afterward this setback, and this chapter will show how their furious campaign to secure a major league franchise culminated in the birth of Coors Field. I will argue that this ballpark became an enclosure for both Denver’s baseball and *urban* dreams amidst the heat of the 1990s MLB

¹⁸ Carl Miller, “Ueberroth Needs a Lesson in History,” *The Denver Post*, April 10, 1985.

expansion race. Local observers had oft lamented the postindustrial stagnation of “Old Denver.” Mayor Pena furthered the ballpark project, originally a token price of admission into the MLB’s hallowed halls, as a panacea for this struggling area, a development that provoked a variety of opinions from other Denverites. Politicians, merchants, residents, and activists would debate its future aesthetics, location, and socioeconomic function, and their competing visions for what eventually became “Coors Field” revealed different interpretations of sports facilities as urban anchors.

Governor Dick Lamm may have openly opposed Denver’s 76 Olympics bid,¹⁹ as Ueberroth suggested, but a majority of Colorado voters actually rejected the bid at the polls themselves. Many worried about the prospect of uncapped public financing and the ecological costs of the athletic facilities, while others cited the 1972 “Black September” terrorist attacks as reason for Denver to eschew the international spotlight. Baseball was a different matter apparently. Ueberroth’s tenuous equivocation of the Olympics and the MLB essentially relegated Denver to the municipal minor leagues, and many incensed Coloradoans rushed to their capital city’s defense. Woody Paige, a sports columnist for the *Denver Post*, responded by dubbing him “Peter the Ingrate,” and called upon readers to submit their own comments to the commissioner.¹⁹ “J.G” wrote in and argued that, “Baseball, being the only civilized sport, should be allowed in Denver.”²⁰ “R.W” added that, “Financially and geographically, Denver deserves major league baseball. Please study it.”²¹ Another reader’s post may have captured many Denver baseball fans’ mounting frustration with the MLB in 1985: “I hardly deem it worth my time to once again explain our situation as a community in love with baseball. Denver has done everything right and you and your cohorts have done everything wrong. We attend minor league

¹⁹ Woody Paige, “Let’s Send Ingrate Peter a Message He Can’t Miss,” *The Denver Post*, April 10, 1985.

²⁰ Woody Paige, “Pete Ueberroth Whiffed Like Mighty Casey,” *The Denver Post*, April 17, 1985.

²¹ Ibid.

games with allegiance and water at the mouth when we are able to have a major league exhibition. I refuse to beg and plead anymore.”²²

These editorialists espoused the notion that sports franchises are markers of a community’s civic worth. Ueberroth had insinuated that Denver lacked the financial, social, or cultural prestige to house the national pastime - “the only civilized” sport according to J.G. Thus, despite their refusal of the 1976 Olympics, many Coloradoans echoed *Post* columnist Joni H Blackman’s opinion that Ueberroth’s comment was “a slap in the face to Denver and its sports fans.”²³ Boosters have extolled baseball’s cultural and economic benefits for decades, painting a picture of haves and have nots. Michael N. Danielson contends, for example, that rooting for “home team” allows “people [to] identify more with a broader civic framework in the spatially, socially, and politically fragmented metropolis.”²⁴ He points out that professional teams and the stadiums they play in have become invaluable assets in the postindustrial age, the possession of which is a prerequisite for a municipality to be considered “big league.” Jay Weiner explains how this sentiment was evident in Minnesota, where boosters argued that major league sports “would allow this overlooked section of the nation to, literally, play with the big boys.”²⁵ The fear of decline and obsolescence is ever present, and many urban communities have sought to keep or lure professional franchises at whatever the cost. The competition for teams is a zero sum game, and this engenders what Glen Gendzel labels “competitive boosterism,” which can be understood as a war of promotion for the patronage of a finite number of professional sports franchises.²⁶

²² Woody Paige, “Pete Ueberroth Whiffed Like Mighty Casey,” *The Denver Post*, April 17, 1985.

²³ Joni H. Blackman, “Pena: Ueberroth Insulted Denver,” *The Denver Post*, April 10, 1985

²⁴ Michael N Danielson, *Home Team: Professional Sports and the American Metropolis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 9.

²⁵ Jay Weiner, *Stadium Games*, xxiii.

²⁶ Glen Gendzel, “Competitive Boosterism: How Milwaukee Lost the Braves,” *The Business History Review* 69, no. 4 (Winter, 1995): 530-566.

The importance of sports in terms of image and national distinction was the overarching impetus behind Denver's lengthy quest for a professional baseball franchise. Always conscious of their locale's geographic isolation and popular reputation as a "cow town," its business leaders and politicians flirted with the MLB time and again in the postwar era. In the late 1950s, the city sprang at an opportunity to join baseball pioneer Branch Rickey's Continental League, which he envisioned as a third branch of the Majors to rival the American and National Leagues. Founded in 1959, it included Denver, Atlanta, Seattle, Buffalo, Houston, Montreal, New York City, and Los Angeles. Rickey's brainchild quickly disbanded after the MLB promised to expand to the cities involved in due time. But while most of the Continental league contenders received big league teams by the 1970s, Denver remained vacant, and boosters fumed that the MLB purposely overlooked the western city. The city even boasted one of the most profitable minor league franchises in history, the "Denver Bears" – who played in old Mile High Stadium between 1955 and 1992 – but the absence of *professional* baseball continued to dishearten local fanatics.

Nothing epitomized their frustration more than oil tycoon Marvin Davis's repeated attempts to buy the Oakland A's from Charles Finley. On 15 December 1977 the two men reached a deal which would have effectively brought the A's to Denver. But just as Davis lay poised to become the source of his city's baseball deliverance, Oakland Coliseum officials contended that a move was in violation of the A's stadium lease and negotiations stalled. They reportedly reached another agreement three years later, but the team's lease obligations scrubbed the proposal once again and Finley ended up selling the A's to local buyers who kept the team in Oakland.²⁷

²⁷ Irvin Moss and Mark Foster, *Home Run in the Rockies: The History of Baseball in Colorado* (Denver: Publication Design, 2004), 25-6.

The campaign continued after the Finley/Davis negotiations fell through and Ueberroth voiced his opposition to expansion. Directly after the 1985 season concluded with the Royals bringing Commissioner's Trophy back to Kansas City, newly elected mayor Federico Pena teamed up with AT&T to form the Denver Baseball Commission (DBC). This was indicative of a new political modus operandi for big city mayors: the public/private partnership. Soon thereafter, the *Denver Post* hinted that the owners of the San Francisco Giants, unable to convince their home city to build a new stadium, were considering a semi-permanent move to Denver. Convinced that the MLB would never expand at this point, the DBC offered the Giants a three year temporary lease, after which they could decide to stay in Denver permanently if San Francisco failed to build a new stadium. The Giants had initiated the discussions with the DBC, but even so, the City of San Francisco moved quickly to shut the proposal down, threatening to sue the City of Denver if its team left.²⁸ During this episode, Woody Paige, ever the piquant booster, cited how "A member of Denver's baseball delegation admitted privately that the city is being shammed by the major leagues." Therefore, he concluded, "Denver must seize a team – Just as New Jersey stole the city's hockey franchise."²⁹ Hopeful fans from across the state even sent season ticket pledges to the Giants organization, but the deal fell through, leaving Colorado empty handed once more.³⁰

Professional baseball would eventually budge on the issue of expansion however. Between 1985 and 1990, the players and owners constituting the MLB hammered out a new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) that allowed the National League (NL) to add two expansion franchises in order match its counterpart, the American League (AL). During this

²⁸ Kevin Simpson, "San Francisco to Denver: Keep Mitts Off Our Giants," *The Denver Post*, November 7, 1985

²⁹ Woody Paige, "Baseballistics," *The Denver Post*, November 10, 1985.

³⁰ Ibid.

period, despite the uncertainty of the CBA process, the intercity competition rose to new heights. A few teams existing teams, like the Chicago White Sox, remained open to new suitors, but the real prize was the possibility of a new franchise. Just a few years after Ueberroth argued that *no* vacant metropolis met the requirements for expansion, well over a dozen American municipalities entered the fray, eyeing this as a golden opportunity to gain entrance into the majors before the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Amidst this competition, a ballpark was born. Steve Katich, the director of the DBC, urged Denver to get serious in 1988, warning the City Council that the MLB would only take them seriously if the city demonstrated a willingness to build a \$70-\$80 million baseball-only facility.³¹ Local journalists relayed the efforts of other cities to secure a franchise, constantly deriding their hometown's campaign by comparison. *Denver Post* columnist Buddy Martin called Denver's baseball plan "a Bush-league effort," and explained how, "While St. Petersburg is building a dome and holding private meetings with the White Sox...Denver's performance in the major league baseball derby has been akin to the Bronco's in the Super Bowl. They looked great in the warm-ups, but after some impressive early speed, they get blown out."³² His comments, which compared Denver's baseball campaign to the 1987 Super Bowl flameout of its cherished professional football team, played right into the MLB's hands. Desperate for a new franchise, the city of Denver, long removed from its aborted Olympic bid, would go on to make tremendous sacrifices to secure a professional franchise.

³¹ Thomas Graf, "City Told Big League Ball Needs Big Effort," *The Denver Post*, March 2, 1988.

³² Buddy Martin, "Denver Baseball Plan: Bush-League Effort," *The Denver Post*, March 4, 1988.



Figure 1: Rex Babin’s “Field of Dreams” cartoon, in which the MLB is portrayed as a bunch of goons descending on an unsuspecting Denver farmer, reminded readers that professional baseball was not a magnanimous enterprise with the city’s best interests in mind. It was, and still is, big business, and Babin seemed to worry that it would take advantage of the longtime “cow town.”³³

Not just any stadium would do. The DBC continued to stress the need for a “baseball only” facility, despite claims that Mile High Stadium (home of the National Football League’s Denver Broncos and the Denver Bears) could easily serve a multipurpose role as both a football and baseball stadium. The MLB, Katich and his associates explained, would not grant a franchise to a city without a *ballpark* plan. Denver’s political representatives took note, and on 12 January 1989 the *Denver Post* announced that the Colorado State Legislature was introducing a baseball stadium bill. Sponsored by Rep. Kathi Williams and Sen. Terry Considine – of Westminster City and Arapahoe County, respectively - HB341 proposed the formation of Denver Metropolitan Tax District in order to finance a \$100 million ballpark project. Considine explained that Denver’s

³³ Rex Babin, “Field of Dreams,” *The Denver Post*, May 10, 1989.

voters needed to decide if they wanted a big-league franchise in short order, noting reports that Orlando's William du Pont III had formed a group of investors to bid for a new team in Florida. He also confirmed the DBC's emphasis on a ballpark plan, noting that, "We've been told that the price of being in the game is the civic commitment to build a stadium."³⁴ The bill passed in the Colorado State Senate on March 15, and moved the issue onto the ballot. If voters passed the tax initiative in the summer, a stadium district board would be created to oversee the site selection process and allocate funds.

Though some observers maintained that the stadium could be located almost anywhere in the Denver metro area, the search for a suitable ballpark site ballooned into a contentious public debate, one which revealed conflicting visions for Denver's future. Mayor Pena and the DBC had already outlined several possible sites before the passage of HB341. In December of 1989, mayoral aide Jim Murray pointed out five different possibilities to the Denver City Council. They included the city's existing sports complex - home to the Bronco's Mile High Stadium and the McNichols Sports Arena (used by the Denver Nuggets of the National Basketball Association); The footprint of the Stapleton Airport (which was due to be replaced by Denver International Airport); and three downtown locales: 23rd and Welton streets, 23rd and Blake streets, and the Tivoli center.³⁵ With the exception of the Stapleton area, all of these sites dotted the Central Platte Valley (CPV) section of the downtown area, which constituted Denver's original city center by the late 1870s (see figure 1.2). Taking into account its storied heritage and recent redevelopment, Pena and Murray others viewed this area as a promising locale for an urban ballpark.

³⁴ Irv Moss, "Orlando's Baseball Push Prompts Call for Action," *The Denver Post*, February 9, 1989.

³⁵ Irv Moss, "Site Linked to Success of Tax Bill," *The Denver Post*, January 13, 1989.



Figure 2. This satellite image shows Denver’s Central Platte Valley in the summer of 1993. This area includes the immediate river valley and Larimer Square, Lower Downtown and North Larimer. Notice how the streets of “Old Denver” run parallel to the river while the newer sections of the grid are set directionally. The Rockies played in Mile High Stadium (left) as Coors Field (completed in 1995) took shape to the northeast.³⁶

At this juncture, it is necessary to review the historical circumstances that pushed the Central Platte Valley to the forefront of the stadium debate in the late 1980s. The basis for the Columbine State’s early success hinged on a volatile extractive economy, and thus its industrial experience from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century can be viewed through periods of mineral booms and busts. Historian Thomas G. Andrews attributes Denver’s rise to the profitable union between railroads and the coal industry:

Once track gangs linked the capital with American rail networks, a prodigious boom lifted Denver from its post-Gold Rush lethargy. The city’s 1870 population of 4,759 doubled in 1871. As coal began to flow into the metropolis the following year another 5,000 people became Denverites. By 1880, the

³⁶ “Denver,” Google Earth, June 29, 1993 (Accessed January 15, 2013).

capital's population had swelled to over 35,000, and by 1914 it exceeded 200,000.³⁷

The Central Platte Valley functioned as Denver's economic engine during this time period, and grew to symbolize the modern ascendancy of the "Queen City of the Plains" in general. Ore smelters lined the languid waterway, while a vast network of railroads converged on its shores, bringing silver, coal, and other minerals from the mountains. To the north, factories, warehouses, and depots built of brick and glass meshed with iron wrought rail viaducts. Larimer Street, the valley's main artery, evolved into a bustling commercial hearth for merchants, saloons, theaters and brothels — a place where silver barons rubbed elbows with cowboys and prospectors.³⁸

However, while a partnership of coal and rail may have brought economic prosperity to the valley in the early twentieth century, this extractive economy also contained the seeds of its socioeconomic decline. According to Andrews:

Denver's wealthy had once shared the downtown neighborhoods with poorer folk, but increasingly the rich and middle classes that emulated them left the center city for new suburban neighborhoods located upwind or uphill from emerging industrial districts. Desirable residential neighborhoods, like Capitol Hill, University Park, and Monclair, all lay comfortably removed from the increasingly polluted Platte Valley.³⁹

The silver crash of 1893, World War I, the Dust Bowl, and the Great Depression further eroded the valley's economic basis. "Larimer Street," writes historian Judy Morley, "deteriorated into a skid row, with bars, liquor stores, and cheap hotels replacing the upscale businesses on the block."⁴⁰

This trend continued into the postwar era. Beginning in the 1950s, a process of decentralization abetted by the popularization of the automobile carried wealthier urbanites to the

³⁷ Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 60.

³⁸ Judy Morley, *Historic Preservation and the Imagined West: Albuquerque, Denver, and Seattle* (University Press of Kansas, 2006), 44.

³⁹ Andrews, 66.

⁴⁰ Morley, 44.

suburbs. All across America's greatest cities, according to historian Robert Beauregard, "Factories closed and manufacturing jobs disappeared. Local tax revenues plummeted and governments faced bankruptcy. Slums and blight engulfed retail districts and neighborhoods alike. For twenty-five years, conditions relentlessly worsened and even the most optimistic of observers began to lose hope that the cities would ever regain their former glory."⁴¹ This postindustrial downturn afflicted the CPV, decimating its economic basis. By the 1960s, writes historian Carl Abbot, Colorado had "jumped from an extractive economy to a sophisticated service economy without going through the intermediate stage of heavy industrialization."⁴² Boosters trumpeted a growing defense industry and a burgeoning population of young and well educated transplants (signs that Denver was adapting to the post-Fordist era) but while these trends translated to overall growth in many residential districts and economic sectors across the metropolitan area, the majority of the downtown area continued to stagnate at an alarming rate. The specter of decline haunted urban circles across the nation, and civic leaders struggled to keep their cities relevant as the nexus of American life shifted away from Main Street and towards suburbia. In many cases, crime rates soared, homelessness became commonplace, and decentralization led to a divestment of municipal assets and responsibilities.⁴³ "As companies boarded up their factories and warehouses," writes economist Stephan Weiler of Lower Downtown Denver's plight, "Squatting and crime increased, and liquor stores (along with their entrenched customer base) became the area's most prominent resource."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Robert A. Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Post War Fate of U.S. Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2003), vii.

⁴² Carl Abbot, Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 315.

⁴³ Beauregard, vii.

⁴⁴ Stephan Weiler, "Pioneers and Settlers in Lo-Do Denver: Private Risk and Public Benefits in Urban Redevelopment," *Urban Studies* 37, no. 1 (2000): 173.

An oil boom left Denver better off than many of its contemporaries during the late 1970s, but even this development, according to historian Phil Goodstein, did not bode well for the downtown area in an era of postindustrial decline and urban renewal: “The runaway price of oil fueled ridiculous land prices and brought a corps of carpetbaggers to a wide-open, rootless, directionless community. Even as the metropolitan area expanded cultural institutions stagnated. Speculators and developers increasingly destroyed low-income housing for parking lots. Downtown was more a sacrifice zone to real estate speculation than a people place.”⁴⁵ When the oil boom went bust in the early 1980s, investors and developers panicked and the city experienced a wave of demolition, abandonment, and foreclosures. The oil fueled real estate boom had set the stage for what Goodstein deemed “the devastation of downtown” in general. The outlook was bleak. When the *Brookings Institution* conducted a study of urban decline in 1982, they listed Denver as a “stagnant city” in an otherwise prosperous standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA).⁴⁶

Downtown America had arguably hit rock bottom by the late 1970s, early 1980s, but a new urban paradigm was taking shape amidst this pessimistic climate, one which would improve, along with hundreds of other downtown spaces, the fortunes of the Central Platte Valley. For decades, modern urban planners had subscribed to the theory of urban renewal, which emerged as a reaction to suburbanization and the cult of the automobile in the postwar era. In order to save downtown, these planners claimed, it was necessary to destroy the old built environment and mimic the conveniences of suburbia in its stead. They pushed for slum removal, nuanced parking and transportation schemes (which included rampant freeway construction),

⁴⁵ Phil Goodstein, *Denver in our Time: A People’s History of the Mile High City*, vol. 2: *DIA and other Scams* (Denver: New Social Publications, 2000), 223.

⁴⁶ Katherine L. Bradbury, Anthony Downs, and Kenneth A. Small, *Urban Decline and the Future of American Cities* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982).

public housing, and other large scale modernization initiatives designed to bring America's cities up to date so they could compete with shopping malls and other suburban retailers. However, the wholesale "demolition of our outworn past," as historian Allison Isenberg puts it, ultimately failed to inspire a general recommitment to downtown America.⁴⁷ The efforts of modern planners to bring order to seemingly anarchic urban spaces often felt heavy handed. Social critics lambasted the emphasis on slum removal by deeming it "negro removal," for example, while large scale housing projects often devolved into segregated ghettos.

It was in response to the forceful and sterile nature of modern planning that Jane Jacobs penned her classic defense of natural urban rhythms, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, in 1961. She argued that by replacing ethnic neighborhoods and tightly knit communities with soulless housing projects and wide open spaces, modern planners like Robert Moses in New York City had destroyed the human and cultural capital historically invested in the built environment in the name of progress. She urged future urbanists to "respect, in the deepest sense, strips of chaos that have a weird wisdom of their own not yet encompassed in our concept of urban order."⁴⁸ Jacobs based this challenge to the existing order on a respect for the historical character of urban America. Whereas Moses often characterized old inner-city neighborhoods as backward, overcrowded, and obsolete, she celebrated them as authentic, diverse, and vibrant.⁴⁹ This perspective, which grew in popularity in the years that followed, helped legitimize a new vision of urban growth based on the preservation of the past rather than its demolition.

Jacobs' supporters focused on the relationship between heritage and identity, and bemoaned the loss of each individual city's historic uniqueness in the postwar era. A new ethos

⁴⁷ Allison Isenberg, *Downtown America: The History of the Place and the People who Made It* (Chicago; London, The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ Anthony Flint, *Wrestling Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took on New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City* (New York: Random House, 2011), 25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 25.

of postmodern city planning would surface in the late 1970s in response to this philosophy, one which “represented the break-down of modernist grand-planning schemes and the emergence of market driven planning.”⁵⁰ Postmodern planners recognized the economic importance of suburban consumers, and many looked to historic preservation as means to bring them downtown. Citing how a proliferation of “urban renewal wastelands” did little to inspire public confidence, they claimed that regional distinction was the key to promote growth via leisure, tourism, and cultural industries. Architecturally appealing and pedestrian friendly, historic districts earned praise as both centers of retail and anchors of urban identity. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which lent federal support to the enterprise of historic preservation and districting, and the Tax Reform Act of 1976, which provided incentives for the adaptive reuse of historic structures, both contributed to a national environment, according to Morley, “where planners, residents, and developers could use historic preservation as a tool to shape and control urban space.”⁵¹

Many inner city neighborhoods found new life as result, but it is important to note that this remains a contested source of urban salvation. Morley points out how the consumer centered art of “heritage tourism” often propagates “unrealistic and nostalgic paradigms of class interaction, ethnic behavior, and gender roles.”⁵² To its detractors, once diverse ethnic neighborhoods are turned into upscale “theme parks,” often by a new, upper class wave of gentrifiers. Some have even argued that the emphasis on civic pride and regional identity serves to mask the displacement of poor folk by this alien “power dynamic.”⁵³ These criticisms should

⁵⁰ Morley, *Historic Preservation and the Imagined West*, 7.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 1.

⁵² *Ibid*, 11.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 11.

not be ignored as we look to the revitalization of the Central Platte Valley and the fruition of Coors Field.

The shift from modern to postmodern urban planning shaped the CPV's postwar evolution. Beginning in the 1950s, the American west transitioned from an extractive economy based on mining, ranching, logging, and agriculture to a service economy. This did not, as we have seen, bode that well for Denver in many respects; however, the postwar era also witnessed a renewed emphasis on leisure and tourism, a positive development for a city in such close proximity to the Rocky Mountains. Between 1950 and 1968, according to Morley, "tourism surpassed mining as (Colorado's) third largest industry, following manufacturing and agriculture. Revenue from tourism increased 418 percent during those twenty years, and visitors to the state increased 303 percent."⁵⁴ Many entrepreneurial Denverites struggled to capitalize, however, and complained that the blighted Central Platte Valley served to distract visitors and prospective investors from their otherwise ascendant metropolis. City planners agreed, and in 1957 Denver's Urban Renewal Authority (DURA) unveiled the "Skyline Project," which called for the demolition of thirty blocks between 18th Street and Speer Boulevard and between Larimer Street and Curtis Street.⁵⁵ The goal, indicative of the logic of urban renewal described earlier, was to demolish the valley's "outworn past" as a skid-row and carve out new multifunctional district in its stead. A local entrepreneur named Dana Crawford had other plans, however, and her work with Larimer Square, argues Morley, changed "the trajectory of city planning in Denver and created a civic identity that resonated with residents and tourists."⁵⁶

Crawford (then Dana Hudkins) arrived in Denver in 1954 as a professional transplant, and entered the city's elite upon her marriage to John W.R. Crawford III. Shrewd, creative, and

⁵⁴ Morley, *Historic Preservation and the Imagined West*, 48.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 49.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 65.

not content to remain a housewife and civic volunteer, she developed an interest in historic preservation after reading about St Louis' Gas Light Square and San Francisco's Ghirardelli Square; two historic-themed developments on the forefront of the preservation and adaptive re-use movement. She looked for a slice of Downtown Denver with similar characteristics, and settled on the 1400 block of Larimer Street, which was then under DURA jurisdiction. Crawford acquired 15 buildings previously appraised as "worthless," and on 28 August 1964, unveiled Larimer Square Inc., a consortium of supporting investors, developers, and property owners. She built upon Ghirardelli Square's success as a mixed use center of cultural consumption, and hoped the preservation of the 1400 block would help developers capitalize upon the neighborhood's heritage as the birthplace of Denver. She marketed Larimer as "the most famous street in the west," and claimed it would soon become an attraction in and of itself as a window to Denver's frontier past.⁵⁷

Crawford espoused a creative blend of preservation and development to bring this to fruition. Larimer Inc (which became Larimer Square Associates (LSA) in 1966) first removed utility wires, fire escapes, and other markers of the inner-city living in an attempt to open things up. Then they renovated buildings, put in antique street lamps and planted trees. As its image improved, LSA courted high-end retailers, including national chains like Talbots later on. Larimer Square, as the 1400 block became known, soon resembled a western-themed bohemian enclave rife with art galleries, book stores, flower shops and cafes. Critics pointed out how the "real west" atmosphere seemed contrived – it was designed as an upscale outdoor mall after all - but Crawford and her associates had no interest in preserving the area's reputation as a rough and tumble skid row. They aimed to spur investment and generate profit through the glorification of Denver's Wild West heritage, and after years of sustained success, the Denver Landmark

⁵⁷ Morley, *Historic Preservation and the Imagined West*, 50-65.

Preservation Commission voted to designate Larimer Square Denver's first historic district in 1971. It entered the national register two years later on 7 May 1973. Morley concludes that Larimer Square "provided Denverites with a vision of a great future based on an adventure filled past."⁵⁸ Crawford had turned a "worthless" block into one of the city's premier consumer destinations, and her strategy continued to reshape the CPV in the years to come.

