

College Park
Rutledge Avenue at Grove Street
Kevin Eberle, November 2017

The City of Charleston purchased the property upon which College Park is built in 1902. In 1907, the College of Charleston Athletic Association was created with the goal of securing a suitable place for its baseball team to play. On August 13, 1907, City Council approved a ten year lease of about five acres of Hampton Park. The first game was played there on March 21, 1908, when the College of Charleston played the local amateur team, the Athletics.

After the ten-year lease, the baseball park nearly became a victim of the United States' World War I drive. In 1918, the United States Navy requested a lease of the property (plus some land to the west) to build a new clothing factory. A large clothing factory already existed at the Charleston Navy Yard, but transportation from town out to the Navy Yard (a remote spot at that time) was a challenge for the more than 1000 female workers. Having a new, even larger plant built on the site of the baseball park would make commutes much easier for the workforce.

The plant, which would employ about 2000 women and would have cost at least \$700,000 to build, was touted as an economic boom for the area that would spur increased housing in



the Uptown. The idea of building a massive industrial plant in a rapidly growing area of Charleston prompted talk around town though. However, the promise that the plant would operate

on electricity instead of steam or coal was offered to assuage concerns about noise and smoke.

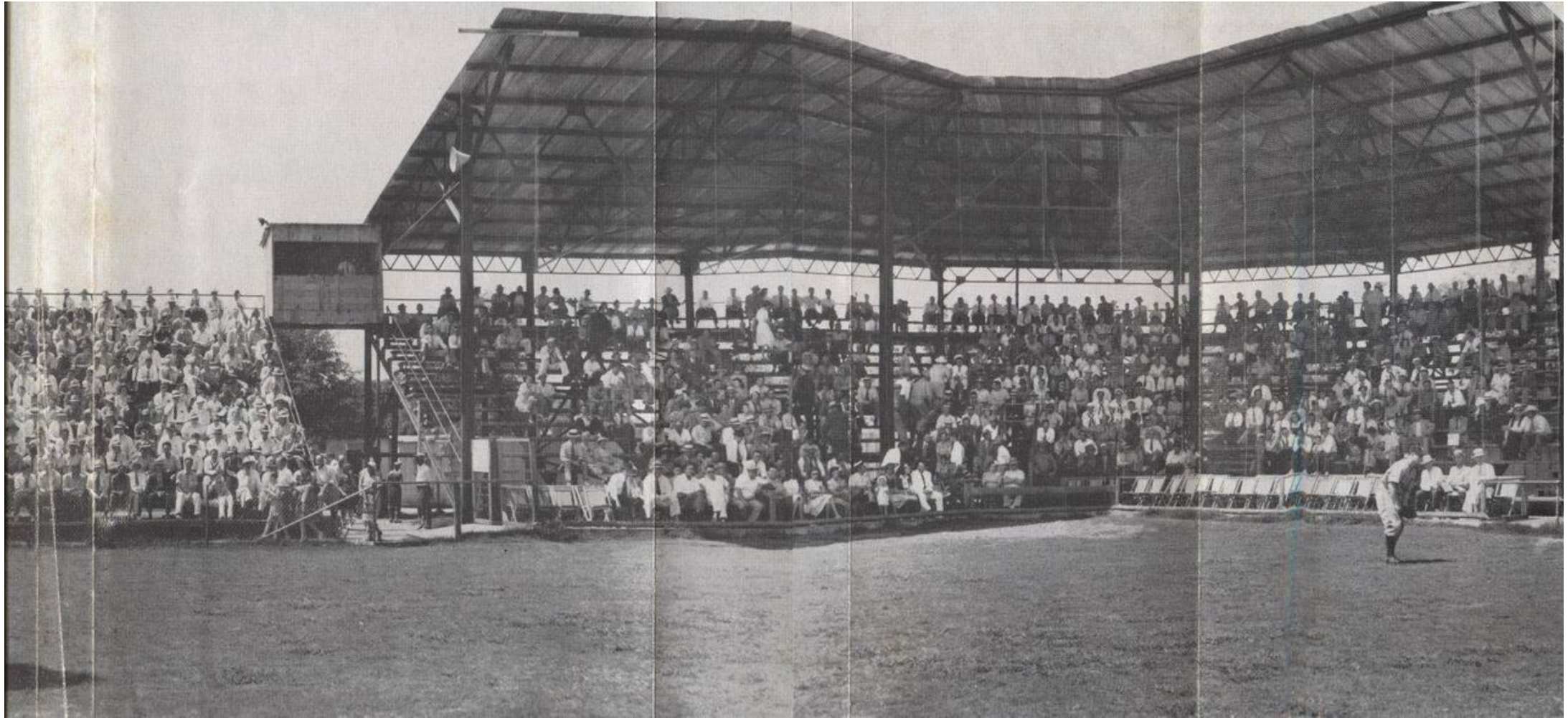
The lease to the United States Navy would have lasted one year but been extendable for another twenty. On September 10, 1918, City Council approved the lease. Two months later, however, World War I concluded, and the Navy realized that it was vastly overstocked with uniforms and materials. Therefore, not only was the new, enlarged plant never build, the older facility at the Navy Yard was shuttered.

During the 1920s, College Park fell into disrepair and eventually became an eyesore for the neighbors. Fences were pulled down and shrubbery was planted to hide the site, and there was an interest in returning the area into Hampton Park proper. In the end, the City held onto the property and continued to operate it as a playing field, but as shown in 1934, it had no bleachers or other amenities.

In 1940, Spartanburg, South Carolina surrendered its minor league baseball franchise, and a Savannah businessman saw Charleston as a good place to move the team; Charleston had been without a professional team since 1923. The promoter, Robert E. LaMotte, sought the use of College Park for five years and agreed that the improvements would revert to the City at the end of the lease. A new field was built, and the grandstands that had been installed at Stoney Field in 1928 were bought over because that facility was no longer used. A special inaugural game was played between the Reds and the Red Sox on April 1, 1940; Ted Williams hit the only homerun of the game. (The Red Sox won by a score of 9-6.) By 1941, the Charleston Rebels had taken over College Park.

In addition to hosting ball games, College Park was also a venue for musical performances. On June 28, 1956, Elvis Presley played to a crowd of 4000 fans who had lined up around the block waiting for tickets. At the time, Presley's importance to musical history was not settled; in response to critics' claim that his dancing was used to cover for an inability to sing, Presley remarked, "[T]hey're right you know, I can't sing, but something I do sells."

Charleston's minor league team continued to play home games at College Park until September 1996; its games have been played at the Joseph P. Riley, Jr. Ballpark since then. On April 19, 2001, the City completed the sale of College Park to the Citadel as part of a complex land swap that had led to the construction of the Joseph P. Riley, Jr. Ballpark. The ballpark is used as a practice field by the Citadel, but if the property ever ceases its use by the Citadel or the State, it will revert to the City.



College Park, ca. 1940, from 1941 City Yearbook



ca. 1926, excerpt from aerial photograph, Citadel Archives