Her success, as Morley suggests, forced city leaders to reconsider their longstanding reliance on urban renewal. Preservationists and developers now eyed Lower Downtown Denver (also referred to the Union Station Neighborhood). Once a heavy manufacturing and warehouse district anchored by the city's Union Pacific depot, It declined precipitously in the postindustrial era, coming to represent the city at its very worst. Morley describes how, "Transients took up residence in the empty warehouses, frequently vandalizing the buildings and causing fires. The (rail) viaducts created a dark no man's land, and the streets under the raised roadways became havens for bums and derelicts."⁵⁹ When Crawford and LSA started marketing Larimer Square, they made sure to distance their end of the "most famous street in the west" from Lower Downtown, which they claimed represented Denver's true skid row.⁶⁰ Larimer Square's revival convinced DURA to approach lower downtown in a similar fashion nonetheless, signaling a major shift in Denver's urban policy. In 1974, the city council created a new zoning category (B-7 mixed use) and applied it to Lower Downtown, citing its historic value. Morley points out how this 1974 rezoning initiated a torrent of private development as "investors saw opportunities for adaptive reuse of Lower Downtown's historic warehouses."⁶¹ Out of state developers seized much of the available space in the neighborhood, which locals avoided initially because of its

⁵⁸ Morley, *Historic Preservation and the Imagined West*, 65.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 130.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 55-7.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 132.

seedy reputation. Crawford eventually became involved in the early 80s, however, and spearheaded the renovations of The Oxford Hotel and the Ice House; the latter of which had to be carefully thawed before lofts and retail space could be installed.

Groups of private investors like the “Wazee Three” and the “Risk Takers” sought to remake Lower Downtown as a bohemian urban village with a palpable connection to Denver’s frontier heritage. *Denver Post* columnist Dick Kreck coined the neighborhood brand “LoDo” in 1983, connecting the up and coming neighborhood with New York’s chic SoHo district. By the late 1980s, it was at once a gritty art colony and a burgeoning hotspot renowned for its restaurants and nightlife. Stephan Weiler explains how, “the propitious timing of the craft brewing trend as well as the congruence of its physical requirements were literally serendipitous to the fortunes of LoDo.”⁶² In 1988, John Hickenlooper (now the governor of Colorado) and Jerry Williams opened the Wynkoop Brewery in the old J.S. Brown Mercantile Building on the corner of Wynkoop and 18th Streets. The brew pub became an instant sensation, and at a time when other types of development had stagnated, Wynkoop’s success laid the foundation for LoDo’s new identity as a restaurant and entertainment center. The exaltation of LoDo’s heritage continued despite the evolving character of the neighborhood, and in March 1988 it became Denver’s second officially designated historic district.

The success of Larimer Square and the LoDo district altered the narrative of urban revitalization in Denver, convincing planners that exploiting the Mile High City’s material heritage could help rekindle public faith in the inner-city. Other new developments coincided with the birth of these historic districts as well. The Auraria campus, which slowly replaced an aging commercial district southwest of downtown in the 1960s and 70s, housed the Community

⁶² Stephan Weiler, “Pioneers and Settlers in Lo-Do Denver: Private Risk and Public Benefits in Urban Redevelopment,” *Urban Studies* 37, no. 1 (2000): 175.

College of Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver and the University of Colorado Denver by 1977, adding a young demographic to area. Moreover, the Sixteenth Street Mall opened in 1982, completing the transformation of the city's longtime main street into a walkable thoroughfare. The CPV remained a work in progress by the time Federico Pena took office in 1983 as Denver's first Hispanic mayor, and several of its fringes still drew criticism as havens for derelicts and other manifestations of the valley's tumultuous past. But by the time Jim Murray unveiled his prospective ballpark sites, this area appeared to be turning a corner. It was time to speculate on what such a facility could do for Old Denver.

Pena believed that a professional baseball franchise would reinforce the CPV's transformation from an empty postindustrial shell to a profitable nexus of history, culture and entertainment. Elected on the mantra "Imagine a Great City," he wanted Denver to be a 24 hour community, a place that would attract both residents and tourists alike. Under the direction of the Denver Planning Office (DPO) and the Denver Partnership, his office unveiled the "Downtown Area Plan" in 1986. This was comprehensive analysis of the issues facing downtown followed by a lengthy set of prescriptions. The plan set forth its goals as follows: "To develop a Downtown Denver that is economically healthy; that continues to be the social and cultural center of the region; that is beautiful and full of people and activity; that is truly a good neighbor to the City's other neighborhoods."⁶³ It recognized that urban renewal and suburban sprawl had left Denver nondescript, and celebrated the gains made by Dana Crawford and other historic preservationist-developers in Larimer Square and Lower Downtown. However, the MLB's insouciance fueled the notion that Denver was still a second tier city. Pena was determined to be the mayor who brought baseball to his community, and by the late 1980s, his efforts, combined

⁶³ Denver Partnership, Inc. and the Denver Planning Office, City and County of Denver, *Downtown Area Plan: A Plan for the Future of Downtown Denver* (Denver, 1986).

with the feverish boosterism of the *Denver Post*, the DBC, and the State Legislature, pushed the issue of expansion - and the concurrent need to construct a ballpark - to the forefront of downtown politics.

The Pena administration wanted to ensure that the new ballpark ended up in the heart of their ascendant metropolis. The area plan repeatedly stressed the importance of “points of reference” to a city’s identity and popular image: “A harbor, a large urban park, a special shopping district, a historic area, a cathedral, distinctive office towers – these are the elements people remember, from which they return again and again. The specific arrangement of these elements, the links or connections between them and the character of their landmarks distinguish one city from another.”⁶⁴ The conspicuous absence of stadiums from this list is difficult to understand, but by the location of Murray’s site proposals one can certainly ascertain that his administration considered sporting grounds possible civic anchors. Urban leaders across the nation had espoused this view after all, leading Michener to conclude that America had entered the “Age of the Stadium” in 1976. Much like the Roman Coliseum of old, ballparks and other sporting facilities have become the objects of obsession for politicians looking to install a lasting testament to their city’s greatness. After affirming that “more Americans are likely to readily identify Yankee Stadium than nearby St. Patrick’s Cathedral,” for example, Robert C. Trumpbour concluded in 2007 that “the stadium has supplanted the ancient cathedral as the most recognizable structure in many communities.”⁶⁵ He explained how “subsidized airports and convention centers have served as a gateway for commerce and tourism, but these projects do not seem to have the same inspiring power once held by the beautiful cathedral, the ornate train

⁶⁴ Denver Partnership, Inc. and the Denver Planning Office, City and County of Denver, *Downtown Area Plan: A Plan for the Future of Downtown Denver* (Denver, 1986), 4

⁶⁵ Robert C. Trumpbour, *The New Cathedrals: Politics and Media in the History of Stadium Construction* (New York: University of Syracuse Press, 2007), 2.

station, or the huge skyscraper proudly built in years past.” Thus, he concludes, “A number of civic leaders have turned to stadium construction to enhance their city’s image.”⁶⁶ Denver’s population remained highly transient by the late 1980s, the inevitable result of rapid population growth bolstered by waves of professional transplants. Sprawl, decay, and abandonment also took their toll on downtown’s sense of physical cohesion and uniqueness, rendering it devoid of recognizable monuments and legible neighborhoods. The Pena Administration recognized the importance of identity in this context, and sold the idea of a downtown ballpark as an iconic encapsulation of the city’s postindustrial progress.

Local observers followed their lead. *Post* columnist Dick Conner, discussing the possibility of a Tivoli center ballpark near the Platte River, urged city officials to, “give us baseball, an amusement park, paddle boats on a portion of the Platte damned and walled and deepened and lined with walks and trees and cafes...Run trams or old fashioned trolleys from the 16th street over to the Platte Center and up to the new convention center...Breathe life into the Denver metro area, if it requires a new stadium, do it.”⁶⁷ His vision of a new ballpark highlighted the nostalgic potential of the national pastime, which in his estimation could return an uninspiring cityscape to a golden age luster reminiscent of 1950s Brooklyn. Columnist John McGrath echoed this idea of renewal through nostalgia in support of a 23rd and Welton site, asking his readers to imagine a beautiful ballpark in the place of the area’s drab of warehouses and abandoned rail yards. He also highlighted the example of the Dodgers, who after relocating from Brooklyn to Los Angeles after the 1957 season, built a stadium at Chavez Ravine. Beforehand, he explained, “this hilly, squalid area was inhabited only by goats.” But everything changed, he continued, “When a referendum was held on whether to give its worthless green

⁶⁶ Trumbour, *The New Cathedrals*, 2.

⁶⁷ Dick Conner, “Build at the Right Site and Fans Will Come,” *The Denver Post*, May 18, 1989.

acres to a baseball team.”⁶⁸ To McGrath, a professional ballpark could work miracles. However, his historical analysis of the Dodgers move conveniently obscures the fact that Chavez Ravine housed one of Los Angeles’ most cohesive Hispanic communities in the 1950s. It was also slated to become a public housing complex before the city, eager to lure the Dodgers away from Brooklyn, shelved the project, removed the Mexican-American population, and offered the hilly area to team owner Walter O’ Malley at a bargain price. The forceful removal of Chavez Ravine’s Hispanic inhabitants, who had long exerted a traditional claim on its “worthless green acres,” caused many to decry the elevation of a private enterprise over the greater social good.⁶⁹

Like Pena, these columnists seemed to believe that a new ballpark could save downtown, but their musings also foreshadowed many of the difficult questions looming over Denver’s stadium project. The hectic pace of the expansion competition pushed the ballpark proposal to the fore at a time, as we have seen, when the city’s future remained uncertain. This forced Pena and other interested Denverites to quickly evaluate the big picture and decide where professional baseball fit in. Conner’s vision connected a ballpark (in a way that would gel with the 1986 Area Plan’s emphasis on elements) with the metro area’s other signposts, including its recent focus on heritage. However, the logistics of such an interaction remained unclear. How would a downtown ballpark mesh with developments like Larimer Square, the LoDo historic district, the Auraria Campus, and the 16th Street Mall? The impact on local residents and small businesses seemed particularly cloudy. McGrath had compared North Downtown Denver to the Chavez Ravine area of the 1950s, but neither actually represented a blank slate. Just as his portrayal of Dodger Stadium obscured the removal of a deeply rooted Hispanic community, his support of 23rd and Welton ballpark did not delve into its impact on the surrounding neighborhood.

⁶⁸ John McGrath, “Baseball in Denver to be Dream Come True,” January 13, 1989.

⁶⁹ Neil J. Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Given the sensitive nature of a downtown ballpark project, others wondered if it should be located away from the downtown area entirely. The stadium district also encompassed many of Denver's exurbs and suburbs, and politicians from these peripheral areas argued that a ballpark should be located closer to suburban families and business centers. In an interview with the *Post* on April 14th, Brighton Mayor Sam Gomez argued that Colorado "should plan for the future and go away from the downtown area."⁷⁰ His comments reflected a particular lack of faith in the CPV, which still bore a particular stigma of blight and postindustrial decay. Suburbia had arguably supplanted the inner-city as the nexus of American life, and to Gomez and many of the other fringe mayors around the Denver-metro area, it seemed entirely practical to locate a new ballpark in a verdant suburb instead of a seedy urban neighborhood.

Debates over the location and character of the proposed ballpark project colored the lead up to the stadium vote. Pollsters had projected an uphill battle, but much to the relief of local boosters and fanatics, the measure would pass on 14 April 1990 after officials tallied votes from the six-county stadium district. "We are in a time that is unparalleled in the history of our city," Mayor Pena announced in response to the stadium vote. "People realize we need to make investments in our city, even in difficult economic times...I predict this is going to be the Denver decade. There has been no other time in the history of the city have I seen so many significant changes and investments in our community"⁷¹ He hailed the results as a clear popular mandate for baseball, and many predicted the city's commitment to a ballpark plan would greatly improve its chances of landing an expansion franchise.

Baseball proponents had cleared one major hurdle in the expansion race, but the stadium vote also reflected a city divided over the prospect of a downtown stadium. Suburban

⁷⁰ Irv Moss, "Metro-area Mayors' Opinions Vary Widely on Baseball Stadium," April 14, 1990.

⁷¹ John Henderson, "Boosters Hail Historic Event," *The Denver Post*, August 15, 1990.

communities within the district supported the proposal with large majorities, including 61.6% in favor in Arapahoe County and 67.0% in Douglas County, but a narrow majority of Denver County voters actually rejected the idea with 50.2% opposed.⁷² Simply put, many Denverites remained uneasy over the prospect of a major league stadium in their backyard. Pena had declared the stadium vote a significant investment in the city's future along with Denver's new convention center, airport, and library (three megaprojects taking shape at the same time), but others asked civic leaders to pause and consider the effect of such rapid change. Their qualms would harden during selection process, when the issue transitioned from a referendum on professional baseball to a logistical matter of weaving a major league ballpark into Denver's urban fabric.

With funding in place after the sales tax measure passed, the newly minted Denver Metropolitan Major League Baseball Stadium District (DMMLSD) assumed control of the ballpark project. They needed a proper site, and the Denver City Council voted to pay over \$225,000 to study three proposed locations; all of which had been on Murray's original wish list. They included: The Gateway or Auraria site (which was a joint offer with railroad baron Philip Anschutz), the Sports Complex site near McNichols Arena, and a "Lower Downtown site" – now perched on the edge of the historic district near Twentieth and Blake. Each seemed to offer a distinct vision of how professional baseball would accent the Mile High City's ascendancy in the late twentieth century. The Gateway site lay adjacent to the Auraria campus on land owned by the Rio Grande Railroad. It was also next to the future home of Elitch Gardens Amusement Park, whose owners planned to move from its traditional home at 38th and Tennyson Street and relocate to the Platte Valley. Anschutz and his associates entered this property with the idea that area would develop into a premier sports and entertainment complex (as Conner imagined

⁷² John Henderson, "Boosters Hail Historic Event," *The Denver Post*, August 15, 1990.

earlier) making “Denver a true destination stop for tourists who very often do not stop over in Denver on their way to and from the Colorado Rockies.”⁷³ The Sports Complex proposal operated under a similar logic, and its advocates envisioned the ballpark as a perfect complement to Mile High Stadium and McNichols Arena (Home of the National Basketball Association’s Denver Nuggets).

The Twentieth and Blake proposal, on the other hand, urged the city to consider a building a true downtown ballpark on the northern fringe of the LoDo historic district. Inspired by the “retro” trend in ballpark construction taking place in Baltimore (Which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter II) it advocated a nostalgic ballpark with architecture which would blend with its historic surroundings. “This isn’t just another sterile suburban stadium,” it began. “The fans walk through a façade of early twentieth century renovated warehouses to enter the stadium. Entering the main concourse of red brick structure, the fans look down on a green, natural grass field...Outside the stadium, the aging warehouses have been converted by entrepreneurs into restaurants, bars and other entertainment activities.”⁷⁴ To the proponents of the Blake Street Ballpark, baseball’s unique material heritage seemed like a solid catalyst for the continued reclamation of their city’s historic buildings.

The DMMLBSD needed to decide which vision was best for Denver’s future as the expansion timetable reached a critical juncture. On October 10th, District members met with a panel from the Urban Land Institute (ULI), a national think-tank that had been invited to assess the viability of these sites and offer their opinion on a most suitable option. ULI chairman Jon Reynolds urged the District to “push for aesthetic excellence” because “civic pride is the real

⁷³ Denver Rio Grande Western Railroad Company to John J. McHale Jr., March 11, 1991, *The Karle Seydel Papers*, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

⁷⁴ City and County of Denver, *Site Proposal to Denver Metropolitan Stadium District: ‘Lower Downtown’* (Denver, 1990).

reason to do this project.” He added that a successful ballpark would exploit the “uniqueness of Denver” and become a “fan attraction on its own merit.” To the ULI panel, the prospect of a ballpark project endowed the District with the awesome power to fashion a new identity for the Mile High City at large. Reynolds voiced the panel’s opinion that a Gateway/Auraria stadium would represent a standalone monument to Denver’s modern ascendancy while a Blake Street ballpark would represent a nostalgic “Old Denver” ballpark. “So we say,” he asked the members of the District towards the end of the meeting, “who do you want to be?” This question, he continued, would be hammered out during public hearing process, and once it was decided, “the site selection will follow naturally...”⁷⁵

One can imagine McHale and the rest of the DMMLBSD members turning to each other and repeating Reynolds’s overarching question after the proceedings ended. At its core lay the debate over the proper relationship between a professional franchise and an American metropolis. Though the ULI panel had voiced a great deal of enthusiasm for the LoDo site as a real architectural opportunity to make a statement (it also represented the cheapest proposal) it remained unclear whether the city should risk building their new ballpark in such a volatile urban area. Just a week before the ULI meeting, for example, local oilman Jack Vickers claimed that families would avoid an inner-city ballpark. In his opinion, downtown was “just not a safe place to take your wife and children and be walking down the streets.”⁷⁶ Echoing Mayor Gomez, he proposed that the district accept a new proposal for a suburban ballpark to be built on a parcel of land he owned in Douglas County. His social commentary infuriated Mayor Pena, who found it reprehensible that “Jack Vickers would insult the city of Denver with false, self serving remarks

⁷⁵ Denver Metropolitan Major League Baseball Stadium District, *Meeting with Urban Land Institute Panel* (Denver, 1990).

⁷⁶ Paul Hutchinson, “Vickers Pitches for Stadium: Oilman Says Downtown Site No Place for Family Outing,” *The Denver Post*, October 4, 1990.

about crime in downtown Denver...⁷⁷ Though Vickers would eventually withdraw his proposal upon a stiff rebuff by DMMLBSD chairman McHale, many Coloradoans' shared his negative assessment of Downtown Denver.

Yet just when McHale his associates seemed poised to reconsider the socioeconomic palatability of the Twentieth and Blake site, a large envelope arrived in the mail from Karle Seydel, a local urban designer and neighborhood activist from the North Larimer Area. Inside, members found a photograph of Denver's skyline he had taken near the 23rd street viaduct earlier that summer. Meant to represent the vista baseball fans would see from the ramparts of a future downtown ballpark, Seydel's photo captured a magnificent sunset cascading through the city's skyscrapers, casting a warm glow on Lower Downtown's brick environs. It included a caption which read, "Denver's Field of Dreams," and a six page letter followed supporting a Blake Street stadium. The site needed a local champion, and Seydel became its biggest proponent and chief visionary. In the years that followed, he fought to ensure that the stadium ended up in his neighborhood; was instrumental in its design; and struggled to define and control the evolution of its environs. He should be recognized as the "Father of Coors Field, the man whose idea for an urban "Field of Dreams" revealed a new discourse between sports establishments and neighborhood development.

Seydel grew up in close proximity to Downtown Denver, attending East High School near City Park. Often described as affable and outgoing – someone who was everyone's favorite friend - he was also a passionate and entrepreneurial individual; the kind of person with an obsessive, almost relentless work ethic. As an undergraduate at the University of Colorado, he gravitated towards its environmental design program – a nascent, interdisciplinary major that focused on the big picture in order to plan for the future of urban America. Later, while pursuing

⁷⁷ Paul Hutchinson, "Pena Blasts Vicker's Slam on City," *The Denver Post*, October 5, 1990.

double masters' degrees in architecture and urban planning, he set out to complete a thesis on the revitalization of urban fringe areas. He decided to focus on North Larimer, an old warehouse district located above Twentieth Street and bound by the Platte River to the west and the Five Points Neighborhood to east. This area was also known as North Downtown or the Arapahoe Triangle at the time.

This neighborhood flourished 1890s as part of the original City of Denver. Larimer functioned as the city's undisputed main street, and its northern end developed into a thriving commercial hub. Saloons, parlors, and brothels served a bustling clientele, while merchants like Western Beef established storefronts and warehouses near the city's railyards. Activity slowed when the city's wealth moved south to the Capitol Hill neighborhood and Sixteenth Street became the city's new retail corridor in the early 1900s, but North Larimer continued to move forward as a business district. It developed a reputation as Denver's melting pot or "entry point," and progressed during the early twentieth century through the efforts of Black settlers and waves of Italian, German, Irish, Jewish, and Italian immigrants. Hispanics arrived in the 1920s, and after World War Two over 6,000 Japanese Americans called North Larimer home. Its diverse populace added to its vibrancy during the 1950s. During its heyday as Denver's "Little Mexico" and "Little Japan," Larimer functioned as Downtown's "other main street," once housing a J.C Penney's, a Safeway, a movie theatre along with repair shops, consignment stores, meat markets and restaurants. Merchants maintained a strong presence, as it was home to several dentists, doctors, and cobblers.⁷⁸

The neighborhood's fortunes declined between 1960 and 1990 for a variety of reasons - among them the slow death of its railroad and manufacturing centers. But Seydel soon discovered that north Larimer Street's ultimate descent as a mercantile hub could be traced to the

⁷⁸ Karle Seydel, "North Larimer History," *The Karle Seydel Papers*, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

externalities produced by other downtown developments - including the Skyline renewal project and Crawford's renovation of Larimer Square. While walking the North Larimer neighborhood in anticipation of his thesis, Karle met Eddie Maestas, a local entrepreneur, and the two became fast friends. Maestas, who had lived in the North Larimer area since he was twelve years old, witnessed the neighborhood's evolution over several decades. His parents moved to Denver from Leadville in the mid-1940s. His father worked at the Hungarian Flour Mill while his mother operated a Mexican restaurant. After graduating from North High School in 1949, Eddie worked for the Ricotta Brothers at Johnnie's Market, a small grocery store. He met his wife, Helen, in 1952, and managed Johnnie's during Larimer Street's heyday as Denver's "second main street." In 1975 the Ricottas retired and Maestas bought Johnnie's Market. He specialized in Mexican cuisine and delivered his trademark "Patita's" brand across the city. But despite Johnnie's continued success, the neighborhood's reputation suffered after the Skyline project forced many homeless shelters to relocate above Twentieth Street. Crawford's renovation of Larimer Square and the subsequent LoDo boom also funneled much of the city's homeless population into North Larimer. "They drifted in here," Maestas recalled in an interview with *Westword* magazine, "The merchants didn't pay attention at first."⁷⁹ Disinvestment slowly devastated the streetscape as the neighborhood fell upon hard times. The *Denver Post* recalled how, "Parts of the neighborhood didn't have sidewalks. Syringes from drug users littered the alleys. Buildings that weren't falling down from neglect were burning down from squatters' fires."⁸⁰

Maestas lamented how North Larimer had become "the forgotten part of Denver" after years of civic neglect, and made a personal commitment to bettering his longtime home. A good example of his efforts involves a mid-1980s a blizzard that ripped through the downtown area.

⁷⁹ Patricia Calhoun, "Street Dreams," *Denver Westword*, October 16, 1997.

⁸⁰ Patricia Calhoun, "Visionary Went to Bat for Ballpark," *The Denver Post*, April 5, 1998.

While Mayor Pena announced that municipal services had cleared the streets on the local news, Maestas noticed that the plows had avoided his neighborhood altogether. They stopped short at Twentieth Street – the tentative border between North Larimer and LoDo. He responded by putting signs in the snow that read “Great job, Mayor Pena,” before calling the television station which ran Pena’s triumphant pronouncement. The incident made the evening newscast and locals began referring to Eddie as the “Mayor of Larimer.” He gathered support in the years that followed, and formed the North Larimer Street Merchants Association (NLSMA) on 22 July 1988. The merchants organized various efforts to clean up the streets and alter North Larimer’s “flop house” image. They worked with police to rid Larimer of drug dealers, initiated recycling campaigns, and supported recovery institutions for local alcoholics and addicts. “You have to sweep out the dirt before you put down the rug,” Maestas claimed, and his organization made sure Denverites understood that their city did not end at Twentieth. The NLSMA also organized a celebration of the area’s Hispanic heritage during their inaugural year. Dubbed *Fiesta! Fiesta!*, the event took shape as a street fair and became an instant Colorado sensation, bringing much needed attention to a neighborhood often overlooked or avoided altogether.⁸¹

With Maestas as a guide, Karle Seydel soon fell in love with North Larimer’s “Old Denver charm.” He dumped his thesis - later telling the *Denver Post*: “I said, screw it, all my academic revitalization strategies, I’m going to prove them”⁸² - and opened his own firm on Larimer Street called Urban Design Options. He was now a freelance urban designer. He also started publishing *InSite* magazine, a monthly recap of his city’s major projects and design issues. The current emphasis on historic preservation and adaptive reuse in Larimer Square and LoDo influenced his approach, and he spent many long hours trying to convince disinterested

⁸¹ Patricia Calhoun, “Shop Owner, Activist Maestas Dies,” *The Denver Post*, February 3, 1998.

⁸² Patricia Calhoun, “Visionary Went to Bat for Ballpark,” *The Denver Post* April 5, 1998.

property holders to refurbish their buildings' original architecture. He viewed the 1986 Downtown Area Plan as a critical juncture in Denver's evolution because it recognized the importance of its material heritage. Urban renewal had left Denver nondescript in his estimation, turning the downtown area into a sea of parking lots and "vanilla buildings." The plan's emphasis on the connection between downtown's historic aesthetics and the success of its retail and cultural facilities resonated with him, and the late 1980s seemed like a propitious time to open an urban design firm in Downtown Denver.

Seydel believed that the plan left a lot to be desired concerning his new neighborhood, however. The DPO's analysis of the North Larimer Area (referred to as the Arapahoe Triangle in the report) did recognize its potential for rebirth as a downtown neighborhood, historic area, or "special arts district, but its authors offered few specific details concerning its fate. They deemed the area a transitional zone with a "barren image," and claimed that the triangle was the location of "shelters and social service centers, local bars and pawn shops" — institutions which collectively perpetuated its skid row image.⁸³ They did not acknowledge the connection between the changes occurring in Lower Larimer and LoDo and North Larimer's socioeconomic decline, nor did they offer any specific prescriptions short of voicing how, "Further concentration of shelters in this area would hinder development."⁸⁴ While the completion of the Sixteenth Street mall and LoDo's urban "renaissance" sparked new enthusiasm for the downtown area, Seydel and Maestas believed the city government was ignoring the neighborhood they had come to embrace. Despite their efforts to "sweep out the dirt" and encourage other merchants and residents to take pride in North Larimer, it remained Denver's "back door" to many observers. But this would all change during the campaign for Major League Baseball. In a few short years,

⁸³ Denver Partnership, Inc. and the Denver Planning Office, City and County of Denver, *Downtown Area Plan: A Plan for the Future of Downtown Denver* (Denver, 1986) 14.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 14.

Seydel and Maestas would craft a new image for North Larimer as the center of Denver's baseball universe.

Their involvement with the ballpark project began in the summer of 1990, at a time when the City Council clearly favored the Auraria site over the Blake Street proposal. North Larimer's sordid reputation seemed to tarnish the idea of a true downtown stadium. The *Denver Post* gave it 70 to 1 odds, and one councilwoman referred to the area as "double ugly."⁸⁵ Seydel refused to let the proposal die, however, and in August he lobbied the City Council and Mayor Pena to retain the Twentieth and Blake site in their final submissions to the DMMLBSD; which they did. In September, he met with all active North Downtown neighborhood organizations to gather support, becoming the unofficial spokesman for residents and businesses in favor of a Blake Street Ballpark. He had hoped for the blessing of The Downtown Denver Partnership, which had been an instrumental power broker in the development of Larimer Square and LoDo, but they refused to commit to what he believed was the sole downtown site (versus those within the downtown area). Their silence, combined with the opposition voiced by the City Council, convinced him that a "strong effort of advocacy" would be required to push the North Downtown site forward.⁸⁶

Over next several months, Seydel worked to gain public recognition for his campaign. He testified in a series of public hearings organized by the Stadium District, reiterating how the site had the lowest land value, no identifiable environmental hazards, and a low water table — perks which all contributed to "substantial taxpayer savings." That October he sent the "Field of Dreams" photo and the six page letter to Stadium District chairman John J. McHale Jr. He wrote

⁸⁵ Patricia Callahan, "Larimer 'Mayor' Shuts Shop: Feisty Market Owner Battling Leukemia," *The Denver Post*, October 22, 1997.

⁸⁶ Karle Seydel, "North Downtown Ballpark Campaign: Background Summary," *The Karle Seydel Papers*, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

on behalf of three community organizations – the North Larimer Business District, the Upper Larimer Neighborhood Association, and the Upper Downtown Development Organization – which collectively petitioned the DMMLBSD under the appellation “North Downtown Businesses and Residents for Baseball in our Backyard.” He stressed how a “Blake Street Ballpark would reinforce the better aspects of the area’s heritage through the magic of the national pastime. Envisioning a nostalgic throwback to timeless ballparks such as Chicago’s Wrigley Field and Boston’s Fenway Park, Seydel explained how, “A ballpark here would never be an isolated monolith...it would have context and character from day one. As one Denver reporter put it, this site has the charm of ‘Old Denver.’ This site would say “Denver” as the stadium architects intended. And, this site would help retain the Region’s tradition, character, and flavor – now evident to the keen observer.” He concluded by asking McHale to recall the area’s historical significance as the very site where Denver coupled with the transcontinental railroad in 1868: “That event made Denver a Major League city at the time. Let this same site’s ground be broken again for Denver’s renewed distinction as a Major League city.”⁸⁷

His letter also highlighted site’s low cost, solid transportation access, parking viability, and proximity to the city’s largest concentration of hotels. But while these logistical merits made the site feasible, its purported link to Denver’s heritage gave it a nostalgic luster that rang true for baseball enthusiasts and historical preservationists alike. Seydel noted a timeless connection between the old American ballpark and the old American city. He believed that baseball – and professional sports establishments in general - represented cultural anchors that could revitalize urban fringe areas by harkening back to the early Twentieth Century “golden age” of the American metropolis. This vision – which provided the basis for the Retro Ballpark Movement

⁸⁷ Seydel to John J. McHale Jr., October 31, 1990, *The Karle Seydel Papers*, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

(the subject of Chapter II) – built upon on the idea that a new ballpark represented a perfect physical and economic fit for downtown’s existing fabric, and Seydel believed it would reinforce the trend towards preservation and adaptive reuse in particular. “The ballpark design would truly fit with the scale and intimacy of the ‘Upper LoDo’ Warehouses as well as North Downtown’s offering of “Old Denver” commercial storefront architecture on Larimer,” he explained. This is Denver’s tradition and it is deserving of a new beginning with a tradition of baseball.”⁸⁸ In his opinion, “Denver’s Field of Dreams” could add tremendous value to downtown without compromising the physical context, intimacy, human scale, or connectedness of environs.

The ballpark seemed like a perfect way, in Seydel and Maestas’ estimation, to realize the potential of North Downtown in particular, an area they believed had been left by the wayside during the late 1970s and 1980s. “I would even speculate that a ballpark at this site would provide an economic impact sufficient for the near-term revitalization of Old Larimer and the historic warehouse area above 21st on Blake & Market,” Seydel wrote in his letter to McHale. “Recall what 5 years can do when you think of this North Downtown site. North Downtown’s smaller scale and laid-back ambiance is charming. You should get to know it – it is one of Denver’s hidden treasures.”⁸⁹ While the city’s original Blake Street proposal referred to a “lower downtown stadium,” and the *Denver Post* continued to deem it a “LoDo” or “Union Station” ballpark plan, Seydel contended that Blake Street site lay in North Larimer or North Downtown, and this area - not the LoDo historic district - would become the new ballpark’s neighborhood. “Let’s get facts straight,” he wrote to the Denver Post’s editorial department, “this site is not in Lower Downtown but adjacent to it...it is not behind Union Station but three blocks from it...It is North Downtown’s site for a ballpark – and it is the only site IN downtown and closest to its

⁸⁸ Seydel to John J. McHale Jr., October 31, 1990.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

core.”⁹⁰ He strongly believed that the proposed traditional design could not stand alone (as would be the case with the Auraria and Sports complex sites). It required “the context of history and character, the urban ‘fit’ of the Blake street setting.” He tied the fate of the North Larimer area to the ballpark, concurring with the original proposal that local entrepreneurs would find creative ways to reuse its historic shell. Thus, while many observers contended that a Major League franchise would herald Denver’s coming of age in the modern era regardless of where its stadium ended up, Seydel and his associates believed that location mattered; especially if the proposal held the power to transform their struggling neighborhood into a baseball Mecca.

The “North Downtown Businesses and Residents for Baseball in our Backyard” campaign propagated a modern union between baseball and Old Denver, but it eventually met with stiff resistance from a small, but vocal coalition of property owners in the LoDo area. The leader of this local opposition was none other than Dana Crawford, the visionary behind Larimer Square. Citing concerns over traffic, noise, and parking, she said a ballpark threatened to disrupt the “fragile nature” of LoDo’s transition to a mixed-use residential area. In October, as Seydel mobilized his campaign and sent his manifesto to McHale, Crawford mailed her own packet to the District, which contained 17 letters from local parties opposing the Blake Street ballpark. Around the same time, The Downtown Denver Resident’s Organization, which claimed to represent 3,000 people, voted to oppose a downtown ballpark on the grounds that it would hinder residential development. The *Denver Post* observed how the opposition gained momentum from “residents and housing developers, who fear the infusion of 2 million baseball fans every summer would bring havoc to an emerging neighborhood just barely in bloom.”⁹¹ Many of LoDo’s pioneers, who had sought to create a quiet bohemian feel to their neighborhood, claimed

⁹⁰ Seydel to *Denver Post*, 1990, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

⁹¹ Paul Hutchinson, “LoDo Up to Bat as Ballpark Site,” *The Denver Post*, October 15, 1990.

that the noise and congestion would stymie the flow of new residents. “Who would choose to live downtown within a few blocks of a stadium?” asked Joanne Salzman, who moved into a Wynkoop loft with her husband, Emanuel, in the early 1980s. “I do believe in diversity, but I believe in small and medium diversity. The stadium would be gargantuan, mammoth. We think it could be the death knell for growth”⁹²

LoDo’s various developers and merchants did not all fall in this category, however. Seydel’s campaign received a serious boost when Mickey Zeppelin, one of LoDo’s uber-developers, told the *Denver Post* how his “rosiest vision of the future has thousands of fans strolling through lower downtown, frolicking at restaurants and bars and shopping in offbeat stores.”⁹³ The opinions offered by Seydel, Crawford, Salzman, and Zeppelin essentially boiled down to a question of postindustrial identity in the downtown area. As the city scrambled to woo the MLB and brace for the future, the site selection process revealed significant differences of opinion among neighborhood activists, residents, and merchants over the evolution of LoDo, the character of North Larimer, and the significance of the Twentieth Street boundary dividing them.

Seydel spent the next several months disputing the arguments forwarded by Crawford and his other opponents. He also continued to mobilize supporters, raise money for his efforts, and defend the merits of his neighborhood against claims that it was “double ugly” and presented a safety risk to suburban families. ULI panel member Larry Cannon had warned the DMMLBSD that local opposition would arise, especially from residents fearing a deluge of rowdy fans and tacky sports bars. He urged the District to cooperate with neighborhood organizations in order to allay potential conflicts: “You’ve got to get in there with people who live in that area,” he explained during the panel discussion. “You have a historic district. You have a well-organized

⁹² Paul Hutchinson, “LoDo up to Bat as Ballpark Site,” October 15, 1990.

⁹³ Dick Kreck, “Zeppelin Makes His Pitch to Put the Ballpark Downtown,” February 15, 1991.

historic society in this area, 2,500-3,000 people...they can and will sue. And because of the historic district, they have the ability to go to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and others and to create a lot of press, bad press, as well as generating some funds for support of lawsuits. So you have to work with them really closely.”⁹⁴

Seydel later cited how he had “recognized from the beginning that the Stadium Board would be the decision maker, not the press or those who manipulate it. My efforts subsequently went towards getting to know the Stadium Board and establishing my credibility before them.” To this end, he devoted himself to the study of ballparks and the impact they have on their surroundings. He traveled to ballparks around the nation, contacted other professionals, and reviewed past examples as case studies. He anticipated the needs of the District and countered negative assessments of the north downtown site with fact based analysis. When Crawford and others contended that ballparks kill housing, for example, he went to work. In November, he presented research to the District which claimed that recent evidence attributed residential harm to design issues and/or a lack of financing or housing market. “Ballparks, in and of themselves, do not (kill housing),” he concluded, “and in a few cases they have added to the appeal and value of housing near them.”⁹⁵ The North Downtown Ballpark Campaign was a full time job – and Seydel was determined to make his “Field of Dreams” a reality.

His efforts paid off in December of 1990. The DMMLBSD released a summary of its October proceedings with the ULI group on the 15th, and Seydel pointed out how the panel had confirmed many of the claims he had made in Blake Street site’s defense. That same day he presented a series of “contextual, site specific designs” of a Blake Street Ballpark to the District in order to prove how a tradition themed ballpark needed a historic context to really spark

⁹⁴ Karle Seydel, “North Downtown Ballpark Campaign: Background Summary,” *The Karle Seydel Papers*, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

community pride. His sketches, which would later form the basis for the ballpark's actual façade, portrayed the ballpark as a majestic collage of brick and steel rising from the area's historic environs. The neighborhood setting, emphasis on material identity, and the human scale of his north downtown "Field of Dreams" captivated District members, many of whom had latched on to the nostalgic potential of a ballpark project from the beginning. Many ordinary Denverites expressed a similar desire to revive the noble tradition of urban ballparks. "LoDo is a ballpark," read one *Denver Post* editorial, "and the Central Platte (Auraria) is a stadium. The LoDo site is on the edge of Denver's proud and charming historic district as well as the north downtown residential and commercial area. The Central Platte will be surrounded by a 'sea of parking'...The LoDo site would mean baseball, the Central Platte site would be an 'entertainment center.'"⁹⁶ A collective reverence for the past and a desire on the District's part to remain true to baseball's material heritage certainly influenced the decision to go with the lower downtown proposal. Anschutz revised his offer (forwarding another proposal that Seydel lambasted as "Auraria II: The pricey sequel") but the Blake Street proposal had gained significant momentum over the past several months. Once deemed "double ugly," the site now seemed a worthy shrine for the national pastime.

The Denver Rio Grande Western Railroad company withdrew its Auraria proposal entirely on 11 March 1991, and the District selected the Blake Street site two days later. Karle Seydel had won; if the National League Expansion Committee awarded Denver a baseball franchise, the stadium would end up in North Larimer. His "Field of Dreams" vision for "the forgotten part of Denver" overcame social stigmas, clear City Council bias, vocal opposition from LoDo residential interests, and high-powered efforts from Anschutz and the Denver Rio

⁹⁶ Bruce Hellerstein, "Platte vs. LoDo: A Case of Stadium or a Real Ballpark," *The Denver Post*, February 17, 1991.

Grande Railroad to boost the Auraria proposal. He had focused on the Stadium District, becoming an expert on stadium construction and the history of America's ballparks. He even brought his members doughnuts when they met, hoping to drop a few lines in support of north downtown. The future of the downtown area now seemed linked to the stadium project. Crawford accepted the District's decision, but remained skeptical regarding its impact on LoDo and Lower Larimer. She told the *Denver Post* that residents and businesses were scrambling to outline several "mitigation projects" designed to spare the historic district from traffic and parking issues. "It will cost some money," she explained, "but if these steps are taken, I believe there could be a good coexistence. If not it will just be miserable."⁹⁷ She intended to work with the District very closely in the future to shape the character and impact of the Blake Street ballpark. Others were not so measured in their reactions however, and a few ardent ballpark opponents forecasted the death of LoDo's bohemian clime altogether. "I would hate to think the soul of a city is equated to its sporting events," said Sandy Carson, the president of a local art company, in an interview with the *Post*. "I honestly feel (the ballpark) will change the whole character of our area."⁹⁸

The quest for professional baseball and the concurrent stadium proposal led local residents, merchants, and activists to comment on the relationship between sports facilities and urban identity. The character or "soul" of the downtown area was at stake, and visionaries across the city diverged on the purported social and cultural impacts of an urban ballpark (which officially became "Coors Field" on March 15th, after The Adolf Coors Co. contributed 30 million for naming rights). All eyes now looked to the NL expansion committee, who planned to visit towards the end of the month. Some desperately hoped they would make Denver's baseball

⁹⁷ Paul Hutchinson, "LoDo Stadium Site Wins by Default," *The Denver Post*, March 14, 1991.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

fantasy come true, while others harbored misgivings regarding the role of baseball in their city's future.

It would finally happen. On 10 June 1991, after pursuing a major league franchise since Branch Rickey proposed the continental league in the late 1950s, the *Denver Post* revealed that the N.L. expansion committee had granted its city one of the new franchises set to begin play in 1993. The press hailed the decision and lauded the efforts of the Pena Administration and Governor Roy Romer. This was only the beginning of the Coors Field saga, however. Ground had yet to be broken on the Blake Street site, and many still questioned its future role in the downtown area. "Denver's national image soars: boom-bust cycle rides again?" read the headline to Paul Hutchinson's reaction to the N.L.'s announcement. He had witnessed the rise and fall of the Mile High City's reputation over the years, including the recent oil bust fallout, and hoped that the current wind under the city's wings would not prove as fleeting this go around. "So is it over?" he asked, "Does the arrival of Major League Baseball certify Denver's return from the urban dead?"⁹⁹ Mayor Pena, while ecstatic, acknowledged there was still work to be done: "Baseball was at the top with a lot of other projects. Clearly, I think we've been successful with all the big projects. The one exception is a major downtown recovery project."¹⁰⁰ Karle Seydel and Eddie Maestas agreed, and hoped that Coors Field, now an official enterprise, would revitalize North Larimer and provide a major boost to the downtown area by extension. Seydel had bought a bottle of champagne in anticipation of the expansion committee's announcement, but as the discussion shifted to the construction and civic integration of his "Field of Dreams," there was simply no time to celebrate. He prepared to drive his vision home, and the

⁹⁹ Paul Hutchinson, "Denver's National Image Soars: Boom-Bust Cycle Rides Again?" *The Denver Post*, June 13, 1991.

¹⁰⁰ Irv Moss, "Denver's Hard-Hitting Mayor Rounds Third in Baseball Drive," *The Denver Post*, May 29, 1991.

next chapter will detail his efforts to steer the design of Coors Field and lay the groundwork for North Larimer's transformation into Denver's Historic Ballpark Neighborhood.

CHAPTER 2

The Birth of Coors Field and the Rebirth of North Larimer:

Retro Ballparks and Notions of Urban Redemption

E. Sam Fishman imagined a better North Larimer. He had inherited a stake in its future in 1989, becoming the custodian of several buildings in “varying stages of decrepitude.” He joined the North Larimer Merchants Association shortly thereafter, participating in their efforts to revitalize the neighborhood in the early 1990s. A longtime Denverite like Maestas, he was well aware of its plight, having witnessed the area decay over several decades. “I want to bring back “the Street” that I knew forty years ago,” he wrote in a letter to the City Council’s Downtown Redevelopment Committee. He wistfully recalled when Larimer was a bustling commercial hub, a time when “there were durable goods and reasonable services of all kinds offered at reasonable prices for everyday people.” He pointed out how, along with Johnnie’s Market and Western Beef, Larimer Street once housed a several grocery stores, “at least two barbers,” a shoemaker, J.C. Penny, several cafes, residential hotels, doctor’s offices, and jewelry shops. “Yes, there were liquor stores, saloons, and ladies of the night, too,” he continued (acknowledging that Larimer was never a picture perfect Main Street U.S.A), “but the predominant character of the Street was a bustle of hard-working, law-abiding people who were going peaceably about their business.”¹⁰¹

He attributed its former working class ethos to a high level of civic investment, both on the part of the City of Denver and local entrepreneurs and residents: “We had prominent foot patrols and THEY KEPT ORDER,” he explained, with extra emphasis. “There were no panhandlers, other than a rare (and brief!) Gypsy entourage. The alcoholics were discreetly

¹⁰¹ E. Sam Fishman, “Faxed Letter to The Downtown Redevelopment Committee,” October 7, 1991, *The Karle Seydel Papers*, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

unobtrusive: being drunk was still a crime and such people were promptly hauled off to jail. The streets were kept clean. The City provided trashcans on every corner and I still remember the little man with his broom and cart they hired to sweep things up.” As he recalled, perhaps through the warm glow of nostalgia, North Larimer *used* to be an epitome of urban America at its finest. His account of its former glory drips with a palpable reverence for the old city; a place, however mythic, that constituted the nexus of American life for most of the twentieth century. His North Larimer was once the perfect melting pot, a bustling hub for postwar consumption, and above all else a working class utopia in its better days - during those optimistic times when a “little man with a broom” kept everything tidy. With baseball on the horizon and the fortunes of other historic downtown neighborhoods on the rise, Fishman and others harbored their own notions of what was once good about North Larimer and what it could still be in the future.¹⁰²

This forced them to grapple with the area’s twentieth century downturn. “What changed all this?” Fishman asked the Redevelopment Committee, tracing the neighborhood’s descent from working class utopia to “double ugly” blight the 1970s and 80s, “Where did all the people go?” He cited the disappearance of the smelters, stockyards, and packing houses which had constituted the area’s economic backbone, and lamented how drunks “arrived in mass” and “gin mills flourished” in the absence of its postwar working-class dynamic. “The remaining ‘decent people’ didn’t want to see this degradation,” he surmised. “(They) became fearful for their lives...’Urban renewal’ further decimated the nearby residential segments of the neighborhood, and concentrated what was left of the ‘undesirable’ into fewer and fewer blocks... the downhill spiral continued.” Focusing on the rule of law and an acute lack of enforcement of late, he urged the police to “get the drunks, and the ‘so called homeless,’ and the panhandlers and the drug

¹⁰² E. Sam Fishman, “Faxed Letter to The Downtown Redevelopment Committee,” *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

dealers and the whores of both sexes and the petty thieves off the streets.” He clearly disdained these traditional low-lifers, even going as far to claim that the “so called homeless” were “vagrants who wander by choice, no matter what the bleeding heart newspapers choose to label them.” He juxtaposed their counterproductive wanderlust with the neighborhood’s hard working background, and asked the city government to follow up their crackdown on crime with real estate policies that favored small businesses. Inspired by the potential of the historic preservation and adaptive reuse movement, the regenerative foundation of Larimer Square and LoDo, he suggested the implementation of tax credits for property owners who would pledge to continue “the historic or craft-type usages of their buildings.” With this prescription in mind, Fishman hoped to recover and maintain the human scale and historic appeal of the old North Larimer Street that he warmly recalled earlier.¹⁰³

Fishman wanted his neighborhood to remain authentic however - perhaps aware that critics had often deemed such recreated locales “Disneyesque.” “I am envisioning something more ‘real’ than the ‘cutesy/touristy,’ atmosphere of Larimer Square and the Tivoli,” he wrote to the Redevelopment Committee: “I think that Larimer Street, from Twentieth to Twenty-third can be a practical, work-a-day amenity and welcome relief from the glitzy, glass towers of the Sixteenth Street Mall, particularly for the daytime downtown population.” By juxtaposing his “work-a-day amenity” against the both the “cutesy” ambience of Larimer Square and the Tivoli, *and* the “glitzy” aesthetic of Sixteenth Street Mall, Fishman painted a picture of a new/old North Larimer that was somehow more historically authentic than the former, while at the same time less commercial and pretentious than the latter. He wanted the neighborhood to grow and attract new businesses and residents, yet at the same remain ever faithful to the street of his childhood

¹⁰³ E. Sam Fishman, “Faxed Letter to The Downtown Redevelopment Committee,” *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

memories, a place for “everyday people.”¹⁰⁴ This was an impossible dream, paradoxical by some respects, and one must look to the nature of historic preservation and gentrification to understand why. Bringing back “the Street” necessarily involved an influx new capital and an ascendant class of urban gentrifiers. This, in turn, would threaten the area’s affordability, diversity, and working class essence.¹⁰⁵

Fishman never mentioned the fruition of Coors Field in his letter, nor did he speculate as to how it would possibly improve his neighborhood’s fortunes. But at the time of his writing, baseball was coming to Blake Street, and the stadium project lay poised to intersect with every one of his qualms, suggestions, and dreams concerning North Larimer. His neighborhood had developed an image problem by the time the National League awarded Denver a franchise in 1991, and the ballpark would become an interesting foil for its rehabilitation. He must have wondered how this latest development would affect his backyard; especially how such a mega-project and the concurrent growth could be effectively integrated in a way that respected, and perhaps even consecrated, the more savory aspects of its history and current identity. Baseball, as America’s national pastime, seemed instantly compatible – in terms of material history and cultural emphasis - with his reverence for the old city. One could imagine, for example, “a little man with the broom” sweeping up ticket stubs outside Ebbets’ Field in 1950s Brooklyn as a massive knish peddler advertised his wares with a booming voice. The Coors Field project evoked such imagery in Denver, enabling its environs to emerge from postindustrial obsolescence and claim a new identity as a historic ballpark neighborhood. But like any megaproject geared towards consumers and high-end investors, the new-old ballpark precipitated upscale redevelopments which did not always mesh with the character of its surroundings.

¹⁰⁴ E. Sam Fishman, “Faxed Letter to The Downtown Redevelopment Committee,” *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Fishman did not want a “glitzy” or “cutesy” revival. He stressed the value of urban authenticity, and this elusive concept would frame perceptions of the Blake Street Ballpark project as it took shape in the heart of Denver.

This chapter will begin to explore what Coors Field could and could not do for Fishman’s “work a day amenity.” It will detail the design, construction, and civic integration of the Blake Street Ballpark, paying careful attention to the traditions it evoked and the future it offered. Karle Seydel touted his “Field of Dreams” as a once-in-a-life-time civic icon and neighborhood anchor. His vision for North Larimer conflated with Fishman’s, as both men sought to dismantle the perception of their neighborhood as a skid row while maintaining its human scale and historic appeal. Coors Field promised to achieve these goals like no other project or public initiative, and Seydel worked with the City to realize its economic, social, and cultural potential. Through his notes, letters, and research – along with an analysis of the reactions of myriad observers – I will detail how the fruition of Coors Field both reflected, and contributed to, the evolution of the “Retro Ballpark Movement” in the 1990s. It served as an iconic encapsulation of its environs’ historical character; forced the city government to deal with vagrancy and substance abuse issues in northern downtown; and ultimately gave North Larimer a new identity as Denver’s Historic Ballpark Neighborhood. The debates surrounding this process of reinvention – which hardly ever proceeded uncontested - served to elevate conflicting notions of urban authenticity (the desire for a place to be “real” rather than “cutesy”) in the late twentieth century narrative of sports-anchored development.

As Fishman aired his grievances to the City Council, Seydel looked to shape the character of Coors Field as a member of the Design Advisory Committee (DAG). This was a panel of local experts the Stadium District organized to work with Hellmuth Obata and

Kassabaum (HOK), the architectural firm in charge of the project. He was already well versed on the design and civic integration of ballparks past and present. He had made pilgrimages to renowned “jewel box” ballparks like Chicago’s Wrigley Field for example, and compiled an illustrated history of old Denver ballparks that he packaged in a set of “ballpark cards” to raise money for the Blake Street campaign. He also continued to monitor contemporary ballpark projects, many of which adopted urban locales and traditional themes in the 1990s. Coors Field’s sister parks included Baltimore’s Camden Yards (opened in 1992; also designed by HOK), Arlington’s Ranger’s Ballpark (opened in 1994), and Cleveland’s Jacob’s Field (opened in 1994; renamed Progressive Field in 2007).

Camden Yards was the prototype of the “retro” craze; a movement which would completely transform the modus of ballpark construction in the 1990s by ushering in a wave of nostalgia parks. Beforehand, most notably during the 1970s and 1980s, many cities embraced ultramodern ballparks and multipurpose arenas. Baseball purists often took offense, deeming such new age twists heretical. Michael Gershman has noted, for example, how with the exception of Royals Stadium in 1973, “no new parks were built solely for major league baseball between Dodger Stadium in 1962 and the new Comiskey Park in 1991.”¹⁰⁶ He characterized the multipurpose facilities of this ballpark “dark age” as “airless, translucent domes,” or “concrete doughnuts, characterless and interchangeable.”¹⁰⁷ Stadiums like the Houston Astrodome (which offered guided tours replete with astronaut helmets) represented a stark departure from the tradition of open air, asymmetrical, and intimate stadiums. These unconventional facilities compensated with modern amenities like synthetic grass, blockbuster scoreboards, air conditioning systems and luxury suites, but as material representations of the national pastime,

¹⁰⁶ Michael Gershman, *Diamonds: The Evolution of the Ballpark* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), 191.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

they ultimately failed to inspire in an age where image and national distinction mattered. By the early 1990s many urban leaders and designers shared Gershman's opinion that they represented characterless "ashtrays, warehouses, and missile silos."¹⁰⁸

The Retro Ballpark Movement sought to break away from this modernist aesthetic and reconnect ballpark architecture, ambience, and location to the "golden age" of the sport. This was the period, often posited as the decades between the 1920s and 1950s, when baseball was the undisputed national pastime and flavorful urban parks like Brooklyn's Ebbets Field, Chicago's Wrigley Field, New York's Yankee Stadium, and Fenway's Wrigley Park were among the most recognized and cherished buildings in America. Seydel romanticized the connection between traditional, baseball-only facilities and the old American city, having fought to ensure Denver's new ballpark ended up wedged in a historic downtown neighborhood and not stranded in a sea of parking lots. The idea of a retro style park blending seamlessly into an old neighborhood was an important foundation of the "golden age" nostalgia binge. Many of Gershman's "ash tray" parks of the 1970s and 80s landed in suburban locales, representing isolated monuments more than community institutions. Seydel intended to make Coors Field an iconic, yet thoroughly urban and intimate reflection of Downtown Denver's identity by contrast, and looked to include design elements unique to the Mile High City's material history. "Ballparks are more than just buildings," he wrote in a promotion for the 20th and Blake Street site found in his ballpark card set, "they are special places with magical and elusive qualities. References to ballparks as "green cathedrals," "grass palaces," and "field of dreams" come from such qualities. What will these qualities be in our new ballpark?"¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Gershman, *Diamonds*, 191.

¹⁰⁹ Karle Seydel, "Card Set Folder: Denver Ballpark Cards," (Urban Exposure Publications, 1991), *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

Seydel asked those who received his ballpark cards to forward their own suggestions. He also discussed the “magical and elusive qualities” of legendary ballparks with other experts, including Bruce Hellerstein, a fellow DAG member who also served on the ballparks committee of the Society of American Baseball Research (SABR). Hellerstein sent him a list of criteria for “what makes a ballpark” and entitled his vision: “Take Me Out to Paradise Park.” His suggestions (with my explanations parentheses), framed many of the physical and spiritual characteristics historically attributed to America’s “green cathedrals”:

1. PARADISE – “an enclosed green space.” (presumably open air)
2. BACKDROP – “the aesthetic enclosure.”
3. CONFIGURATION DEFINED BY NATURAL RESTRAINTS – “integral part of urban pattern of streets and squares.” (i.e. the ballpark should be asymmetrical, conforming to the neighborhood layout).
4. INTERACTION WITH THE OUTSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD – “Knothole gangs and homerun retrievers.”
5. A BUILDING – “An urban structure which hides the mystique of its inside.”
6. A GRAND ENTRANCE WAY – “Entering the ‘temple of baseball.’”
7. AMBIENCE AND INTIMACY- “The smell of the ballpark in my nose...the thrill of the grass.” (This is a quote from “Shoeless” Joe Jackson in W.P Kinsella’s *Shoeless Joe*).¹¹⁰

His “Paradise Park,” “the temple of baseball,” with its asymmetrical configuration, “knothole gangs,” and nod to “Shoeless” Joe Jackson (the legendary player of Black Sox fame), harkened back to professional baseball’s golden age, a time when little rascallions fought over knotholes in the stadium walls to view their heroes free of charge. Hellerstein was, and still is, an avid collector of baseball memorabilia, and he later went on to open “B’s Ballpark Museum” a few blocks from Coors Field (which Smithsonian Books recognized “one of the top 21 private baseball collections in the world – and is still open at the time of this writing”).¹¹¹ As a middle-aged baseball purist, he wished to see a return of the open-air, asymmetrical, ballpark of his childhood. The Retro Ballpark Movement gained momentum through the wistful recollections of his generation – baby boomers who grew up appreciating the old urban ballpark in the immediate

¹¹⁰ Bruce Hellerstein to Karle Seydel, July 2, 1991, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

¹¹¹ Bruce Hellerstein, B’s Ballpark Museum, <http://www.ballparkmuseum.com> (accessed October 24, 2012).

postwar era and wished to see its return in a “dark age” of suburban mega-domes and “concrete doughnuts.” This would lead ballpark architects, designers, and city-planners across the country to stage the past, at least physically, in an attempt to recreate the old ballpark and capitalize upon widespread nostalgia for the old ballgame.

The Retro Ballpark Movement would offer civic leaders a “golden age” prescription for urban revitalization. As a generation of new facilities draped in 1900s aesthetics, it drew inspiration from the many of the same nostalgic perceptions of the old city Fishman had evoked in his desire to bring back “the Street” he knew as a child. Daniel Rosenweig argues that these “new old” ballparks are “the most important contemporary representations of baseball’s mythic resiliency and creativity,” and “serve as dramatic texts articulating American utopian longings invested in the national pastime.”¹¹² Like Fishman’s “work-a-day” conception of a “real” urban neighborhood shaped by everyday people, these mythical “representations” deemed “working class notions of authenticity” - like tribalism, community pride, and sporting leisure – to be a “source of salvation” in the postmodern world.¹¹³

This rhetoric evokes images of diverse and vibrant inner-city ballpark neighborhoods, but Rosenweig points out how these thematic temples often exploit the mythical union between baseball’s golden age and the American city in order to offer palatable “urban safaris” for tourists and suburban families. These ballparks and their neighborhoods present a “clean” version of America’s urban roots that can “experienced” without the facing the risks attributed to gritty industrial cities.¹¹⁴ They are upscale initiatives that target consumers with dispensable income, often precipitating higher ticket prices and property rates while quelling conditions and behaviors that compromise their utopian narrative. Rosenweig dismissed Baltimore’s Camden

¹¹² Daniel Rosenweig, *Retro Ball Parks*, 84.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Rosenweig, 17.

Yards as a “cheap grace” upon his first visit, unimpressed by its efforts to propagate a 1900s ambience in a modern setting. He later concluded that the Gateway Neighborhood surrounding Cleveland’s Jacobs Field was a “Disneyfied urban space,” one that “subsumes the city in its own aestheticization, making urban life quaint, a consumable relic of the purer, yet somehow improved upon past.”¹¹⁵ Working class themes and symbols reminded visitors that these neighborhoods maintained a spiritual connection to the traditional hustle and bustle of the old city, but for Rosenweig and other cultural critics and historians, they felt like sterile replications of a bygone age.

Like Cleveland’s “Disneyesque” Gateway then, Denver’s new baseball neighborhood ran the risk of over playing its connection to a “somehow improved past.” Fishman’s vision for a “real” North Larimer betrayed the same whitewashed romanticism that Rosenweig found so distasteful in Baltimore and Cleveland. The ballpark project linked its destiny to the American game, a fantasized union that gelled with his nostalgic remedy but possessed the same propensity for artificiality. There was no guarantee that North Larimer would evolve into a diverse reincarnation of its former self instead of baseball version of Disney Land’s Main Street U.S.A. There was little difference, after all, between the rhetorical foundations of Crawford’s Larimer Square, a place scrubbed clean to allow suburbanites and tourists a chance to experience a “cutesy” version of “most famous street in the west,” and the reinvention of north downtown as an old school ballpark neighborhood. Both rested their laurels not on true history, but on heritage, which Judy Morley contends is mythic, leaves out problematic information, and focuses on aspects of the past agreed upon by a certain group.¹¹⁶ The fruition of Coors Field would consecrate certain memories and alter or destroy others as a result, fabricating a new identity for

¹¹⁵ Rosenweig, *Retro Ballparks*, 167.

¹¹⁶ Morley, *Historic Imagination and the Imagined West*, 17.

northern downtown that occasionally clashed with the cultural and social capital previously invested in this built environment. Its proponents chased an elusive notion of urban authenticity framed by baseball's sense of Americanism and North Larimer's former role as Denver's "second Main Street." This rhetorical maneuver – one guided by consumer tastes and experiences – left many wondering (a la Rosenweig) if there was room for a "work a day" amenity in the city's new baseball fantasy land. The rest of this chapter will detail such idiosyncrasies by looking at the design of Coors Field and the transformation of its environs.

On 5 July 1991, the Colorado Baseball Partnership announced the arrival of the "Colorado Rockies." While a few Denverites complained that the team's moniker should have included their city in some way, no one doubted that the new ballpark on Twentieth and Blake Street would be proclaim the ascendancy and enduring character of its locale. Seydel presented an "unofficial vision" for what eventually became Coors Field in his ballpark card set. Entitled "Union Park," it advocated a creative synthesis between his dream park and its neighborhood surroundings:

This artist's concept places a ballpark on the 20th & Blake Street site and architecturally integrates it with the existing neighborhood character through the use of brick, sandstone, and steel...21st street (is) lined with commercial buildings recalling the history of Denver...Statuary under the game time clock and neon is part of the fanciful display of images and icons which celebrate Denver's colorful baseball history throughout the Ballpark Plaza area. Buildings in the plaza area are restored and have new ballpark-related uses within them. They contribute to and are part of, a potential historic district in the immediate neighborhood.¹¹⁷

In a subsequent description of "Union Park," he discussed how a "Cooperstown West museum" would enliven the "Ballpark Plaza," while the addition of old-fashioned trolleys carrying eager fans from distant lots would further another urban ballpark tradition in terms of public transit.¹¹⁸

The Stadium District did not all include all of his suggestions (and several explosive

¹¹⁷ Karle Seydel, Urban Options and Planning, "Union Park," December, 1990, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

¹¹⁸ Karle Seydel, Urban Options and Planning, "Card 6," December, 1990, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

confrontations occurred, as we shall see, when he was rebuffed) but the nascent ballpark resembled, in many ways, his conceptualization of “Union Park.”

The construction of Coors Field began with the discovery of a 66-million-year-old dinosaur rib near home plate, witnessed what constituted the largest continuous cement pour in history at the time, and concluded with a the completion of a first rate retro ballpark that caused local observers to wax poetic with nostalgia tinged praise.¹¹⁹ Schrock informed the *Denver Post* that HOK drew inspiration from “the squat red-brick warehouses and old steel viaducts in Denver's lower downtown, a district steeped in railroad history.”¹²⁰ Coors Field also imitated several local monuments, including, “Union Station, the colonial pillared entrance of the Union Pacific Freight House, the Daniels & Fisher Tower and Union Square clocks, and the Victorian-like lighting found in Larimer Square and the Lower Downtown Historic District.”¹²¹ Its façade and foundation, built with 1.4 million bricks of varying local shades, wistfully recalled both its neighborhood’s material heritage and the motif of jewel box ballparks like Ebbets Field and Wrigley. The exposed steelwork elevating the stands and lights - a dark green, “custom – mixed Rocky Mountain Evergreen”- saluted the area’s historic viaducts and rail yards.¹²² The Stadium District even commissioned Denver artist Barry Rose to design “etched glass, terracotta columbine blossoms” to enhance its pedestrian towers.¹²³

“The architecture says 1900,” announced Deputy Stadium District director Tom Gleason in 1994, and many Denverites got caught up in the Coors Field nostalgia binge. *Westword* columnist Bill Gallo highlighted how “Those dark green arches of graceful steel immediately put

¹¹⁹ Diane Bakke and Jackie Davis, *Places around the Bases: A Historic Tour of the Coors Field Neighborhood*. (Englewood: Westcliffe Publishers Inc., 1995), 60.

¹²⁰ The Associated Press, “Coors a Techno-Historic Jewel,” *The Denver Post*, April 2, 1995.

¹²¹ Bakke and Davis, *Places around the Bases*, 61.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 63.

you in mind of Fenway Park,” (the much lauded home of Boston Red Sox since 1912). Like many of the parks of this older generation, he continued, “Coors Field has been fitted to its snug site rather than plunked down in a wasteland of a suburb, so its outfield dimensions are gloriously asymmetrical – 347 feet down in the left-field line, 350 to right, 415 in dead center, and 390 and 375 in the left center and right center power alleys, respectively.”¹²⁴ Many Denverites would echo Gallo’s subsequent conclusion that it would have been a shame if Coors Field ended up in some “wasteland of a suburb” as an isolated, ultramodern stadium:

Let Giants fans squeeze into the soulless and inhospitable Candlestick Park. Let Pirate slugger Andy Van Slyke try to figure out if he is he’s batting in Three Rivers Stadium or the nearly identical Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati. Most unspeakable of all, let Joe Carter hit homeruns in that overgrown video arcade up in Toronto, and leave the beleaguered fans of Houston to gag on the fetid indoor gases of the Astrodome. For your \$160 million, you will get 1900 next year.¹²⁵

Even Dana Crawford – who originally opposed a downtown site and later mocked an early drawing of Coors Field as “paste on architecture” - eventually bought in to buzz surrounding the new ballpark. Her opposition melted away, she claimed in an interview with the *Denver Post*, upon a visit to Baltimore’s Camden Yards: “It was kind of a magical moment. I was driving in from Washington early in the morning, the fog was lifting, the lights were still on, and I just got this feeling.”¹²⁶ By 1994, she had “won a \$4.2 million dollar deal to develop a sports bar and restaurant complex,” and expressed a wholly positive view of Denver’s new ballpark: “It’s going to be first rate, absolutely first rate. We’re building a monumental piece of urban architecture.”¹²⁷ Her reversal reflected the optimism (or perhaps opportunism) surging across the Mile High City. Having moved beyond the contentious site selection process and the clamoring of suburban

¹²⁴ Bill Gallo, “Diamond in the Rough,” *Denver Westword*. March 9, 1994, 47.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Paul Hutchinson, “Ex-Ballpark Foe Plots New Ideas for Old U.P. Site.” *The Denver Post*, April 9, 1994.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

mayors, Denverites looked upon their retro and thoroughly urban “Field of Dreams” like it was always meant to be.

It is important to note, however, that Coors Field was also designed with the latest contemporary amenities and technological marvels, features which separated it from the older parks it tried so hard to imitate. It is, as Rosenweig would have it, a cathedral of modern consumption clothed in a retro shell, one designed to look old but feel up to date. Observers deemed the finished product “neoclassical,” and pointed out its creative blend of 1900s aesthetics and state-of-the-art amenities. “For all its bows to baseball nostalgia,” wrote Hutchinson, “Coors will be a thoroughly modern ballpark.” He extolled its purposeful blend of tradition and technology by comparing the stadium’s two scoring displays. HOK architects had added a Wrigley Field inspired, hand-operated scoreboard in right field to follow games across the league, continuing their emulation of classic ballparks.¹²⁸ But the primary scoreboard, the “second largest ‘Jumbotron’ video screen in the major leagues” at the time of its installation, topped 6.5 million dollars, and completed a state-of-the-art audio and video system. The ballpark also boasted 50,000 seats, a 350 yard open concourse with unobstructed views of the playing field, club level seating, and luxury boxes. Fancy bars and restaurants enveloped its concourses, leading one columnist to quip how, “Latte, espresso and Midori margaritas will be served up with as much aplomb as beer and bratwurst.”¹²⁹ Upon its completion, the *Denver Post* proclaimed that it was a “techno-historic jewel,” a compliment that gelled with the traditions it evoked and the paradigm of development it offered. For many Denverites, the Blake Street Ballpark seemed to represent, as Diane Baake and Jackie Davis have claimed in *Places Around*

¹²⁸ Paul Hutchinson, “Coors to Have All Those Gadgets.” *The Denver Post*, January 29, 1994.

¹²⁹ Associated Press, “Coors a Techo-Historic Jewel,” *The Denver Post*, April 2, 1995.

the Bases: A Historic Tour of the Coors Field (1995), “the best example of Denver’s personality – past, present, and future.”¹³⁰

Such endorsements lauded the ballpark’s iconic aesthetics and features, touches that seemed to commemorate the city’s origins and future aspirations. A creative retelling of sorts, it was a monument that consecrated certain memories while obscuring others, offering a narrative of pride and optimism that gelled with local observers like Bakke and Davis. Schrock and his team highlighted Denver’s historic rail viaducts for example, paying tribute to these iron bridges with the “dark green arches of graceful steel,” Gallo mentioned in his flowery account of the ballpark’s character. They elevated the railroad as a symbol of its industrial era ascendancy this way, harkening to a time when Denver was the “Queen City of the Plains” and train whistles symbolized the inexorable march of progress across the American frontier. The ballpark’s steelwork also connected the spirit of this ancestral railroad economy to the evolution professional baseball, an enterprise that relied on a burgeoning rail network until the postwar era. One can recount Babe Ruth’s legendary barnstorming tours as an example of the mythic imagery that flowed from this creative synthesis. In the 1920s, the Yankees great travelled the country with his teammates and other baseball journeyman during the offseason, holding a series of profitable contests pitting his “Bustin’ Babes” and Lou Gehrig’s “Larrupin’ Lous.” Trains allowed his company to play in western cities, and the Bambino took his talents to Denver on a couple of occasions. To enter the city via Union Station, the Babe’s passenger car would cross a few viaducts and allow the slugger to witness the hustle and bustle of the Platte Valley’s profitable extractive economy. “The train mirrors baseball’s pace,” wrote historian Peter Richmond in 1993, “its rhythms of start and stop, rushing and frantic one moment, slowed to a

¹³⁰ Diane Bakke and Jackie Davis, *Places around the Bases*, 73.

crawl the next.”¹³¹ Such interpretation of the viaduct and its greater historical significance obscured previous representations of these rail overpasses as the physical manifestations of postindustrial decay – like Morley’s commentary on how they often created “dark no-man’s land” as “havens for bums and derelicts.”¹³² Coors Field’s “1900s” architecture highlighted an ascendant union between Old Denver and the national pastime, and this historical rereading left no room for the specter of decline.

The ballpark’s creative aesthetics could lead Denverites to hearken back to the “best example” of the Central Platte Valley’s former personality – a time before the overwhelming decrepitude of the 1970s and 1980s – but the reinvention of North Larimer also required urban planners to face the realities of the present and offer pragmatic solutions. The Stadium District intended the relationship between the new ballpark and its old neighborhood to be reciprocal: Coors Field needed a lively historic context to perpetuate its authentic ambience and North Larimer lay poised to reap the economic and cultural benefits of professional baseball. Their 1992 “Neighborhood Influence Study” emphasized the union in terms of local publicity, stressing how “The ballpark will provide the opportunity to showcase (the surrounding) neighborhoods, not only through the experience of the pedestrian, but also through the national media.”¹³³ The future of the MLB in Denver was thus tied to the evolution of North Larimer, its image, and the fortunes of the north downtown area in general. The ballpark environs still needed to maintain growth and perpetuate its own positive identity or image on non-game days, including the lengthy offseason, but Seydel and his supporters hoped that the ballpark would generate enough momentum to spur year round activity and development.

¹³¹ Peter Richmond, *Ballpark: Camden Yards and the Building of an American Dream* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993) 85.

¹³² Morley, *Historic Preservation and the Imagined West*, 130

¹³³ Denver Metropolitan Stadium District, *The Coors Field Neighborhood Influence Study* (Denver, 1992), 6.

The Stadium District sought to address and guide the impact of Coors Field on its urban surroundings after selecting the Blake Street Site. In 1992, they presented the findings of the Downtown Ballpark Development Committee (DBDC), a steering committee comprised of representatives from neighborhood organizations, community groups, the City Council, the Stadium District, the Colorado Rockies, the Planning Board, the Denver Chamber, Historic Denver, and the Downtown Denver Partnership. The economic subcommittee claimed that the overarching goal of the Coors Field project was to transform an underutilized slice of north downtown into a year round activity center that attracted residents, engaged visitors, and ultimately represented a safe, pedestrian friendly environment conducive to consumption and long-term economic growth. “The historic fabric of its 125 year neighborhood remains much in place,” the subcommittee explained in its final report to the Stadium District, “and the shops, restaurants, bars, and other sorts of commercial street life one would typically find around a traditional urban ballpark are there in small, but growing number. Denver thus has two one-of-a-kind opportunities: to restore the national tradition of urban ballparks and reinforce the West’s and Denver’s own rich history in the neighborhood.”¹³⁴ They outlined, in short, a historical unity between North Larimer’s commercial background and the economic potential of baseball that seemed to gel with Fishman’s desire to bring back “the Street.” Inspired by the initial reclamation of LoDo by urban entrepreneurs and venture capitalists like John Hickenlooper (who opened the Wynkoop Brewpub), the subcommittee sought to perpetuate this kind of adaptive reuse development around Coors Field.

They admitted that taking advantage of these “two once-in-a-lifetime opportunities” would not be easy, however, given that “real and perceived physical and social conditions

¹³⁴ Downtown Ballpark Development Committee, *Downtown Ballpark Development Committee Recommendations: Economic Subcommittee Recommendations* (Denver, 1992).

threaten a feeling of safety and comfort for potential neighborhood users.”¹³⁵ The committee traced the deterioration of this built environment over time, illustrating how low levels of civic investment had resulted in “inadequate street lighting, the lack of sidewalks, (and) poor upkeep of public and private property.”¹³⁶ The “social misfits” compounded this uninspiring visage, they concluded, citing “chronic alcoholics and substance abusers sleeping off a buzz in doorways or back alleys; individually drinking on the street or in groups to share a bottle; loitering; staggering; panhandling; exchanging verbal abuses, etc.”¹³⁷ The fruition of Coors Field pushed North Larimer’s vagrancy problem to forefront, and if the City wanted the popular adulation for the project to continue, it would have to address “the real and perceived” threats to public safety in the downtown area. The economic subcommittee, while attributing the negative perception of the neighborhood to an unruly few, basically supported Fishman’s claim that the city needed to deal with localized vagrancy and substance abuse issues before North Larimer could maximize its historic potential. In their opinion, it was “time to realize that Denver neither needs nor warrants a skid row”¹³⁸

Seydel and Maestas welcomed this conclusion, and redoubled their commitment to civic improvement as future success of their nascent ballpark neighborhood hung in the balance. Building on the success of the North Larimer Merchants Association, they helped organize the North Larimer Business District (NLBD) in 1991. The NLBD responded to social concerns by sponsoring the Larimer Street Task Force (LSTF), an alliance between local businesses and shelters coordinators. This group sought to control the proliferation “curbside feeders” - which are essentially unregulated soup kitchens, donation stations, and other ad hoc Good Samaritan

¹³⁵ Downtown Ballpark Development Committee. *Downtown Ballpark Development Committee Recommendations: Economic Subcommittee Recommendations* (Denver, 1992).

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

operations. The LSTF made sure these charitable services worked with existing shelters in order to minimize the number of “feeders” on the street at the same time without reducing the quality of social services. They also successfully campaigned for a “special police foot patrol,” which maintained a presence in North Larimer for three months in order to reduce drug trafficking. Though temporary, this patrol made over 300 arrests, and according to an NLBD newsletter, “the street remained relatively quiet for 2-3 months afterwards.”¹³⁹

The spirit of cooperation guiding the LSTF would prove illusory, however. Conflicts arose between neighborhood groups and shelter providers, often pitting the demands of redevelopment and rebirth against the necessity of such safety nets. The NLBD supported a formal protest of the both the Salvation Army Shelter and the Denver Rescue Mission for example, hoping to dismiss these two organizations looking to renew their licenses to operate as shelters in North Larimer. Lacking an intensive rehabilitation facet for substance abusers, these “traditional” programs were perceived as revolving door sanctuaries for the city’s down-and-out population. “The continued dumping of this problem on our neighborhoods is going to lead to a catastrophe,” began a letter on behalf of the North Downtown Alliance of Neighborhoods to Dorothy Nepa, a zoning administrator:

It is absolutely necessary that the care providers offer the best possible services to their clientele rather than simply boast of the numbers being served. These people need work – not just free handouts from one day to the next. The help provided by social service agencies has turned into a cruel joke played on the surrounding communities that bear the brunt of such services. It’s time to stop warehousing human beings in undesirable ghettos; to deal with these problems we must stop the clustering of service providers.¹⁴⁰

The sentiments expressed in this letter on the issue of vagrancy (along with those expressed by Fishman and the DBDC above) reflect a mounting sense of exasperation with the intractable

¹³⁹ Karle Seydel, “NLBD Accomplishments: 1991-1992,” *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

¹⁴⁰ North Downtown Alliance of Neighborhoods to Dorothy Nepa, City and County of Denver: Department of Zoning Administration, December 11, 1992, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

nature of the problem. The neighborhood alliance believed North Larimer's troubles began after it became the city's dumping ground following the renovation of Larimer Square and LoDo, and many residents and merchants had simply seen enough and demanded change.

This NIMBY attitude irked many shelter providers, who claimed that such facilities were necessary and difficult to relocate. The protest of the Salvation Army Shelter and the Denver Rescue Mission (the latter of which had operated various facilities in the downtown area since 1892) generated significant pushback, especially when shelter opponents lashed out at the concentration of services without providing any alternatives. Fishman's prescription seemed particularly harsh, though it was certainly not outside the norm for frustrated residents and merchants at the time. "For the life of me, I don't understand why a 'poor farm' type of operation can't be resumed, where these people could be made to earn a portion of their keep," he mused. "Those violators who didn't like this approach would leave the Denver area and we would be well-rid of them."¹⁴¹ Short on options and frustrated with his neighborhood's role as a "dumping ground" for the city's down and out, he was somewhat unapologetic in his draconian stance. "Until some pied piper DOES come up with something better," he concluded, "why should these loafers continue to destroy mainly MY backyard?"¹⁴² Others were even more dismissive, including Rex Labelle, who lived near Cherry Creek in the 1990s. Reacting to news that the city had removed several homeless individuals and six tons of trash from under one of bridges near his home, Labelle expressed little sympathy for the displaced: "Good riddance to bad rubbish. I pay my rent. I'm a citizen. I mind my own business. I'm not even close to being homeless. I don't feel sorry for them."¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ E. Sam Fishman, "Faxed letter to The Downtown Redevelopment Committee," October 7, 1991, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Jeffrey A. Roberts, "Homeless Vacate Digs along Cherry Creek," *The Denver Post*, March 14, 1995.

These inflammatory comments ignored signs that Downtowns Denver's vagrancy issues were far more ingrained than many cared to admit. Claire Martin of the *Denver Post* noted in 1994 how "the number of such homeless families in Denver has risen more than 88.5 percent [since 1990]. Families account for nearly half (43 percent) of the homeless population here, equal to the percentage of single, homeless men."¹⁴⁴ This was not a question of alcoholics and other "vagrants who wander by choice," but a pervasive issue plaguing a city with a long history of demographic transience. Shelter coordinators blamed downtown's acute lack of low-income housing, citing how the number of cheap hotels and other Single Room Occupancy (SRO) establishments had dropped from 1500 to 300. Many of these were renovated or torn down since 1975; the victims of both urban renewal and downtown's subsequent heritage boom. Suburban neighborhoods remained unreceptive to recovery facilities and daily shelters as well, so there was little chance of dispersing services across the metro area. "I think the reaction to homeless people is so strong and so negative that there is not a neighborhood that would accept an emergency homeless shelter, said Maureen Kottenstette, the director of Sacred Heart House in 1994, "That's the problem with finding sites outside the core city."¹⁴⁵

The concentration of shelters in the downtown area would remain a divisive issue, but North Larimer began to shed its skid row image in the mid-1990s, its turnaround the culmination of several factors. As downtown's newly christened "mitt," the historic neighborhood cradled the city's new multimillion dollar baseball playground and lay poised to become a hotbed of local redevelopment efforts. City leaders wanted to abet the impending economic boom, and the rule of law returned to an area long ignored by public officials. Loitering was no longer tolerated and traditional hangouts (like the bridges along Cherry Creek) were targeted. Two shelters also

¹⁴⁴ Claire Martin, "Not in My Backyard: Homeless Plight Produces Frustration," *The Denver Post*, November 5, 1994.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

closed their doors as rents took off in the late 1990s. These changes did not go unnoticed, and many Denverites would later claim that the installation of Coors Field merely displaced homeless individuals to other urban margins. But for Seydel, Fishman, and other Denverites invested in the downtown area, North Larimer appeared to be turning a corner, and impact of this renaissance on the homeless did not cause them to lose any sleep. Seydel contended that remaining shelters, “have benefitted from new people – and new donations from those exposed to their efforts...they are participants in step-up housing projects and other programs they did not have as much money for, before baseball.”¹⁴⁶ In a 1998 letter recounting Denver’s experience to Jim Tarbell (who was campaigning for an urban ballpark in Cincinnati and came to Seydel for advice) he did cite how many vagrants had relocated, perhaps in response to an increased police presence or the general acceleration of social and economic activity in lieu of Coors Field. But “what can I say?” he concluded, “I believe this is a good thing. The neighborhood’s buildings are no longer burning – they’re being renovated. The *neighborhood* is being restored and dramatically coming back to life. Homeless are still here, but not as readily apparent amongst the crowds and new storefront businesses.”¹⁴⁷

With the slow evaporation of the “real and perceived” conditions that once compromised its value, North Larimer embraced its new role as Denver’s historic ballpark neighborhood; the next big thing in the Mile High City of late the 1990s. Both the design of the ballpark and the reorientation of its environs around baseball did not proceed uncontested, however, and tensions surfaced as Denverites’ entered the fray with competing motives, concerns, and visions for the future. Seydel had fought for an urban “Field of Dreams,” and his struggles to bring this

¹⁴⁶ Seydel to Jim Tarbell. “Response to Fax from Mike Hoeting...Questions and Comments Opponents Have Regarding the Broadway Commons Site,” February 19, 1998, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

paradigm to fruition reflected the idiosyncrasies between Fishman's working class ideal and the nature of rapid growth and upscale development in the late twentieth century.

To start, the cost of the stadium project ballooned from an initial estimation of \$100 million to upwards of \$215 million by 1995. Tax considerations and inaccurate appraisals of construction materials and man power affected its price tag, but the Stadium District further inflated costs when they added 7,000 seats to the initial design (to boost the total to 51,000) after the Rockies set MLB attendance records at Mile High Stadium. They also continued to add "enhancements" (often comfort amenities or other moneymaking gimmicks) without public deliberation. The oversized grandstands upset Seydel a bit, but he seemed more perturbed when cost-cutting initiatives or amenity enhancements forced architects to compromise their initial design plans. One of the first red flags, in his opinion, emerged when HOK began to scale back some of the interior detail, substituting concrete for brick in the ballpark's main concourse. "The stadium needs a concrete reduction program," Seydel told the Hutchinson of the *Denver Post*, who noted in his article how brick "radiates warmth" while concrete "can seem cold and harsh."¹⁴⁸

Seydel often lashed out at touches that seemed overly commercial or just plain tacky. He had assumed a small degree of ownership in the ballpark's design, and like any possessive architect, he challenged developments that seemed anathema to his initial vision. As the ballpark neared completion for example, he recoiled at the sight of a "shoppette" (described as a "maze of cinder block concession stands") taking shape on the plaza above the main entryway. Seydel had hoped that this space would remain open to fans hoping to take a break from the game and view the mountains or Denver's skyline, and was not informed of this concessionaire while serving on

¹⁴⁸ Paul Hutchinson, "A ballpark figure: Cost of 'Fast-Track' Coors Field Up in Air," *The Denver Post*, June 8, 1994.

the DAG. It also partially obscured his brainchild, the arched clock façade. “From a design standpoint, it’s extremely disappointing,” he related to Hutchinson. “I call it ‘concourse interruptus.’ I mean, it’s not like there weren’t enough concessions in the stadium already. If they needed anything up there, food carts and picnic tables would have been fine.”¹⁴⁹ This remark infuriated HOK architects, and his pleas for “camouflage work” fell on deaf ears. The Stadium District’s John Lehigh, who was among those not amused, would end the matter by cutting Seydel off mid sentence in a public hearing with a weary, “we all know what you’re talking about Karle...but it certainly isn’t a high priority.”¹⁵⁰

Seydel made more noise in 1996, complaining about the proliferation of billboards in the outfield and the concurrent preclusion of local businesses from Coors Field ad-space due to escalating prices and corporate competition. “There isn’t anything local about Coors Field advertising, something to suggest that the ballpark is in Denver,” he told Hutchinson, “It’s getting close to losing its character with all these new levels of advertising.”¹⁵¹ One year later he found cause to lambast the installation of a faux wilderness area - which included waterfall, boulders, spruce trees, and a small pond - just beyond the centerfield wall. The District claimed this was an attempt to capture the majesty of the Rocky Mountains, but the miniature forest left Seydel unimpressed. “We’ve got a beautiful park now,” he told the *Denver Post*, “Why add cute and unnecessary frills that cheapen the place? If you want to see real mountains, all you have to do is look from the upper deck. I’d rather see the Rockies spend the money on another pitcher.”¹⁵² In short, Coors Field could never really measure up to his “Field of Dreams.” The

¹⁴⁹ Paul Hutchinson, “Groan, Cheer, But Pay the Tax,” *The Denver Post*, January 3, 1995.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Hutchinson, “Stadium Shoppette a ‘Wart’? Coors Field’s Mini-Mall Strikes Out, Critic Says,” *The Denver Post*, March 2, 1995.

¹⁵¹ Paul Hutchinson, “Rockies May Hit Ad Limit: Coors Field Near Saturation Point,” *The Denver Post*, April 14, 1997.

¹⁵² J. Sebastian Sinisi, “Ballpark Gets A Sprucing Up, Complete With Waterfall,” *The Denver Post*, January 24, 1997.

“Baseball Plaza” never really materialized, nor did the “Cooperstown of the West.” No Brooklyn style trolleys clanged down Blake Street, and “knothole gangs” of street urchins would have to buy tickets like everyone else. Its consumer orientation – the product of modern behavioral expectations, money making schemes, and comfort amenities – conspired to limit its authentic feel.

Other critics pointed out how the “techno-historic jewel” was in danger of representing, in the words of Rosenweig, “a cheap grace.” Even Bruce Hellerstein, whose “Paradise Park” was the epitome of golden age nostalgia, made sure to distance Coors Field and its retro contemporaries from the early 1900s ballparks they mimicked: “There’s no way you can compare these new ones with Fenway Park and Wrigley Field. Coors Field is a state-of-the-art stadium that just has a lot of nostalgia built into it. But there is so much copycatting with these parks, it can seem like it’s forced. It’s being a little too cute. It bugs me when people say its old-fashioned and it really isn’t.”¹⁵³ His indictment echoed Crawford’s initial hesitance to embrace what she saw as “paste on architecture.” As more and more cities pursued ballparks with traditional themes replicated notions of golden age aesthetics, “copycatting” threatened to devalue the whole enterprise, substituting synthetic themes and overtures for diligent considerations of material and historical uniqueness.

The new-old ballparks of the late twentieth century could never really measure up to the legendary allure of their “jewel box” predecessors, but this did little dissuade ordinary fans, many of whom flocked to these facilities for their creative blend of nostalgia and comfort. “(These new ballparks) may look old,” wrote Michelle Hiskey of the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, “but they are designed to attract people who don’t even like sports to come and

¹⁵³ Michelle Hiskey, “Stadium Boom: Build It, and They Will Come; Friendly Confines: New ballparks Are Designed So Fans Have More Fun While Spending Money,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, April 27, 1995.

spend as much money as possible.”¹⁵⁴ The role of the actual game of baseball in the decision to visit one of these retro wonders was almost negligible, and she quoted an eager Texas Rangers Fan to hammer her point home: “Our old park was crummy. This one holds your interest. There’s so much going on, even if you just go to the shops and watch people. My wife’s not a baseball fan, but she’ll come here.”¹⁵⁵

This type of attitude prevailed in Denver as well, even as the 1994-5 players strike turned the inaugural game in Coors Field (a preseason exhibition) into a less than exemplary display of replacement ‘scabs’ – in this case old-timers and lackluster college players hastily arranged by the MLB. The lengthy strike caused a national uproar and fueled widespread disgust with the growing importance of money in professional sports, but Rockies fans flooded this first game - many wearing T-shirts that read, “I came to see the field, not the players.”¹⁵⁶ They seemed altogether undeterred, even as attendance dropped across the nation in wake of the player’s strike, which actually left Americans without a World Series in 1994 (the first time since 1904). Despite its lasting damage – which did not continue into a second regular season as the players and ownership came to an agreement on 28 March 1995 – Coloradoans showed up in droves during their new park’s inaugural season, and the team sold 30,000 season tickets. Many observers had commented on the role of on-the-field success in the future character or gravitas of Coors Field earlier. Dramatic moments and player legacies had cemented the mystic of legendary parks like the old Yankee Stadium after all, “the house that Ruth built.” But while the quality of play was still important, the new-old parks of the late twentieth century were attractions in and of themselves.

¹⁵⁴ Michelle Hiskey, “Stadium boom: Build it, and They Will Come,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, April 27, 1995.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

The idea that a “historic” ballpark could represent a lone, year round anchor for an urban neighborhood – a proposition once disregarded in era of multipurpose domes and sporting complexes – had gained serious traction by the late 1990s.¹⁵⁷ MLB franchises across nation campaigned for retro digs of their own, and many city leaders were more than happy to oblige franchise owners whose stadium machinations involved the prospect of urban revitalization. The creative synthesis between the retro ballparks and historic neighborhoods was no sure route to civic acclaim, however. Popular notions of authenticity and intimacy affected conceptualizations of certain ballpark neighborhoods, rendering some “real” and others “artificial.” Observers scratched their heads, for example, when Cleveland’s Gateway area (the focus of Rosenweig’s analysis) failed to take off when the city moved Jacob’s Field there in 1994. Becky Yanisch, a Minnesota community developer sent to study Cleveland after familiarizing herself Denver’s efforts in 1996, pointed out how the Gateway complex, which also included a basketball arena, felt more gargantuan and isolated than Coors Field. She apparently “didn’t get the same sense that (Jacob’s Field) was integrated into the neighborhood”¹⁵⁸

Yanisch was attuned to the fragile nature of such projects, but the Retro Ballpark Movement continued to lure city leaders with the promise of instant history and inner-city redemption. This played to the advantage the MLB, whose franchises perceived the nostalgia boom as golden opportunity to foist new ballpark projects on their communities. One such example involved the St Louis Cardinals, who sold their city a new stadium in 2006 by guising it as downtown revitalization initiative they called “the Ballpark Village.” The mayor’s office and countered opponents of public funding by claiming the new ballpark was “never about baseball”

¹⁵⁷ Michelle Hiskey, “Stadium boom: Build it, and They Will Come,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, April 27, 1995.

¹⁵⁸ Jim McCartney, “The Right Stadium Can Revitalize Area, But Cleveland, Denver Examples Show Success Isn’t Guaranteed,” *St Paul Pioneer Press* November 17, 1996.

(or luxury boxes). They urged their constituents to consider the prospect of a “mixed-use, retail, office, and residential space” anchored by the new Busch Stadium (a tantalizing prospect given the success of similar initiatives in other cities). Historian Ponder argues that the Cardinals effectively played off their longstanding fears of urban decline and obsolescence. The franchise never intended to follow through on such a grandiose proposal, and once they received the necessary concessions from the city, the “Ballpark Village” was effectively abandoned. “What was once ‘an urban development of dreams,’” writes Ponder, “now consisted of an office building and plaza.”¹⁵⁹ This was a cautionary tale, one that warned of the elusive nature of these sports themed urban recovery initiatives. The retro craze exalted the ballpark’s potential as an urban panacea, but these megaprojects remained incredibly expensive and tricky propositions to hammer home. “There is an alchemy to turning a new stadium into economic gold,” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* columnist Jim McCartney surmised in 1996, “It includes finding the right neighborhood and carefully fitting the ballpark into the surrounding community.”¹⁶⁰

This was the essence of Denver’s approach anyway. Seydel believed North Larimer was “the right neighborhood” and worked with architects to ensure the ballpark “fit” with its material surroundings. He recognized the reciprocal nature of the project, and hoped city leaders would help North Larimer rise to the occasion as Denver’s new baseball neighborhood. This proved to be a frustrating campaign, much like his efforts to prevent the desecration of his field of dreams. The nostalgic trolley system never materialized, for example, even though it was discussed in the DAG and gained support from the Denver Rail Heritage Society. A feasibility study revealed that extending the Platte Valley Trolley (a vintage 1989 tourist attraction that still operates

¹⁵⁹ Benjamin Ponder, “Ballpark Village or Urban Wasteland: Rhetorical Invention, Civic Ego, and the St. Louis Cardinal’s Controversial New Home,” *Nine: A Journal of Baseball and Culture*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (Fall 2004) 74-80.

¹⁶⁰ Jim McCartney, “The Right Stadium Can Revitalize Area, But Cleveland, Denver Examples Show Success Isn’t Guaranteed,” *St Paul Pioneer Press* November 17, 1996.

between Elitch Gardens and Mile High Stadium) to Union Station would cost around \$19 million dollars, plus \$5 million for a pedestrian bridge. At a time when the escalating price of Coors Field caused Stadium District members to lose sleep, this touch was simply not an option.¹⁶¹ Seydel also pushed for the immediate ballpark environs to include a “family picnic area” where people could sit, eat, and take in the neighborhood. But this suggestion did not sit well with the Rockies ownership (who wanted families to frequent the ballpark’s concessionaires) and in his letter to Tarbell, he related how the team really “screwed us” on this initiative. The Stadium District also bungled the preservation of a Depression era, art-deco gas station which originally stood at Twentieth and Blake until the ballpark displaced it. They came to an agreement with the neighborhood and the DAG in 1992 stipulating they would dismantle what historians dubbed “a significant symbol of Denver’s industrial past,” and reinstall it on Twenty-Second Street as a “ticket booth or souvenir booth.” However, in the hectic days that followed, contractors misplaced a large portion of the station’s brick and terra cotta and the District scuttled the project rather than pay for new materials. Seydel was not amused: “I think for awhile they tried to figure out what the hell they had done. It ultimately came down to the fact that some things were lost and it would be a costly project to complete.”¹⁶²

His most impassioned fight centered on the issue of street improvements, infrastructure items like traffic signals, sidewalks, lighting, and minor repairs which he considered a critical component of North Larimer’s future success. The Stadium District and the city government had often balked at such beautification initiatives, figuring that streetscaping was a low priority in the grand scheme of things. Seydel countered that these improvements greatly enhanced the neighborhood’s image, especially in terms of a perception of public safety, and he sometimes

¹⁶¹ Dick Kreck, “Trolley on main line for future?” *The Denver Post*, April 29, 1996.

¹⁶² Andy Van De Voorde, “One of Our Gas Stations is Missing: A Historic Preservation Effort for Coors Field Goes in the Tank,” *Denver Westword*, June 6, 1996.

“relentless pestered” government agencies for funding, according to the *Denver Post*.¹⁶³ He managed to persuade (or at least wear down) those in charge of the purse strings at several turns, and boasted to Tarbell that his efforts, though hellish, precipitated the beautification of “over 30 blocks” of the new ballpark neighborhood between 1993 and 1998. By this time he had developed a reputation as an “urban gadfly,” someone who was tireless, altogether undaunted by the drudgery of going door to door to garner support, and “relentless” when facing an often insouciant civic bureaucracy.¹⁶⁴ His work paid off. With the installation of the “techno-historic jewel,” his neighborhood lay poised to overshadow LoDo in as a local hotspot, and planners, civic delegations, and neighborhood activists across the nation came his way when their cities considered building a downtown stadium. His tactics and outspoken nature may have rubbed some the wrong way (i.e. “concourse interruptus”) but his tireless nature helped ensure the culmination of one of the most successful stadium projects in American history. In the summer of 1995, Governor Roy Romer recognized his efforts with a “Smart Growth and Development Award.”

The fruition of Coors Field reignited public confidence in the “the forgotten part of Denver,” giving it a much needed boost. Private developers swarmed the area almost as soon as the site was slated for the ballpark, scooping up old warehouses and vacant lots. Coors Field capped a process of revitalization that began with Crawford’s reclamation of Larimer Square in the 1960s. Properties once deemed worthless became hot commodities, and the stigma of blight disappeared project by project. One such example was the transformation of an old flour mill located northwest of the ballpark. Once considered a national competitor and “the Pride of the Rockies,” it was abandoned in the 1970s, becoming somewhat of an urban legend. Stories

¹⁶³ Virginia Culver, “Obituaries: Gadfly tireless in pursuit of a better Denver,” *The Denver Post*, June 1, 2010.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

concerning human sacrifice, devil worship, and a “maniac living on the third floor and dismembering people,” flourished.¹⁶⁵ Homeless teens frequented the building (often fighting older winos for control in the late 1980s) but many shuddered at the very sight of the decrepit industrial monolith. According to Denver police officer Paul Goff: “We used to call it Frankenstein’s Loft. Or the Devil’s Tower. It was straight out of a Hollywood movie. I always expected to find a body in there. I never went in alone. When I did go in, I held my breath.”¹⁶⁶

This building lay idle for decades, but Downtown’s resurgent housing market would breathe life into Denver’s “haunted” mill in the wake of the ballpark project. Spared from demolition, it ended up the hands of Dana Crawford, who secured a \$1 million dollar loan from the city to renovate the building in 1998. She believed it was invaluable in a historic sense, and planned to turn it into upscale lofts. No longer a “clubhouse” for homeless teens, or a perfect garret for monsters and serial killers, it became a residence for yuppies and retirees looking to live near the ballpark in the midst of what some were already calling an urban renaissance. Crawford rebuked one patrolman who “joked about a sacrificed baby,” telling him, “You’re going to kill this project like that.”¹⁶⁷ Through reclamation projects like these, which entailed, as with the design of Coors Field, remembering the better aspects of the area’s heritage, the neighborhoods surrounding the ballpark continued to shed their late twentieth century identity as Denver’s skid row.

Another tale of redemption concerned “Herb’s Hideout,” a disreputable bar police once considered one Denver’s “most murderous saloons.”¹⁶⁸ According to Seydel: “Herb’s Hideout was a box-car bar and a notorious place for drunks and disorderly – a place that if you kept all

¹⁶⁵ Harrison Fletcher, “Building for the Future,” *Denver Westword*, March 5, 1998.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Dick Kreck, “Everything Out-Of-Date at Herb’s,” *The Denver Post*, May 13, 1996.

the tape on the floors and walls that police used to outline bodies after various knife and gun mishaps – it would have been white as snow.”¹⁶⁹ Herb’s was even shut down in 1993 (2 years after Coors Field became its future neighbor) because it was found to be a front for the exchange of drugs and stolen goods. Upon reopening, however, the owners of Herb’s decided to reinvent their shady watering hole as a chic, 50s style piano bar. It was an extremely successful makeover, and Herb’s began to eschew the winos and attract a high-end clientele. Seydel often used this as an example of the redemptive power of Coors Field, assuring Jim Tarbell and other ballpark planners that it was one of many success stories redefining his ascendant ballpark neighborhood.

The NLBD evolved into the Ballpark Neighborhood Association (BNA) under Seydel and Maestas’ guidance, a semantic modification that marked the culmination of their efforts to reimagine North Larimer. The ballpark pioneers looked forward to more success stories, more renovations, more emphasis on preservation, and more residents swallowing up lofts and reinforcing the neighborhood’s civic character. The BNA outlined a “Larimer Street Business Revitalization Program,” which planned to turn North Larimer into hip new focal point for Denver’s music scene. The program also envisioned the formation of an “international marketplace” in order to renew “the historic, ethnic, and cultural enterprises” that Larimer once boasted as Denver’s second main street. The BNA’s ultimate goal, according to Seydel, was the consecration of the neighborhood as a historic district.¹⁷⁰ The city government bought in, and found a new source of pride in what was once an object of shame. To demonstrate their renewed dedication, the Denver Planning and Community Development Office unveiled the Northeast Downtown Plan (NDP) in 1995. Eight years after the Downtown Area Plan of 1987 largely

¹⁶⁹ Seydel to Jim Tarbell, “Response to Fax from Mike Hoeting...Questions and comments opponents have regarding the Broadway Commons site,” February 19, 1998, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

¹⁷⁰ Karle Seydel, “History of Larimer,” *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

ignored the “Arapahoe Triangle,” the Ballpark Neighborhood became the focus of the city’s urban policy.

Its reinvention produced winners and losers, however, a reality made readily apparent by the plight of its homeless shelters. Coors Field was an upscale initiative, and many longtime merchants faced outright obsolescence as rents escalated and the character of north downtown shifted to cater to young professionals and suburban families. Seydel predicted rapid change, but hoped existing businesses would stay and flourish. “Nobody wants to see (La Casa De Manuel) or La Popular or Johnnie’s Market go,” he told Dick Kreck of the *Denver Post*, “They’re real people.”¹⁷¹ Even so, those who opposed the ballpark from the beginning feared the worse, especially the contingent of LoDo residents clinging to the vestiges of their “bohemian village.” Despite her conversion and involvement, for example, Crawford still harbored a few reservations regarding the ballpark project. “The city has to decide,” she remarked in 1994, whether “this is a historic district or a loading ramp for baseball and basketball.” Her qualms were not absent from reality. LoDo activists cringed in 1995, for example, when it was revealed that Arnold Schwarzenegger planned on installing a “Planet Hollywood” franchise – the ultimate symbol of all things kitschy - in the vicinity of the ballpark. The barbarians were at the gate, so to speak. The actor turned governor even partnered up with former Stadium District director John Lehigh, and many thought the project was inevitable.¹⁷² Competing narratives of progress and displacement will be discussed in greater detail in chapter III, but it is important to note that certain developments validated at least some of the fears expressed by opponents of a downtown ballpark as Coors Field took shape between 1991 and 1995.

¹⁷¹ Dick Kreck, “Let’s Not Forget the Roots of Those on Upper Larimer,” *The Denver Post*, March 31, 1995.

¹⁷² Steve Raabe, “Coors Field Exec to Direct Schwarzenegger LoDo Project,” *The Denver Post*, October 21, 1995.

Denverites would diverge on the nature of new developments associated with the ballpark in the years that followed, but its efficacy as a community icon and progenitor of growth could not be ignored. The retro ballpark ultimately inspired confidence in an area that had come to represent urban America's worst tendencies by the late 1980s. North Downtown was once Denver's bowery, a place where buildings crumbled, where one *London* newspaper joked that you could roll a bowling ball down the street without hitting anyone or anything of value. The ballpark's nostalgic architecture allowed many Denverites to look past this era of postindustrial decline and cherish an idealized version of North Larimer's history instead. It memorialized the city's viaducts, which had become symbols of vagrancy and darkness. It also allowed Crawford to turn a "haunted" flour mill into upscale lofts. Fishman must have celebrated this rehabilitation of his neighborhood's identity, which at least paid some homage to his desire to recover "the Street." Seydel struggled to keep Coors Field's sense of intimacy and local scale intact, suffered a few setbacks, and could never really extend the ballpark's retro elements into his neighborhood. The essence of his "Field of Dreams" remained intact though, enshrined by the quality Blake street ballpark and the resurgence of its environs. It was a tremendous hit, and his efforts to reinvent northern downtown had gained serious traction in its wake. By the mid-1990s, after decades of obsolescence, his neighborhood had found new purpose as Denver's Baseball Neighborhood. It lay poised to become a notable historic district and entertainment destination, and Seydel hoped this authentic, work-a-day place could hold its own amidst Downtown Denver's turbulent urban milieu.

Not all of the private developers rushing to the scene – as evidenced by Schwarzenegger and "Planet Hollywood" - bought into Seydel's small scale, local, and intimate ethos of growth, however. The next chapter will continue to focus on the issue of "urban authenticity" while

tracing how popular conceptualizations of the Ballpark Neighborhood and the greater downtown area evolved between 1995 and 2010.



Figure 3. One discovers Coors Field’s “technohistoric” character by comparing its two scoreboards. Above: the modern Jumbotron, which dwarfs the surrounding grandstands. Below: the right field hand-operated scoreboard, which harkens back to the early 1900s.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Preston Miller, “Scoring Displays at Coors Field,” December 2013.

CHAPTER 3

Coors Field and the Ascendant City of Leisure

On 12 November, 1996, a three alarm fire devoured a vacant warehouse two blocks away from Coors Field at 2201 Market Street. Seydel witnessed the “flames licking off the top of the building,” and worried that the growing conflagration would spread to the Breckinridge Brewery and ravage over half a block of his nascent ballpark neighborhood. Firefighters eventually controlled the blaze, but not before it damaged several structures, including Johnnie’s, Eddie Maestas’ eatery. It was a minor setback for the ballpark pioneers’ otherwise ascendant neighborhood, which looked to capitalize from its association with the American game. Many Coloradoans were discovering its allure and potential for the first time in the late 1990s. Developers swept up vacant properties, Rockies’ fans frequented games, and young professionals moved into renovated lofts. With an influx of upscale developments and fresh faces, perceptions of Coors Field’s environs changed, and different opinions emerged regarding its new identity and significance to the city of large.

Such commentary framed its evolution, each diverging quip and portrayal citing things gained and others lost. These debates were still in their infancy in 1996, and news coverage of the three-alarm fire revealed how many Denverites approached their city’s reinvented neighborhoods with uncertainty. The *Denver Post* reported a fire in a “LoDo warehouse,” a geographic slip that raised the ire of several locals who insisted that the warehouse in question was in the Ballpark Neighborhood. Bill Mosher, chairman of the Downtown Denver Partnership (DDP), immediately criticized the press, stressing how, “These distinctions become important as

the media pursues follow-up stories about the incidence of fires in these vacant buildings.”¹⁷⁴

Callers hounded the *Denver Post*, supporting his representation of Denver’s new urban boundaries, while a confused representative of the brewery commented that “we always thought of ourselves as being in LoDo.”¹⁷⁵ Seydel, for his part, acknowledged that he did not see locals referring to this area as the Ballpark Neighborhood or even NoDo any time soon.

The fire revealed an ongoing revaluation of the built environment, one that began with the consecration of Larimer Square and LoDo before encompassing Coors Field. This was more than a discussion of geographic boundaries, however. It was a cultural reckoning of sorts, a rhetorical process where individuals outlined the tentative identities of the reinvented neighborhoods that comprised Denver’s new downtown periphery. Seydel and his allies hoped to connect Coors Field to North Larimer or “NoDo,” but many Denverites still associated it with LoDo even though this historic district technically ends at Twentieth Street. “We just want to clarify the different parts of downtown,” said partnership spokesman Chris Chavez, in a follow up to Mosher’s censure. “I remember a crime last year taking place at 16th and Stout reported as ‘lower downtown.’”¹⁷⁶

The fruition of Coors Field loomed over this rhetorical process of clarification as it unfolded in Central Platte Valley (CPV) Denver. As a focal point, it forced individuals to juxtapose the traditional role of sports facilities with a larger discussion of the city’s urban identity and authenticity. This chapter will investigate how different individuals and groups perceived and conceptualized Denver’s revamped downtown area between 1995 and 2010, the first fifteen years of Coors Field’s existence. It will focus on how myriad observers, both critics

¹⁷⁴ Sebastian Sinisi, “A Fire in LoDo? Not So, Officially Ballpark Outside District, Too,” *Denver Post*, November 13, 1996.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

and champions of the stadium project, made sense of the built environment left in its wake. Their opinions and debates reveal many of the tensions beholden to the “the city of leisure,” a philosophy of urban development based on amusement and ornamentation.¹⁷⁷ The CPV continued to reawaken under these auspices after the fruition of Coors Field, but while some Denverites embraced its remarkable journey from skid row to entertainment capital, others asked what it this paradigm displaced. Historian Phil Goodstein has claimed, for example, that the ballpark and other megaprojects did little to resolve the city’s problems with vagrancy and substance abuse, and may have even aggravated these issues by exiling homeless individuals to increasingly thin urban margins. The notion of displacement extends beyond the impact of higher rents, shelter closures, and other socioeconomic issues, however. The transformation of downtown Denver is also an important example of “cultural gentrification,” which is the imposition of new tastes and values on a space by an influx of new residents and investors. Coors Field ushered in a new wave of development, the nature of which occasionally clashed with existing mores in LoDo and elsewhere. Sharon Zukin claims that the “continuous reinvention of communities” precipitates the death of authenticity, the true “soul” of the city. This, as we shall see, is a useful framework to understand the externalities of the city of leisure model as it unfolded in CPV Denver.¹⁷⁸ The ballpark project had its fair share of champions and critics, those who believed the “Field of Dreams” gave the downtown new life and those who saw it as sterilizing megaproject. Seydel and Maestas subscribed to the former: the ballpark had saved their neighborhood, allowing it to flower as an epitome of urban America at its finest. Others, like Goodstein, hesitated to embrace the new order, remaining skeptical of the upscale, homogenous nature of growth it espoused. They asked what types of people, behaviors, and

¹⁷⁷ Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University Press, 1991).

¹⁷⁸ Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

expectations Coors Field displaced, and argued that a wide chasm existed between the “working class” identity it propagated and the process of gentrification it inured. A final group composed of LoDo’s pioneers and founding acolytes bemoaned the loss of their urban bohemia. They expressed a different kind of nostalgia than Seydel and Denver’s other baseball nuts: a reverence not for the old ballgame, but for a time before rowdy sports fans and ascendant yuppies descended on their idyllic version of New York’s famed East Village. This chapter will demonstrate how individuals from these three categories struggled to square the traditional promise of ballparks and “home teams” as sources of civic pride and common identity with Downtown Denver’s new lifestyle dynamic.

The Rockies reached the playoffs in 1995, capping off a tremendous inaugural season for Coors Field during in which Denver continued to lead the National League in average attendance. Effusive sportswriters dubbed this team “the Blake Street Bombers” in honor of their offensive proficiency, offering the nascent ballclub a future persona. The pitching staff even included Bret Saberhagen, the hero of the 1985 “I-70 series” I described in Chapter I (though at this point he was firmly in the twilight of his career). They lost to the Atlanta Braves (the eventual World Series champions) in round one, but the 1995 season still felt like a major accomplishment for a fledgling organization. For the next eleven seasons, however, the team did not reach the postseason, finishing with above a .500 win percentage just three times during this span. Pitchers struggled with the altitude, prospects did not pan out, and the average attendance dipped nearly fifty percent between 1995 and 2005.¹⁷⁹ It was during this span that I witnessed my first game, leaving (perhaps unfairly), with the impression that this team had a lackluster fan base. But in 2007, the Rockies turned things around, and their historic late season heroics made

¹⁷⁹ Sports Reference LLC, “Colorado Rockies Attendance, Stadiums, and Park Factors,” Baseball Reference, <http://www.baseball-reference.com/teams/COL/attend.shtml> (accessed March 30, 2013).

them the toast of Denver once more. Below average for most of the season, the team won 21 of 22 games in September, an unprecedented run. They then clinched a playoff berth in a one game tiebreaker against San Diego. Led by young short stop Troy Tulowitzki (Tulo!), MVP-candidate Matt Holiday, and consistent veteran Todd Helton, the 2007 Rockies continued their hot streak into the playoffs, sweeping two consecutive series to capture their first National League Pennant. As they geared up to play the Red Sox in the World Series, it seemed like the culmination of a long journey for both the team and its city. Twenty-one years after Ueberroth had insinuated that it was still a “bush-league” metropolis, Denver boasted a successful franchise, a popular major league ballpark, and an ascendant downtown area as well.

The 2007 “Rock-tober” mania led many observers to look back and reflect upon Colorado’s lengthy baseball campaign, the construction of Coors Field, and the current state of downtown. It was, in other words, the perfect before and after moment. *Sports Illustrated* columnist Rick Reilly may have summed up the general position of many local ballpark enthusiasts when he penned a testament to the redemptive power of baseball entitled “Mile High Madness.” After detailing the how the long wait to enter the MLB’s ranks was “the cruelest kind of suffering,” Reilly, writing from the perspective of an elated Rockies Fan, proceeded to capture (quite satirically) the 1970s-late 1980s essence of lower downtown: “LoDo was a dirty, dilapidated old business district, the kind of place gangbangers tiptoed through. When my mom would drag us to those Bears games, she’d reach across and lock our doors when we went through LoDo. It was full of druggies and brutes and three-toothed thieves. And those were the women.”¹⁸⁰ But this all changed, he continued, upon the arrival of professional baseball and the Blake Street Ballpark:

¹⁸⁰ Rick Reilly. “Mile High Madness.” *Sports Illustrated Magazine*, October 29, 2007.

And then it finally happened. We got a major league team in 1993, a very bad team, but a team. And we put on clean shirts and crammed into Mile High Stadium and screamed our fool heads off so that nobody would take it from us...And when Coors Field arrived in 1995...we cheered even louder. Not because the baseball was good, it wasn't...No, we whooped because baseball was saving our town. No city in America was transformed more by baseball than Denver. LoDo blossomed into a garden of restaurants and lofts and shops and 4,300 housing units.¹⁸¹

In his opinion, baseball *saved* downtown Denver and allowed LoDo to blossom. This take ignores the distinction between LoDo and NoDo and credits the ballpark for the former's revival, which was arguably abetted by the entrepreneurs and residents who gambled on the district's future long before the ballpark project took shape. Even so, the civic optimism that Coors Field inculcated (and the new paradigm for development that emerged as a result) cannot be ignored. Denver became a "city of leisure" - a place of amusement, culture, and entertainment - between 1990 and 2010, and baseball was an integral, and revealing, part of this transformation.¹⁸²

Several megaprojects joined with the ballpark to redefine the Mile High City as a destination for tourists and a playground for adults of all ages. The Pena Administration, as we have seen, recognized the importance of consumers and cultural industries in the post-Fordist era, and set out to improve their city's image with distinctive monuments and world class attractions. This heralded the ascendancy of the "city of leisure," an archetype for postindustrial development that sought to lure consumers back to the city with cultural attractions ranging from historic districts to sporting cathedrals.¹⁸³ In 1990, they oversaw the completion of the Colorado Convention Center, which promised to represent a marquee destination for conventioners across the nation. That same year, Denver voters approved a multimillion dollar bond issue to fund the complete transformation of the Denver Public Library at the old Burnham Hoyt building on Broadway. The city employed architect Michael Graves and his seven story addition won rave

¹⁸¹ Reilly, "Mile High Madness," October 29, 2007.

¹⁸² Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

reviews as a creative, postmodern blend of different fragments and styles. Pena also initiated the construction of the Denver International Airport (DIA) in 1989. After he left office two years later, newly elected mayor Wellington Webb (who served in this post from 1991 to 2003) inherited this project and saw it to completion. Observers bemoaned DIA's escalating costs and intermittent construction delays (scheduled for completion by 1993, design changes problems with the baggage system pushed its opening to 1995) but the finished product sent shock waves through the architectural community. A white, tent-like enclosure mimicked a snow capped mountain range, while natural imagery and modernist reflections on globalism colored the interior. "Once the city was a place where businesses congregated," wrote *New York Times* critic Herbert Muschamp in response these developments, "(but) now 'the city' is itself a consumer product, recast as an escape from grown-up care."¹⁸⁴

This philosophy influenced the transformation of the Platte Valley floodplain as well. Elitch Gardens Amusement Park reopened at this location in 1994 and continued its successful run as one of Denver's premier attractions. The adjacent area, which had remained vacant after the DMMLBSD passed on Anschutz's ballpark proposal, soon housed the Pepsi Center, a professional basketball arena. This facility was the brainchild of the Ascent Entertainment Group, which as a subsidiary of the cable/satellite television giant Comsat purchased the Nuggets in 1992. Three years later they convinced the Quebec Nordiques of the National Hockey League (NHL) to relocate to Denver after the team received unfavorable lease terms from their Canadian hosts. Both the Nuggets and the Nordiques (who became the Colorado Avalanche) played in McNichols Arena at first, but Ascent complained that this older facility (built, interestingly enough, for Denver's aborted 1976 Olympic bid) did not meet national standards. They agreed to privately finance a new arena on the Anschutz site, but reneged on a tentative deal with the city,

¹⁸⁴ Herbert Muschamp "Wonderland in the Mile High City," *The New York Times*, May 2, 1995.

citing its stringent tax guidelines. Mayor Webb was furious, agreeing to a new, less favorable, lease in 1996 only after Ascent threatened to move the arena project to the suburbs.¹⁸⁵ With this in place, the Pepsi Center Arena took shape across from the amusement park and became a major attraction upon its completion in 1999. Unlike Coors Field, it was entirely forward looking, with a construction tagline: “The Excitement is Building,” that evoked the frenetic energy of basketball, hockey, and sold-out concerts. “We have designed a premier facility that will be an attraction in and of itself,” said Ascent point man Tim Romani of the arena. “Leading edge audio and video systems, dazzling event lighting and perfect sight lines will stimulate your senses and create excitement throughout the Pepsi Center. Visitors to the Pepsi Center will also be treated to the ultimate in comfort and convenience.”¹⁸⁶ Other attractions joined this growing nexus of entertainment in the Platte Valley Floodplain, including the Recreational Equipment Inc (REI) flagship (which recycled the historic Denver Tramway Powerhouse in 1998), and the Colorado Ocean Journey Aquarium (completed in 1999).

Through this veritable explosion of development, the entire swath of CPV Denver – an area once considered a postindustrial casualty – evolved into a consumers’ Mecca for culture and entertainment. “It’s becoming Denver’s playground, for adults and children,” wrote Christopher Lopez of the *Denver Post* in 1997. “With a big-league baseball park anchoring the north end of the sprawling urban development and a world-class amusement park to attract visitors to the opposite side, the Platte Valley could be to Denver what the River Walk is to San Antonio and the Inner Harbor is to Baltimore.”¹⁸⁷ Professional sports establishments made this transformation possible, lending credence to Costas Spirou and Larry Bennett’s assertion that “the symbolic and

¹⁸⁵ John Kisla, “Avs Must Unravel This Tangled Webb,” *The Denver Post*, November 15, 1996.

¹⁸⁶ Alan Snel, “2 Designs Preview Denver’s Future; Pepsi Center Intent: to Blend into Valley,” *The Denver Post*, August 29, 1997.

¹⁸⁷ Christopher Lopez, “EMERGING JEWEL: Platte Valley Grows into a Main Attraction,” *The Denver Post*, January 2, 1994.

material importance of sports clubs and sporting facilities embodies the ascendancy of the city of leisure as a model of postindustrial urban economic development.”¹⁸⁸ After gaining the Avalanche, Denver became the smallest city to support teams from all four major American sports leagues: The NFL (Broncos), the MLB (Rockies), the NBA (Nuggets) and the NHL (Avalanche) – all of whom played in the CPV.

The former postindustrial casualty was Denver’s premier attraction by the dawn of the new millennium, and while civic leaders and urban boosters toasted their success, the cult of Mile High fandom grew to represent an important source of community pride and identity for the entire city. Fresh off back-to-back Bronco’s Super Bowl victories in 1997 and 1998, commentators referred to Denver as “Sports Town USA,” lauding its passion for sport. Woody Paige deemed the late 1990s as a transformative moment, guesstimating that one hundred million fans had passed through Denver’s sporting cathedrals: “That’s a lot for a Dusty Old Cowntown where the first professional baseball game in 1885 attracted 1,500 and \$ 90 in gate receipts (\$75 of which was taken by the manager, who fled).”¹⁸⁹ National recognition followed as the former “cowntown” basked in the glow of its professional franchises. In 1998, the MLB held its annual All Star Game at Coors Field amidst an unprecedented surge in offensive numbers later known as the “Steroids Era.” The NBA followed suit in 2005, hosting its All-Star weekend in the city.

Mile high homerun and dunk contests symbolized the ascendant spirit of a city now firmly on the up and up. The very extent of its national momentum would be confirmed in 2008 when the Democratic Party chose to hold its national convention in the Pepsi Center. This was a transcendent moment in the sun — an honor matched only, perhaps, by hosting the Olympics.

¹⁸⁸ Costas Spirou and Larry Bennett, *It’s Hardly Sportin’: Stadiums, Neighborhoods, and the New Chicago* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003). 58

¹⁸⁹ Woody Paige, “Avs and Rockies Keep Colorado on a Roll,” *The Denver Post*, March 29, 1998.

Denver had not accommodated a presidential convention since 1908, when William Jennings Bryan received the Democratic nomination for president. Dick Kreck compared the buzz surrounding that occasion to his own experience one hundred years later, and pointed out how the nascent “Queen City of the Plains” experienced a similar feeling of ascendancy back then. To establish this parallel he quoted Paul Thieman, a journalist who witnessed Bryan’s nomination for the *New York American*: “No other national convention in the history of the land ever convened in the soul of such architectural triumph and such thoughtful arrangements and such aspiring environs,” he attested, “Denver is the ideal convention city. It is a joy to be here.”¹⁹⁰ His praise would have been very fitting in 2008, Kreck surmised, as Denver, once more in a position of municipal prestige, basked in the national limelight.

The rebirth of Denver as “Sports Town USA” signaled a shift in municipal priorities, however, and its aftermath led some observers (in Denver and across the nation for that matter) to ask whether this rampant boosterism allowed urban politicians to dance around issues like poverty and inner-city crime. “Cities adapted, rather admirably, to a changing America,” writes urban historian Jon C. Teaford of the downtown building boom of the 1990s, “but the concept of Renaissance is really an illusion.”¹⁹¹ He cited the late twentieth century wave of “messiah mayors” and claims that this generation of “canny politician-executives” extolled the public/private partnership as a means to attract businesses and cultural attractions to their cities. Pena and Webb embraced this philosophy at a time when the stigma of decline afflicted a majority of American cities and cutbacks in federal aid precluded large-scale transportation and housing projects. The transformation CPV Denver was a remarkable accomplishment in this

¹⁹⁰ Dick Kreck, “Denver's Boosters Offer a 1908 Refrain The Same Arguments, Same Hopes Surrounded the City's Only Other National Convention,” *The Denver Post*, January 12, 2007.

¹⁹¹ Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990) 306-7.

context, but Teaford reminds us that the “quest for the visitor’s dollar” produced winners *and* losers. In Denver and other metropolises nationwide, the inner city was still disproportionately poor and the lack of affordable housing remained a legitimate issue.

Historian Phil Goodstein claims that the Pena and Webb Administrations “targeted the poor and misfits for elimination from downtown while the private/public partnership ruled the city.”¹⁹² While it is unlikely that the city government sought to remove lower class individuals in particular, the gentrification of CPV Denver, which precipitated higher rents, an escalation of police enforcement, and a general shift in the area’s socioeconomic makeup, displaced, or at least alienated, many people that once called this area home – many of whom were low income wage earners or vagrants. Real estate speculation also forced many longstanding shelters and other social services to relocate, and the new upscale loft market precluded the poor. The new cityscape may have boasted a nationally acclaimed consumer’s playground, but Goodstein’s appraisal of the CPV denotes its social consequences: “As the city eagerly pushed upper class developments in the historic abodes of the city’s down-and-out denizens along old Larimer Street, near Coors Field, and the Platte Floodplain, tensions grew among the homeless. In the fall of 1999, a wave of murders saw the deaths of seven street people. The police blamed ‘mall rats’ – teenagers hanging out in the 16th Street Mall.”¹⁹³ He also cites the case of Sonny Lawson Park on 23rd and Welton Streets, explaining how it became “a gathering point for those unable to fit in with the middle class ethic, especially after the slum displacement stemming from the renovation of LoDo.” The Webb Administration actually put “spy-cameras” in the greenery before fencing off the park entirely in June of 1999.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Goodstein, *A People’s History of Denver Volume II: DIA and other Scams* (Denver: New Social Publications, 2000), 224.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 430.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 428.

Goodstein's contention that Denver's politicians conducted a "war on the poor" in the 1990s is a bit hyperbolic, but the rise of "Sportstown USA" does reveal how a heady ethos of civic boosterism allowed Denverites to gloss over many of the social tensions bubbling under the surface. A few critics pointed out how city leaders granted their beloved sports franchises extraordinary offers and incentives, often at the cost of Denver taxpayers, while problems like homelessness went unchecked. This sentiment finally boiled over when Broncos owner Pat Bowlen pressured the city to build his team a new stadium after their back-to-back 1997-98 Super Bowl victories. Cashing in on the "Bronco mania" sweeping the city, Bowlen stressed the need for a new facility before casually hinting that the team would consider other suitors if Denver did not act quickly. A panicked state legislature soon obliged, and the Broncos moved into their new digs, "Invesco Field at Mile High," in 2001. As this drama unfolded, *Westword* columnist Patricia Calhoun looked back to the Coors Field Lease, which was one of the most generous in the MLB at the time. She also noted in disgust how John McHale, the first DMMLBSD chairman, had promised that the financing plan represented a true public/private partnership when in reality, taxpayers absorbed most of the escalating costs. McHale parlayed his tenure with the District into a management position Rockies, and Calhoun sarcastically noted that "he earned it" for his unwavering service to the City of Denver. "In the ensuing years," she concluded, "Denver has grown – but it has not grown up. This is still a cowtown, and it's about to give Bowlen his cash cow. Since the baseball district felt free to ignore the legislation that created it – not to mention the vote of the people – there's no reason to assume the football stadium district will play the game by different rules."¹⁹⁵ Calhoun recognized that professional sports franchises often took advantage of their privileged status in urban America, winning concessions where other public initiatives foundered.

¹⁹⁵ Patricia Calhoun, "The Million Fan March," *Denver Westword*, February 5, 1998.

But something very telling happens at the tail end of her sensible discussion of how sports teams often play off city leaders' longstanding fear of obsolescence. After emphasizing that it is important to at least "know what were paying for," she transitions to an extremely heartfelt note concerning one of the Blake Street Ballpark's earliest proponents: "Eddie Maestas, the owner of Johnnie's Market and the unofficial mayor of Larimer Street for over two decades, passed away Saturday night."¹⁹⁶ She detailed how he "went to bat to ensure that Larimer did not become a sea of parking lots," and attributed the success of the ballpark neighborhood to his efforts. Maestas was diagnosed with leukemia in 1997, forcing him to close Johnnie's and step away from the community he had served for nearly 50 years. "My life has pretty much been the neighborhood," he told the *Denver Post* - "I will miss the people more than I will the market."¹⁹⁷ Maestas even asked that people donate to the BNA in lieu of sending flowers, leading Seydel to remark how, "even in his passing, he's supporting the neighborhood."¹⁹⁸

His passion for North Larimer ultimately made Calhoun realize – in the midst of an extremely skeptical analysis of stadium construction - that the fruition of Coors Field could not be circumscribed as a soulless, top down attempt to enhance Denver's national image at the cost of John Q. Taxpayer. It involved ordinary people who loved their neighborhood and wanted to help realize its potential. Eddie Maestas treated the homeless men that congregated in his backyard with respect, even as it though others (like Fishman), were fed up, and had no qualms asking the city to mop up these individuals. He certainly did not pursue the ballpark as a means to initiate a "war on the poor," and wanted, above all else, to see North Larimer thrive like it did when he was a younger man. Because of the "difficulty of estimating what would have happened

¹⁹⁶ Patricia Calhoun, "The Million Fan March," *Denver Westword*, February 5, 1998.

¹⁹⁷ Patricia Calhoun, "Larimer 'Mayor' Shuts Shop: Feisty Market Owner Battling Leukemia," *The Denver Post*, October 22, 1997.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

in the absence of gentrification,” according to Jacob L. Vigdor, measuring the effects of displacement in terms of harm is almost impossible.¹⁹⁹ But even if the record shows that the ballpark forced impoverished individuals to relocate, causing problems in other parts of the city, it is important to note that it also allowed Denverites to regain faith in Maestas’ neighborhood and invest in its future. Calhoun began her article in an attempt to recognize the costs of “Sports Town USA,” but she also found time to highlight the significance of Coors Field to North Larimer. “We need to celebrate what this town has while we still have it,” she concluded, “Eddie did.”²⁰⁰

Maestas’ town was changing, however, and the issue of socioeconomic displacement does conflate with the identity struggles of the ballpark neighborhood, LoDo, and CPV Denver between 1995 and 2010. The primacy of sports facilities and the cult of fandom in Denver’s new urban milieu ignited a cultural struggle between individuals with different visions of urban progress in the twenty-first century. The rise of “Sports Town USA” led myriad Denverites to comment on the identity or spirit of the new CPV; evaluate the role of professional sports in its evolution; and ultimately ponder what was and what could have been. As future cities look to stadium projects not only as economic boons but as sources of civic inspiration and identity as well, the example of Coors Field serves as a reminder that narratives of urban salvation and authenticity coexist rather uneasily in the city of leisure.

With the advent of the Blake Street Ballpark, Private developers absorbed vacant or underutilized properties in the surrounding area at a frenetic rate. With new types of businesses and residents, the character of both LoDo and the nascent Ballpark Neighborhood evolved to meet the new lifestyle dynamic of the city of leisure. Brewpubs, restaurants, sports bars, and

¹⁹⁹ Jacob L. Vigdor, Douglas S. Massey, and Alice M. Rivlin, “Does Gentrification Harm the Poor?” *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs* (2002) 133-182.

²⁰⁰ Patricia Calhoun, “The Million Fan March,” *Denver Westword*, February 5, 1998.

nightclubs all flourished in a resounding tribute to the longstanding alliance between baseball, beer, and food. Expensive lofts reclaimed warehouses and vacant lots while real estate speculation reached a fever pitch in general. A new demographic also surged into the area when young professionals, drawn by the promise of a vibrant nightlife, descended on the downtown area. “Count 27 year old H. McNeish among those who moved to LoDo ready for a party,” wrote *Denver Post* columnist Michelle Mahoney in 1995, “As an economic development assistant for the Downtown Denver Partnership, McNeish says he’s living a dream in the loft he shares with two buddies.” The young urbanite related how they “chose to buy a loft here knowing that Coors Field was under construction, that the restaurants and bars were going in. The first season that the Rockies played (at Mile High Stadium) I went to 45 games! So you see, having Coors Field five blocks away is a definite plus for me.”²⁰¹ Several Denverites shared McNeish’s enthusiasm for the growing nexus of culture and entertainment, causing Mayor Webb to celebrate the fact that “what was once referred to as a Skid Row area is now probably one of the hottest spots in downtown.”²⁰²

²⁰¹ Michelle Mahoney, “HIGH TIMES for LODO; Reborn Community Awaits Next Phase of Its Life.” *The Denver Post*, April 1, 1995.

²⁰² Ibid.

“



Figure 4. A sign for “CrossFit LoDo” - a hip, group oriented fitness center – below a faded advertisement for one of the area’s earlier institutions. This is an example of the new lifestyle dynamic taking root in Old Denver’s postindustrial shell.²⁰³

But while many embraced the culture of the new Denver, others asked what ways of urban life it had displaced. Maureen Harrington of the *Denver Post* cautioned her readers to take a hard look at the transformation of downtown, offering a few pointed questions for those hailing a gentrified LoDo as Denver’s promised land: “Where have the homeless gone since the under bellies of the viaducts were cleaned out? Will the elderly be pushed out of cheap apartments for yuppies with mortgage money? Can an artist find a garret amidst lofts complete with trash compactors and alarm systems? Can a working stiff get a parking place, or a draft beer that

²⁰³ Preston Miller, “CrossFit LoDo,” December 2013.

wasn't made by a Ph.D.?"²⁰⁴ She expressed a hesitance to endorse the new order, wondering if the emphasis on sports and entertainment would ultimately displace longtime residents and traditional mores. Kyle MacMillan, the Post's "Critic-At-Large" confirmed that LoDo's art district had slowly dissipated and argued that Coors Field elevated property values, and "[attracted] sports bars and other amenities that were not always compatible with art galleries."²⁰⁵ A 2001 study of Coors Field's economic impact conducted by the Downtown Denver Partnership, supported this analysis, noting that while 33 galleries existed in LoDo before baseball, the number dropped to 24 by 1996, then to 17 by 1998, and finally to 16 (less than half of the original number) by 1999. The study also revealed that the number of microbreweries in the downtown area had jumped from four to ten in this same timeframe, while 61 new liquor licenses were issued between 1991 and 1997. In terms of retail, taxable sales nearly doubled after the ballpark opened, but food and beverage collections accounted for 70.89 percent these receipts, while collections for all other types of merchandise actually decreased 6.09 percent between 1995 and 1997.²⁰⁶ As these numbers suggest, the ballpark precipitated an economic paradigm shift which did not always gel with the existing businesses in the surrounding neighborhoods, and this is not surprising. But combined with Harrington's example of the Ph.D brewer, it is evident that the nature of development in the CPV often clashed with working class notions of authenticity - the very ethic that Coors Field was supposed to consecrate in the first place. Years after Fishman suggested that North Larimer could represent a "work-a-day" amenity, the rise of Sports Town USA and the concurrent process of gentrification

²⁰⁴ Maureen Harrington, "CULTURAL CLASH; Changes in LoDo hurt some," *The Denver Post*, February 4, 1996.

²⁰⁵ Kyle MacMillan, "LoDo Art-Gallery District Splinters Off to New Digs: 1990s Stronghold Dissolves as Dealers Form New Outposts," *The Denver Post*, October 21, 2001.

²⁰⁶ Downtown Denver Partnership, *Coors Field Economic Impact* (Denver, 2001).

threatened to erode the distinctions between LoDo and NoDo, making the entire downtown area less of a “place for everyday people,” as Fishman would have it.

The concept of authenticity is useful when approaching these tensions. Sharon Zukin contends that *real* urban authenticity is “a continuous process of living and working, a gradual buildup of the everyday experience, the expectation that neighbors and buildings that are here today will be here tomorrow.”²⁰⁷ She explains that “a city loses its soul if this continuity is broken,” and considers gentrification to represent a harbinger of urban “death” in this context. The popularization of historic districts, festival marketplaces, and ballpark neighborhoods led many individuals to praise the material “experience of origins” that guided these expressions of local identity. Whether it was the “real west” atmosphere of Larimer Square or the brick façade of Coors Field, nostalgic themes responded to a widespread sense that urban renewal, sprawl, and modernism had left the city nondescript. Even so, Zukin argues that the “universal rhetoric of upscale growth” behind these themed developments is “exposing a conflict between city dwellers desire for authentic origins – the traditional desire for roots – and their new beginnings: the continuous reinvention of communities.”²⁰⁸ As an urban neighborhood is carved up by a new social class they imbue the built environment with new values and “tastes,” often quelling existing mores to “present a clean image of diversity for mass consumption.”²⁰⁹ According to Zukin:

The tastes behind these new spaces of consumption are powerful because they move longtime residents outside of their comfort zone, gradually shifting places that support their way of life to support a different cultural community. Bistros replace bodegas, cocktail bars morph out of old style saloons, and the neighborhood as a whole creates a different kind of sociability. Against longtimers’ sense of origins, newcomers impose their own new beginnings.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Sharon Zukin, *Naked City*, 6.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 3

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

She explains in her most recent monograph, *Naked City: The Life and Death of Authentic Urban Spaces* (2010), how Jane Jacobs expressed an “urban gentrifier’s appreciation of authenticity” as a material expression of heritage, and failed to “recognize the growing influence of her own perspective.”²¹¹ As developers look to preservation as a tool to control urban space, and consecutive waves of upper middle class pioneers and superrich buyers descend on old urban neighborhoods - bringing with them new lifestyles and symbols – the city’s old social and cultural fabric dies and Zukin’s continuum of real urban authenticity is broken. Looking at New York City as a case study, she concludes that in a twist of irony, it was not the mega planners like Robert Moses that caused the death of authentic urban spaces, but rather a coalition of private developers, retailers, and residents that embraced Jane Jacob’s aesthetic appreciation of material heritage and approached deteriorating neighborhoods with a new rhetoric of upscale growth. This understanding of gentrification is a useful theoretical framework for the evolution of the CPV, including Coors Field’s significance as an object of social and cultural tension in the downtown area.

Unlike the Pepsi Center or Invesco Field, Denver’s professional ballpark took root in a true urban neighborhood. This setting was important to Seydel and others in terms of historic context, but it also meant that its fruition directly impacted the identity of several established communities. We have already detailed how it served to elevate North Larimer, but the ballpark also clashed with a particular vision of LoDo as an intimate historic urban village and sanctuary for the arts. This was the intent of many of the district’s founding mothers and fathers, people who gravitated to LoDo in the 1970s and 80s because it represented a quiet, underutilized, and nostalgic escape from suburbia. Many of them protested the Twentieth and Blake Site because the cultural of professional baseball did not mesh with their designs, and by the mid-1990s, it

²¹¹ Sharon Zukin, *Naked City*, 3.

seemed like a few of these qualms had come to fruition. Their retreat was now an urban hotspot, a festive jubilee populated with meandering baseball fans and young professionals (or “yuppies”) with affluent lifestyles. More and more visitors and developers took interest in the neighborhood, and after a while it was no longer an urban bohemia or village for a select few. Though many factors, including the microbrewery revival, contributed to LoDo’s evolution and popularity, the ballpark came to symbolize its ultimate undoing for many older residents.

David Gottlieb, once the executive director of Lower Downtown District Inc (LDDI), expressed such an apocalyptic view in 1995 article for the *LoDo News* entitled “The Blind Leading the Blind.” Imagining what it would be like to lead a tour of the historic district amidst all the changes produced by the ballpark, he proceeds to highlight what he considered many of its unsavory consequences:

Yes ma’am, you want to know how we feel about the new baseball stadium? Well, actually, we’ve been warned not to call it a baseball stadium. The baseball Stadium District encouraged us to think of it as more intimate than a stadium; so we call it the Baseball Boudoir. That fits with the history of the neighborhood as you’ll see on the tour... Yes, little boy? ... You’d like to know where all the bums are? Why, they’re all here son, right in our little historic district. You say you don’t see any? Well, see that fellow over there? That’s right, the one with the beard and the ponytail? Well, I know he’s getting into a BMW... Yes that’s his BMW... No, my boy, you’re absolutely right, they don’t make bums like they used to... Yes ma’am, you have a question? You want to know why there are so many sports bars? Well, it’s because of our proximity to the Baseball Boudoir. That would make us the Baseball PISOIR, in a matter of speaking...²¹²

Gottlieb’s disdain of the ballpark - in terms of the type of development and socialization it propagated - is palpable, and he furthers this notion of paradise lost in a subsequent article entitled “Life in the Big City.”

You’ve found yourself a between a Rock Pile [a name for the Coors Field bleachers] and a hard place. Your tiny little parks are being carved up by new road ways; your evening quiet is being splintered by the screams emanating from Disaster Canyon [a river rafting ride at Elitches] and Coors Field (which will adopt the name Disaster Canyon if the Rockies choke); you live in a swirl of bus fumes and busted beer bottles. You walk home in the evening, dodging yuppie hootenannies at local watering holes, only to find someone has left some

²¹² David Gottlieb, “The Blind Leading the Blind,” *The LoDo News*, Vol. II, no.4 (August 1995).

kind of bodily fluid on your doorstep. And you think: no one said it would be like this.²¹³

Gottlieb continued this piece by describing how this hypothetical urbanite “signed petitions, joined lawsuits, posted signs, and protested to neighborhood groups,” all in vain: “You were angry. You’d been sold a bill of goods. You were promised a haven, and instead you got Animal House. You hated the greedy developers who had rushed to cash in on the moment with no regard to creating a real sense of community.”²¹⁴

LoDo’s fate as “baseball’s pisoir” irked many of its longtime residents, who had hoped to replicate the kind of beatnik spirit found in New York’s East Village. The former director of LDDI was a pragmatic man however, and as the title “Life in the Big City” suggests, he wanted to stress how urban life is frenetic, unpredictable, and ultimately not beholden to one sect’s notion of utopia. “Then, you woke up,” he continued, moving to reconcile his nostalgia for the old LoDo with its new beginnings:

You realized that you’d moved into a downtown dwelling in a rapidly growing city. You had peace and quiet, sunrises over downtown, and sunsets over the mountains. You still had two out three, which ain’t bad. You’d lived in a neighborhood in the midst of reinventing itself, which is never easy, and now its new identity was clear to you: not all good, but not all bad – and certainly not all things to all people... You realized you weren’t entitled to quiet. This isn’t golf course living. This isn’t Highlands Ranch. This is the City.²¹⁵

Thus is the nature of urban life in his opinion, and though he praised LoDo’s pioneers for fashioning a community out of a skid row, he also acknowledged how it was not theirs to possess alone. Even so, the problematic relationship between LoDo’s fresh start as an urban village and its new beginning as chic entertainment zone continued to play out between 1995 and 2010. Gottlieb advised frustrated residents to keep investing in their neighborhood and challenge developments that seemed overly hostile to the community, but there was always a sense – as

²¹³ David Gottlieb, “Life in the Big City” *The LoDo News*, Vol. II, no.6 (October 1995).

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

evidenced by the lamentations of opinionated holders on – that Coors Field was the beginning of the end.

Active LoDo residents did fight back against what they saw as “an invasion of commercial uses,” and scored a major victory in 1996 by impelling the city to reject a liquor license for a proposed “Planet LoDo” nightclub; a 7000 square foot dancehall and cabaret.²¹⁶ A coalition of business owners, developers, and residents subsequently drafted a neighborhood development plan under the guidance of LDDI. This called for a 100 foot height limitation for new buildings, outlined a design review process, and also included a “good neighbor policy,” which asked bars to limit noise, strive for safety, and keep their environs clean.²¹⁷ Private developers continued to sweep up downtown properties, but the fight against “Planet LoDo” and the ensuing grassroots formulation of the LoDo plan (which established guidelines usually set by the city government) demonstrated that the residential base could work together to dictate the nature of growth. “The feeling is that for the first time, the residents are winning,” said John Hickenlooper of this recent spate of community activism. “It’s helping make (LoDo) coherent, making it a real neighborhood.”²¹⁸ Those in favor of maintaining the area’s historic character chalked up another win when Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Planet Hollywood entertainment complex – which, to them, had come to represent the coming of the apocalypse - foundered due to local opposition and financial inconsistencies in the late 1990s.²¹⁹

LoDo’s original gentrifiers and longtime activists expressed an ambivalent opinion of their neighborhood’s success. Economist Stephan Weiler has argued that “Coors Field both reinforced and crowned LoDo’s reversal,” and this is hard to dispute if you look at the explosion

²¹⁶ Steve Raabe, “LoDo Residents Flex New Political Muscle to Stop Projects” *The Denver Post*, October 27, 1996.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

of the loft market and the influx of new bars, restaurants, and microbreweries.²²⁰ But some residents conflated the issue of socioeconomic displacement with the commercialization of their neighborhood, remembering presence of vagrants and poor folks before the ballpark took root almost nostalgically, as if LoDo had become painfully homogenous with the influx of yuppies and suburban visitors. Windy Frye, a longtime Denver resident, wondered what happened to one familiar individual who stopped showing up at the Volunteers of America shelter: “There was a homeless man who lived right there – in what is Coors Field. He always used to come here every morning to clean up and get his coffee. But he couldn’t get used to the change. We haven’t seen him in while.”²²¹ Frye attributed the displacement of this man to gentrification: “It’s migration. First the poor and the homeless, and then the artists, and then the wealthy come push them out.”²²² As her portrayal of “migration” suggests, LoDo’s cultural clash took on the overtones of a class struggle as the former skid row transitioned from an urban village to a playground for wealthy consumers. Phil Goodstein noticed a marked difference in the manner in which city leaders dealt with substance abuse, for example, as vagrants were replaced by late night revelers: “Webb further called for severe crackdowns on the poor in downtown; he did nothing, however, to protest the mass, rowdy alcoholism of affluent drunks in LoDo.”²²³ A LoDo restaurateur supported this conclusion, relating how the density of bars and nightclubs continued to cause problems in 2007: “Every Friday or Saturday, at 1:30 or 2 when they let out, there’d be a brawl. It created an extremely unsafe environment for my staff. We’re trying to go home and we can’t because we’re too scared to exit the building.”²²⁴ His comments came after a man opened fire

²²⁰ Stephan Weiler, “Pioneers and Settlers in Lo-Do Denver,” 173.

²²¹ Maureen Harrington, “CULTURAL CLASH; Changes in LoDo hurt some,” *The Denver Post*, February 4, 1996.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Phil Goodstein, *A People’s History of Denver Volume II: DIA and other Scams* (Denver, New Social Publications, 2001) 430.

²²⁴ Karen Auge and John Wenzel, “Lowdown on LoDo” *The Denver Post*, November 8, 2007.

into a crowd exiting Hush nightclub, an incident that rocked the neighborhood just two weeks after the Rockies stunned the baseball world and brought positive attention to the downtown area with their improbable World Series run.²²⁵

While this shooting was isolated - crime did not actually increase in LoDo between 1995 and 2010 - many longtime merchants and residents simply believed that their neighborhood had reached a “saturation point,” and bemoaned the concurrent erosion of its social diversity and unique cultural fabric. The abject commercialization of downtown was a mixed blessing in their minds, a take readily apparent in *Post* columnist Ricardo Baca’s appraisal that LoDo was no longer “hip or cool.”²²⁶ To hammer his point home, he tried to make sense of a local boutique manager’s remark that “LoDo is like our own little Bourbon Street: “Ask any Louisianan worth his ancestry and he’ll tell you that Bourbon Street is for tourists. It’s fun, but it’s New Orleans Light. It’s Diet NOLA Cola. And most important, it’s a tax cow, bringing in the revenues and making the rest of the city a better place. Bourbon Street, like LoDo, is a necessary evil.”²²⁷ Even Dick Kreck, who coined “LoDo,” lamented its post-Coors transformation: “This is not the way we envisioned it. Lower Downtown was supposed to be an urban village, a place where residents would live in renovated warehouses and stroll to small shops, galleries and boutiques. What we have now is a party-hearty zone, full of sports bars, restaurants, and filling stations. It’s beginning to wear.”²²⁸ In his opinion, it was ultimately becoming “synthetic.”²²⁹

As Denverites like Baca and Kreck weighed the economic benefits of the city of leisure model against its cultural consequences, with many wondering if LoDo was better off as an underutilized urban village than a “theme park,” there was a creeping realization that after years

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ricardo Baca, “In Search of Hip: Has LoDo Lost Its Edge?” *The Denver Post*, May 11, 2003.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Dick Kreck, “More Galleries Flee as LoDo Becomes ‘Synthetic’” *The Denver Post*, March 2, 1998.

²²⁹ Ibid.

of reinvention, it was, as Zukin would claim, losing its soul.²³⁰ This sense of loss was articulated by Gretchen Bunn, a “cable executive and 20-plus LoDo-er,” whose confusing (and rather stereotypical) take on her neighborhood’s evolution reflects a lost individual grasping for markers of authenticity: “It’s not that I’m against commercial success. It’s just that are way too many blonds here. What happened to our diversity? God we could even use a few Italians... We’ve had a culture down here for years. [But] we’re being turned into a theme park. People sweep through for a few hours, dump their trash and drive back to the ‘burbs. Things are getting so expensive, the artists are fleeing.”²³¹

The consequences of the ballpark and the city of leisure blueprint were equally disorienting to residents of the Ballpark Neighborhood. Their locale’s identity was increasingly tied to LoDo with the reorientation of the CPV, a merger evidenced by Rick Reilly’s narrative of urban salvation and the disappearance of qualifiers like North Larimer, NoDo, or even Upper LoDo in the local vernacular. An explosion of Lofts, brewpubs, restaurants blurred material and economic distinctions, while a convergent lifestyle dynamic and demographic shift worked to erode any sense that the Ballpark Neighborhood involved a different kind of socialization. Seydel continued to extol the impact of the ballpark project and the uniqueness of North Larimer nonetheless, but it is important to note the cultural tensions that came to define the new LoDo plagued the process of reinvention as it unfolded in his locale as well.

The father of Coors Field was a pragmatic visionary, and defended the role of the ballpark as a source of civic inspiration and economic growth. He argued that it “brought people together to resolve issues and make downtown a better place,” stressing how the fruition of the Coors Field and the consecration of a successful mixed use environment for growth required a

²³⁰ Maureen Harrington, “CULTURAL CLASH; Changes in LoDo hurt some,” *The Denver Post*, February 4, 1996.

²³¹ Ibid.

collaborative effort on the part of city leaders, private developers, local residents, and committed merchants. The ballpark was designed as a symbol of civic pride, he continued, and “has since become the symbol for downtown’s rebirth.”²³² Seydel contended that “people saw downtown differently” after the fruition of Coors Field, creating a “place” out of what was previously considered an irredeemable blight on the city. It was now a “great place to live” and “a place to be entertained” and he cited the explosion of the loft market and the ascendancy of the entertainment district. The “techno-historic jewel” also spurred a greater appreciation of the area’s historic resources in his opinion. As a testament to the redemptive power of heritage aesthetics he noted how “even the owner of an adult bookstore in an historic building is renovating and both the building and the store are now on the national register of historic places.”²³³ It ultimately “made Denver a Major League City,” he concluded, and gave North Larimer a future when it seemed destined to become another victim of urban renewal.²³⁴

The magnitude of his role (or roles) eventually caught up to Seydel, however. By the mid 1990s he was balancing time spent at the head of the Ballpark Neighborhood Association with his work at Urban Options, his attempt to publish *Insite Magazine*, and his various other capacities as a design advisor, local booster, and national ballpark expert. The initial coalition of merchants and residents that he organized could not pay him, and the city government refused to subsidize his substantial services in full. The nascent BNA spent every cent it took in, and Seydel worked long hours without remuneration or a proper support staff. Newcomers to association noticed that he was overwhelmed, and in 1996 Mike and Donna Dire of “Dire’s Lock and Key” challenged his tenure as executive director. They formed a new association, entitled “Friends and NeighborS of Baseball, Inc” (also known as FANS or “B-Fans”) and urged the BNA’s board of

²³² Karle Seydel, “Coors Field: What Has It Done For Denver?” *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

directors to relieve Seydel from his position. They asked them to appoint their friend, Jim Maroney, a suburban lawyer, in his stead. The “B-Fans” cited how the neighborhood association had not passed any bylaws in seven years or filed for tax exempt status, expressing concern that it was behind in its income tax returns and all money was “simply being passed through to Karle Seydel.”²³⁵ A majority of the board agreed with the Dires, and Eddie Maestas, as chairman, regretfully informed his friend that he would have to step down to make way for Maroney.

The acronym happy FANS group introduced themselves in a BNA newsletter as the “new kids of the block” and connected their organizational philosophy to the ethos of sport: “We visualize the B-fans as being like the South Stand fans of football. They are lively, noisy, fun loving but responsible group of diehard baseball fans. They want to enjoy baseball with their friends and neighbors and they want to be treated right, to be respected for the fun and business they bring to our neighborhood.”²³⁶ Under the leadership of Maroney, the B-fans issued pointed proclamations of what was best for the neighborhood, including this plea to remove “bums” from the environs of Coors Field:

Belaborers

Under Gratuitous

Multiple, Monetary

Solicitation Requirements

and

Habitually Sobriety Deprived Persons (Drunks)

**ARE A BLIGHT
ON COLORADO
BASEBALL!**

Please help us get them out of the Ballpark Neighborhood.²³⁷

²³⁵ Karle Seydel, “The Maroney Era,” *The Karle Seydel Papers*

²³⁶ Ballpark Neighborhood Association, “There are ‘New Kids’ on your Block called Friends And NeighborS of Baseball,” *Ballpark Neighborhood News*, February, 1996, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

²³⁷ Friends And NeighborS of Baseball Inc., “Plea to remove ‘bums’ from Ballpark Neighborhood,” *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

Maroney also presided over a conflict with LoDo over the geographic boundaries of their neighborhood plan, which included parts of the Ballpark Neighborhood. This was perceived as a power grab by the BNA, who had always regarded its counterpart in LDDI with apprehension. The FANs reacted in their typical, propagandistic manner, distributing a poster depicting a creeping figure that read: “Hey LoDo! Didn’t Your Momma tell ya...it Ain’t Nice to Backstab Your Neighbors...Curb Your Dog, LDDI; its urinating on your neighbor again!”²³⁸ Seydel continued to work with the BNA during what he later referred to as the “Maroney Era,” but refused to share his records with the B-fans until his future role with the association was clarified. For their part, the Dires insisted that he had not been “fired” and pointed out that his contract had expired in 1995, but several longtime NoDo residents and merchants expressed their displeasure that the ballpark pioneer was no longer in charge.²³⁹ Maestas continued to serve as chairman of the board through all this, but Maroney’s aggressive style irked the longtime “Mayor of Larimer” and the two did not get along. After one particular incident in which Maroney and the Dires sent out a fax concerning the BNA’s position on a zoning proposal without Maestas’ knowledge, he stormed out of meeting and voiced his intentions to quit. He was diagnosed with leukemia soon thereafter, forcing him to retire from public life and take care of his affairs. The increasingly unpopular Maroney cut his tenure short in 1997 and the “B-fans” essentially disappeared. Seydel returned to the BNA in full to push for the neighborhood to be consecrated as a historic district, but “the Maroney Era” proved that he could no longer dictate the fate of his lifelong project alone.

The brief rise “B-fans” conflated with the new emphasis on amusement in the city of leisure, a paradigm that often clashed with Seydel’s notions of urban intimacy and authenticity.

²³⁸ Friends and NeighborS of Baseball Inc., “Hey! LoDo poster,” *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

²³⁹ Donna Dire to Karle Seydel, January 29, 1996, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

As their introduction suggests, they embraced the rowdiness of fandom, comparing their organization to the “South Stands,” a section of the Bronco’s Mile High Stadium renowned for the passion and ferociousness displayed by its denizens on Sundays. The Ballpark Neighborhood continued to market itself as a more authentic urban alternative to LoDo, but while the aesthetics and traditional function of the ol’ ballpark did not compromise this narrative, the character of the ensuing development boom often did. As new faces and businesses poured into to area, their elevation of North Larimer as an everyday alternative to the LoDo “yuppie-ville” became as tenuous in the public imagination as the geographic boundaries exposed by the three alarm fire.

NoDo struggled to maintain a semblance of its former identity as a multicultural working class locale in the first decade of the new millennium. Louis Aguilar noted in 2003 that the Ballpark Neighborhood still included, “homeless shelters, a soup kitchen, a day-labor site, pawn shops, boarded up storefronts, abandoned warehouses, three bus lines catering to Mexican immigrants traveling to El Paso for \$ 35 one way and a handful of dive bars that immigrants sometimes refer to as mala muerte - bad death.”²⁴⁰ But these institutions were among the last their kind in NoDo; the final symbols of the old neighborhood coexisting uneasily with new, upscale developments and affluent residents. Aguilar interviewed one homeless man named Jack Hudson, “a 49-year old former Marine who sleeps in the shelters and sometimes on the streets of the Ballpark area,” and told him of the BNA’s residential estimates, which boasted 3,312 new housing units and did not include street people. “Of course those yuppies ain’t going to count me,” Hudson responded. “People like you never even look me in the eye. All this change you’re telling me about, how does it help people like me?”²⁴¹ Old dive bars and shelters

²⁴⁰ Louis Aguilar, “Whole New Game for Ballpark Area Attracting Upscale Projects,” January 12, 2003.

²⁴¹ Louis Aguilar, “Whole New Game for Ballpark Area Attracting Upscale Projects,” January 12, 2003.

relocated or closed altogether, and individuals like Hudson felt alienated by the onslaught of new businesses and residents.

A few of North Larimer's longtime merchants shared his skepticism. Manuel Silva, the owner of Casa de Manuel, commented on the "Animal House" nature of the new downtown area, singling out the ballpark in particular: "You tell the mayor to get some toilets down here. We're used to drunks here, but these new drunks are really bad. They're young. They relieve themselves and throw up in the alleys on game days, and we can't get parking for our regular customers anyway."²⁴² Loretta Garcia-Davis, the proprietor of the Mexico City Café, concurred, and told the *Post* that she saw right through the overtures of community spirit that guided the ballpark project. "The baseball people come and clean up the neighborhood only on game days," she noted disdainfully.²⁴³ Thus, years after Fishman had urged the city to clean up the unsavory panoply of vagrants, prostitutes, and alcoholics he believed gave his backyard a bad name, the Ballpark neighborhood was beset by a new coalition of "social misfits" who tore through the new entertainment district on weekends and game days. It can be argued, as Phil Goodstein suggests, that the city did not seek to control these revelers because of their economic contribution to the bar and restaurant industry. But even if you ignore the socioeconomic hypocrisy that occurs in classic examples of gentrification, the opinions expressed by Silva and Garcia-Davis reflect an uneasy relationship with Coors Field marked by a hesitance to dismiss the old order in favor of the new. "The area will likely remain full of stark contrasts," Aguilar mused in his 2003 piece, but he hinted that readers should expect the neighborhood to continue evolving, as evidenced by his article's title: "Whole new game for Ballpark Area attracting

²⁴² Maureen Harrington, "CULTURAL CLASH: Changes in LoDo hurt some," *The Denver Post*, February 4, 1996.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

upscale projects.”²⁴⁴ He concluded with the remarks of a 27 year old waitress who was attracted to the Ballpark Neighborhood for its authentic feel, but worried that the “LoDo yuppies” would infiltrate it as well: “The only thing that worries me is that it’s too good to last. It’s cheap, and I can find parking. Neighborhoods like that don’t last in Denver, huh?”²⁴⁵

As I walked around the Ballpark Neighborhood and LoDo to get a sense of the new CPV for this project, one could still sense how it remained, as Aguilar predicted, “full of stark contrasts.” The neighborhood is cleverly choreographed to give a visitor a sense of its 1900s architecture. New lofts have conformed to local height limitations and color schemes, while rowdy sports bars continue to reclaim old brick shells replete with faded advertisements for the tanneries and general stores of a bygone age. Street side “feeders” are still in operation and the homeless maintain a presence. However, in terms of its culture and identity, it is apparent that it is becoming less and less of a diverse merchant’s enclave. One only needs to look at the final years of Eddie Maestas and Karle Seydel to understand how Coors Field was both a contextually harmonious urban savior and a symbol of the death of the old order in favor of a new beginning.

Maestas lived just long enough to see Coors Field open and steer the BNA in its formative years. This was the culmination of his lifelong mission, which began when he bought Johnnie’s and gained steam when he formed the merchants association as the newly crowned “Mayor of Larimer.” The Blake Street Ballpark did allow many individuals to rediscover what had become known as Denver’s lamentable “backdoor,” and it continues to inspire younger professionals and empty nesters to live downtown to this day. But as a manifestation of the city of leisure, the Ballpark Neighborhood is no longer a place where people live, work, raise a family, and stay for generations like Maestas did. Johnnie’s market is now an Irish bar called

²⁴⁴ Louis Aguilar, “Whole New Game for Ballpark Area Attracting Upscale Projects,” January 12, 2003.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

“Scruffy Murphy’s,” a popular hangout “where many hipsters now end their nights” according to Patricia Calhoun.²⁴⁶ The dance hall where he met his wife Helen is now the home of Snooze, a posh breakfast joint “where many of those same hipsters start their days.”²⁴⁷ Upscale developments are gradually overtaking the institutions that he grew up with, leaving a new city in their wake.

Homelessness is still an issue though, a condition evidenced by the tragic fate of “Eddie Maestas Park,” which Seydel dedicated to his closest ally and friend in 2006. The park took shape on one of the traffic islands shaped by the Broadway corridor as part of a \$300,000 effort to renovate what was considered “an ugly patch of dirt and asphalt sprouting nothing but despair.”²⁴⁸ The city even covered its surface with a “prickly groundcover” to discourage loitering, but after a few short years locals referred to the revamped park as the “Bumuda triangle,” leading Maestas’ relatives to ask the city to remove the “Eddie Maestas Park” sign from the premises.²⁴⁹ His neighborhood remains a place of stark contrasts, a place where hipsters and vagrants rub elbows perhaps, but it is no longer a working class area where a young man can open a grocery store, meet a nice girl at a local dancehall, and do business amidst a vibrant ethnic milieu. This was the price of progress perhaps, but it is important to note that Maestas – who had lived long enough to notice the climate of change – predicted “nothing but good” for North Larimer in his final years. His neighborhood had a future with Coors Field at least, which is perhaps the most important consideration at a time when many economists still believed that cities would simply never recover after the abject decay of the 1970s and 80s.

²⁴⁶ Patricia Calhoun, “Eddie Maestas Park is an Insult to the Ballpark Pioneer’s Memory,” *Denver Westword*, June 9, 2011.

²⁴⁷ Ibid

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

Karle Seydel, “the father of Coors Field,” remained heavily involved in the Ballpark Neighborhood until his death in 2010. A relentless visionary, he fought to bring the ballpark to Twentieth and Blake Streets, believing every inch of the way it would bring a positive influence to a neighborhood he believed was one of the “city’s hidden treasures.” He was an urban gadfly “tireless in his pursuit of a better Denver,” his efforts culminating in 2000, when the Ballpark Neighborhood became an officially recognized historic district.²⁵⁰ The journey that began when he showed up at Maestas’ doorstep as a skinny graduate student took him into the realm of professional sports facilities, and he can be considered one of the earliest and foremost experts on putting the Retro Ballpark Movement into practice. The specter of gentrification loomed over his brainchild, but he certainly helped ensure that the synthesis between Coors and its environs reflected the “golden alchemy” absent in other stadium projects in Cleveland and elsewhere. His direct involvement waned after the area became a historic district, and he spent his time in North Larimer as a consultant specializing in small area revitalization strategies and urban design. He also continued to receive delegations from other cities considering ballpark projects of their own, lauding the economic benefits of Coors Field in his tours of the Ballpark Neighborhood.

He was bemused, however, as to why North Downtown was never recognized as its own distinct place in the way that “LoDo,” as a brand of sorts, had sparked the public’s imagination and connoted a particular identity. He contended that his popularization of “NoDo” was a not just a play on “no-dough” in the sense that his neighborhood had no money compared to other parts of the city, it was also his attempt to reinforce the notion that North Larimer was its own community, one distinct in its “international cultural identity” and deserving of separate consideration from LoDo. It did not take, but he still considered his neighborhood a unique jewel

²⁵⁰ Virginia Culver, “Obituaries: Gadfly Tireless in Pursuit of Better Denver,” *The Denver Post*, June 1, 2010.

nonetheless, arguing that “both history and contemporary conditions elevate the notion of community and ‘Place’” above all else.²⁵¹

Considering its storied past and successful maturation into the ballpark neighborhood, Seydel believed that it qualified. He worried, however, that North Larimer’s narrative was being lost as national observers like Rick Reilly discussed the magic of baseball in relation to LoDo instead. This sentiment is evident a letter he wrote to Elana Jefferson, the daughter of a former colleague, in which he discusses the demise of his magazine, *Insite*:

I did continue to use North Downtown and promote the name in my other activities for the neighborhoods – and kept it alive to a certain extent, but the publication of the magazine would have really done a much better job of it...Coors Field became the bird in hand, whereas North Downtown Insite was the ‘two in the bush.’ I would still like to get this publication out – North Downtown is a phenomenal story. In due time, I will.²⁵²

This letter also related how a few close friends referred to him as the “Duke of NoDo” during his days as the neighborhood’s most passionate and vocal proponent.²⁵³ His wistful remembrances harkened back to the hectic fight for the Twentieth and Blake site and the slow denouement of the design process – a time when anything seemed possible for North Larimer. He had a measure of control then, a finger or two on the reins as his community embraced the culture of baseball. It must have been difficult to relinquish his vision when developers rushed to the scene and pushed the evolution of downtown every which way, and he never got the chance to tell its story on his own terms. Nearly all of the articles and monographs that describe the fruition of Coors Field associate it with LoDo and wholly ignore the efforts of neighborhood activists in favor of city politicians, district members, and the various owners of the Rockies franchise. The issue of cultural gentrification is important here, as the ascendancy of the city of leisure archetype served to blend the differences between LoDo and NoDo as similar projects and people descended on

²⁵¹ Seydel to Elana Jefferson, March 17, 2006, *The Karle Seydel Papers*.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

both areas. It is important to note, however, that as late as 2003, the waitress in Aguilar's article describing "a whole new ballgame," felt like the Ballpark Neighborhood was not LoDo, and essentially described it as an authentic alternative. This distinction is important, on a certain level, as North Larimer continues to evolve in the twenty-first century and Seydel's legacy is made the subject of historical inquiry.

So is it fair to label the transformation of the Central Platte Valley as a classic testament to Zukin's theory that the continuous reinvention of communities in the post-Fordist era causes cities to slowly lose their souls? This is an interesting question when approaching the relationship between the ethos of sports anchored urban development and gentrification, especially if Zukin's notion of authenticity is utilized to frame the impact of Coors Field in particular. The CPV was a classic victim of postindustrial decline, and many observers, as we have seen, felt like it was irredeemable. Crawford's work with Larimer Square changed this narrative - convincing city leaders of the utility of historic preservation as a tool to control urban space - and the rebirth of LoDo further cemented the value of recycling old buildings and creating a "mixed use" community to draw consumers and residents back to the inner city. Coors Field took root in the northern most fringe of the downtown area, the final remnant of Denver's skid row by many accounts, and as a scion of the Retro Ballpark Movement, it promised salvation through a similar emphasis on heritage aesthetics. The "techno-historic jewel" harkened back to a romantic alliance between urban neighborhoods and old ballparks; a mythical, "golden age" union that proponents hoped would serve to rekindle local faith in its environs.

This nostalgia served to obscure the traditional animus between rowdy fans and disenchanting residents, however. Coors Field was a tremendous success from an economic

standpoint, but its affect on Denver's cultural landscape is more complicated. As a symbol of the ascendancy of Denver's as a city of leisure - an evolution captured by the celebration of the former "cow town" becoming "Sports Town USA" - it represented the dawn of a new urban paradigm that emphasized amusement in "the quest for the visitors dollar." This represented yet another phase of reinvention for the CPV, one which clashed with a vision of Lower Downtown bohemian village and sanctuary for the arts. But while this conceptualization, as Gottlieb suggests, was probably too good to be true in the sense that LoDo's success ensured that it would never remain the quiet enclave for a select few, many of its pioneers attributed the "Animal House" culture that emerged to Coors Field. The notion that the downtown area was inundated with rowdy yuppies and careless sports fans was held by many longtime North Larimer residents and merchants as well, and in a way, the ethos of development spurred by the Blake Street Ballpark served to erode the cultural distinctions between their community and LoDo. This was an unwelcome development for a neighborhood that considered itself more authentic than the reconstructed bourgeois districts below Twentieth Street. Fishman wanted North Larimer to retain its working class character in order to provide a "welcome relief" the "cutesy" ambience that characterized Larimer Square, but while NoDo's transformation into the Ballpark Neighborhood helped clean up its image (forcing the city to deal with the "social misfits" in his backyard") the idea that it was somehow more authentic faded under the auspices of "Sports Town USA." As a combination of Gottlieb and Rick Reilly's appraisals will tell you, the ballpark became more about LoDo, whether one considers it a "crowning" panacea or a sign of the apocalypse. Many observers still refer to the entire swath of "Old Denver" as LoDo while references to North Downtown, NoDo or even the Ballpark Neighborhood are increasingly rare. This is due, in part, to the popularity of Kreck's brand in the local vernacular, but it also suggests

that the “story of North Downtown,” was subsumed by the rapid, often homogenizing growth that swept the entire downtown area.

Does this mean that it lost its soul, however, as Zukin claimed was the case with New York City? As a climate of upscale growth continues to influence the revitalization of downtown and superrich revelers replace disenchanted gentrifiers and poorer residents alike, it is possible that North Larimer’s sense of origins, as reflected in its former identity as a multicultural working class enclave, will disappear completely in the near future, existing only in material form in the worn brick shells of old buildings now housing hipster’s coffee shops and chic boutiques. Still, it is important to remember that the area was nearly demolished entirely as an irredeemable blight on Denver. Coors Field, for all of its cliché bows to baseball nostalgia, did help rekindle local faith in the downtown area, causing a new generation of younger professionals and empty nesters to rediscover its storied neighborhoods. Whether or not it lost its soul is something for every Denverite, Coloradoan, and out-of-state visitor to decide for themselves.

CONCLUSION

A 24 Hour City

Denver's Central Platte Valley has continued to evolve since 2010. As I write this conclusion, the Union Station Redevelopment Project – a 1 billion dollar makeover of Denver's historic rail terminus – is nearing completion. Plans call for a “bustling urban center and multimodal transportation hub,” and this vision will transform the old station into a practical gateway for the twenty-first century. Indeed, much like the preservation of Larimer Square and the construction of Coors Field, this project involves a creative blend of nostalgic and modern elements. Denver's Union Station Project Authority (DUSPA) boasts that the “Train Room will be rehabilitated to its historic prominence as a transportation gateway to Denver,” giving it a nineteenth century luster. On the other hand, artistic renderings show a cascade of glass towers, fountains, and tree lined plazas taking shape in an area now colored by renovated brownstones (including John Hickenlooper's Wynkoop Brewery). The new complex will also include a new hotel and several retail outlets.

If this vision comes to fruition, yet another swath of the CPV will be reclaimed and transformed. The development is close to the heart of LoDo, and is supposed to mesh with its mixed-use flavor. Lofts, office buildings, retailers, and restaurants will figure prominently, lending more credence to its growing reputation as a chic place to live and go out on the town. It also lies in the shadow of Coors Field, and one can imagine scores of baseball fans flooding through its plazas and turnstiles in the near future. Consequently, it is significant that it is set to become the new Mile High City's signature gateway. Long removed from its tenure as Denver's skid row or “back door,” the CPV is now its prized possession, the first place its leaders want visitors and suburbanites to see and experience. The Union Station redevelopment is a

culmination of sorts, one of the final pieces in the CPV's evolution from a postindustrial victim to a capital of culture and entertainment.



Figure 5. Denver's Union Station of the future.²⁵⁴

The fruition of Coors Field marked the inaugural stage of this process. A historical analysis of its origins and protagonists shows us how it laid the foundation for a mile high “city of leisure.” Denver won a franchise on the cusp of the Retro Ballpark Movement, and its leaders capitalized on its nationwide momentum, bringing downtown’s “techo-historic” jewel to fruition. It is important to note, however, that this was an extremely risky venture at the time. The campaign for professional baseball lasted several decades, and Denver only gained a new

²⁵⁴ Denver Union Station Project Authority, “17th Street Linear Gardens and Regional Bus Facility,” http://www.denverunionstation.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13&Itemid=14 (accessed March 3, 2013).

franchise after a costly expansion race against well over a dozen other municipalities. Suddenly, the size, location, and character of its new ballpark mattered, and the Stadium District offered a bold vision of a traditional ballpark plopped in the heart of an old urban neighborhood many still considered a skid row. The new-old ballpark became a source of redemption in this uncertain context, an urban panacea clothed in the majesty of the national pastime. Chapter I: “The Field of Dreams” was an analysis of why this urban paradigm emerged when and where it did. After years of decline, Downtown Denver benefitted from a heritage boom, which transformed older sections of the CPV like Larimer and LoDo. These projects helped reclaim postindustrial zones and imbue downtown with an emerging sense of self after years of decay. The 1987 Downtown Area Plan stressed the importance of these “points of reference” in an era of sprawl and demographic transience, and the Stadium District figured that a nostalgic ballpark could represent a similar type of urban anchor

Baseball was thus re-woven into the narrative of urban America in Denver. Karle Seydel’s vision for a downtown “Field of Dreams” is a critical example of how urban planners have seized upon the sport’s mythical underpinnings to reimagine the built environment in the last several decades. Seydel believed that baseball represented the very best of the American city - its diversity, material heritage, and industrial, working class past - and Coors Field was his masterpiece. He designed the ballpark’s façade, including its signature clock tower entranceway. He also participated in the Design Advisory Committee (DAC), where he fought to keep the ballpark intimate and authentic. The finished product seemed to encapsulate, as Diane Bakke and Jackie Davis have claimed, “the best example of Denver’s personality – past, present, and future.”²⁵⁵ Its material template – the much celebrated warm brick foundation and “evergreen” steel supports – consecrated Denver’s industrial glory, erasing memories of decay and obsolescence.

²⁵⁵ Diane Bakke and Jackie Davis, *Places around the Bases*,” 73.

The viaduct, which for a time represented dark havens for winos and other derelicts in the modern era - became a symbol of the area's rail-bound, nineteenth century prosperity for example.

Seydel hoped that Coors Field's impact would be more than symbolic, however. Chapter II: "A Neighborhood of Dreams," related many of his battles to integrate the ballpark while dealing with issues like homelessness. He wanted Coors Field to usher in a new era for North Larimer, granting it a steadfast identity amidst Denver's tumultuous urban milieu. His passion – both for the ballpark and its North Larimer environs – made him an "urban gadfly" to some, but one must admire his determination to revitalize "the forgotten part of Denver."

Even so, it is important to note that Coors Field was always a contested urban panacea. . Dana Crawford and many of the "urban pioneers" who resettled Larimer Square and LoDo saw it as a death knell for their bohemian community. They opposed the idea of a downtown ballpark, and complained bitterly when the Stadium District chose the Twentieth and Blake site. While some, including Crawford, eventually warmed up to the idea of an intimate urban stadium, others continued to bemoan its impact, citing the influx of tacky sports bars and drunken yuppies. The homogenous nature of post-Coors Field growth seemed to validate their fears, while more ominous projects – like Schwarzenegger's Planet Hollywood proposal – loomed on the horizon. The emphasis on upscale development also alienated many of the CPV's less affluent denizens and the social agencies that supported such individuals. Shelters closed, the police went after loiters and winos, and the city fenced off former hangouts like Sonny Lawson Park. Higher rents squeezed artists and the elderly, while an influx of LoDo revelers and intoxicated Rockies fans ran wild.

The culmination of these changes led many to question whether the area was no longer authentic. But did the CPV “lose its soul,” after this process of continuous reinvention, as Zukin has argued concerning New York City? This, as stated earlier, is a question everyone should answer for themselves, but if forced to take a stance, I would lean towards “no.” One can look to the evolution of David Gottlieb’s stance in the *LoDo News* for starters. Disgusted, at first, that his beloved LoDo had become the “Baseball Pisoir,” he eventually concludes that what he originally viewed as signs of the apocalypse – the rowdyism, the construction, the noise – are indelible traits of “life in the big city.” Many opponents of the Blake Street Ballpark had discovered Downtown Denver before it became a nexus of entertainment. Much like someone whose favorite coffee shop or bar is overrun with new customers, they yearned for the time when the neighborhood was still their little secret. But Gottlieb understood that this was not supposed to be “golf course living,” and asked his readers to wake up and realize that “this is the City.”²⁵⁶ Put another way, urban America is messy, and I believe that such chaotic interactions and debates give the CPV life.

Downtown Denver is still a volatile place marked by rapid change and stark contrasts, and Coors Field is an excellent prism through which the historian can continue to approach its different dimensions. The ballpark never quite lived up to Seydel’s expectations as a neighborhood icon; the kind which would put North Larimer on the map, differentiating it from LoDo and other downtown districts and neighborhoods. It did grant this storied place a new lease on life at least, and it is now one of Denver’s most prosperous areas. LoDo continues to flourish as well, and the Union Station redevelopment will further its ascendancy. Upscale developments may have blurred the distinctions between these neighborhoods, but walking around the CPV one gets the sense that it is still a vibrant and diverse place. Cranes tower over skeletons of

²⁵⁶ David Gottlieb “Life in the Big City,” 1995.

upscale lofts, while street feeders (which are still in operation) cater to lines of homeless individuals under the watchful eyes of Denver cops. Young men and women frequent popular microbreweries and dance clubs while older folks stroll about Larimer Square. On game days at Coors Field, fans of all ages gather at the ballpark (now one of the older facilities in the MLB), with newcomers discovering the charms of Old Denver for the first time. This is how I became interested in the area, after all, way back on that tranquil afternoon in 2002. So while property values are up, and the adverse effects of gentrification readily apparent, it is impossible to conclude that it is no longer authentic. As recently as the mid-1980s, this was somewhat of a desolate place. Now it is an environment where people of all backgrounds can live, work, and play. It is not a perfect revitalization, and years from now it may lose its luster, becoming too upscale and sterile for its own good. But for now it is still, as Gottlieb suggested in 1995, “not all good, but not all bad – and certainly not all things to all people.”²⁵⁷

In short, the story of Coors Field can tell us a great deal about the role of ballparks and other sports facilities in the postmodern evolution of urban America. This thesis was an attempt to understand its implications through the voices of those who influenced the project and those who just had an opinion regarding its impact. There is still a great deal of room for scholarly inquiry, however, both with Coors Field and the Retro Ballpark Movement in general. I would love to conduct an oral history of the Blake Street Ballpark, for example. I avoided, quite purposefully, interviewing those connected to the project this go round because I did not want to fill my pages with hazy remembrances and nostalgic praise (or condemnation). There was enough of this sentiment behind the new old ballpark in the first place. However, there are so many interesting individuals who contributed to the fruition of the ballpark and helped shape the destiny of its surroundings. People who knew Karle Seydel and Eddie Maestas for example, or

²⁵⁷ David Gottlieb “Life in the Big City,” 1995.

perhaps Dana Crawford and the urban pioneers behind LoDo Inc. There are politicians as well, men like Federico Pena and Wellington Webb, who shaped the evolution of their city from the top down. There are also those who run shelters or feeders and those who continue to take advantage of such operations. One could also pursue the Rockies ownership and investigate their efforts to give back to the community. I did include many of these voices in my thesis as they were recorded in newspapers and other periodicals, but it would be great to compile an oral history of Coors Field that eschewed academic analysis in favor of a narrative composed entirely their opinions and memories. Anyone who contributed to this project or lived through its fruition and has an interesting take deserves to be remembered in the annuals of history. Denver was (and still is) their city.

WORKS CITED

Primary Sources

The Denver Post

Denver Westword

The Karle Seydel Papers

The LoDo News

Sports Illustrated Magazine

Secondary Sources

Abbot, Carl, Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel. *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005.

Andrews, Thomas G. *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Bakke, Diane, and Jackie Davis. *Places around the Bases: A Historic Tour of the Coors Field Neighborhood*. Englewood: Westcliffe Publishers Inc., 1995.

Beauregard, Robert A. *Voices of Decline: The Post War Fate of U.S. Cities*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Bradbury, Katherine L., Anthony Downs and Kenneth A. Small. *Urban Decline and the Future of American Cities*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982.

Danielson, Michael N. *Home Team: Professional Sports and the American Metropolis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

- Flint, Anthony. *Wrestling Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took on New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City*. New York: Random House, 2011.
- Gendzel, Glen. "Competitive Boosterism: How Milwaukee Lost the Braves." *The Business History Review* 69, no. 4 (Winter, 1995): 530-566.
- Gershman, Michael. *Diamonds: The Evolution of the Ballpark*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993.
- Goodstein, Phil. *A People's History of Denver Volume II: DIA and other Scams*. Denver: New Social Publications, 2000.
- Isenberg, Allison. *Downtown America: The History of the Place and the People who Made It*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Michener, James A. *Sports in America*. New York: Random House, 1976.
- Morley, Judy Mattivi. *Historic Preservation and the Imagined West: Albuquerque, Denver, and Seattle*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006.
- Moss, Irvin and Mark Foster. *Home Run in the Rockies: The History of Baseball in Colorado*. Denver: Publication Design, 2004.
- Ponder, Benjamin. "Ballpark Village or Urban Wasteland: Rhetorical Invention, Civic Ego, and the St. Louis Cardinal's Controversial New Home." *Nine: A Journal of Baseball and Culture*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Fall 2004) 74-80.
- The Project for Public Spaces. "What is Placemaking?" PPS Website.
[Http://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/](http://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/) (accessed January 15, 2013).
- Richmond, Peter. *Ballpark: Camden Yards and the Building of an American Dream*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.

- Rosenweig, Daniel/ *Retro Ballparks: Instant History, Baseball, and the New American City*.
Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.
- Spirou, Costas, and Larry Bennett. *It's Hardly Sportin': Stadiums, Neighborhoods, and the New Chicago*. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003.
- Sullivan, Neil J. *The Dodgers Move West*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Teaford, Jon C. *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985*.
Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Trumpbour, Robert C. *The New Cathedrals: Politics and Media in the History of Stadium Construction*. Syracuse: University of Syracuse Press, 2007.
- Weiler, Stephan. "Pioneers and Settlers in Lo-Do Denver: Private Risk and Public Benefits in Urban Redevelopment." *Urban Studies* 37, no. 1 (2000): 167-179.
- Vigdor, Jacob L. Douglas S. Massey, and Alice M. Rivlin. "Does Gentrification Harm the Poor?" *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs* (2002) 133-182.
- Weiner, Jay. *Stadium Games: Fifty Years of Big League Greed and Bush League Boondoggles*.
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Zukin, Sharon. *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993
- _____. *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)