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Stan Bumgardner

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The Veterans Memorial Field House in Huntington, W.Va.

A HISTORY

by Stan Bumgardner
Introduction

“When Ernie Salvatore sat at ring side on fight night. When the crowd noise could be heard all the way across the street in the parking lot of the B & B Super Market. When brightly colored spotlights chased the stars of Holiday on Ice around the rink, and the “Clown Prince” of basketball, Meadowlark Lemon, and the Harlem Globetrotters entertained children of every age. It was a place where families went ice skating, elephants occupied center ring, and the latest fashion in automobiles covered the entire floor in 1957.” Writer Clyde Beal recounted these vivid memories of Huntington’s Veterans Memorial Field House more than 50 years after the fact, testimony to the building’s impact on the River City and its residents.1

Events such as these are etched in people’s memories. Most people who grew up in Huntington or attended Marshall University (formerly Marshall College) between 1950 and 2012 have vivid recollections of the arena at the corner of 26th Street and 5th Avenue. In nearly 62 years, millions of people filed through the building's doors. The Field House was much more than just a basketball arena or recreation center, though; it was an iconic symbol of people’s childhoods and college careers. And, for one heartbreaking but poignant night, it helped pull together a community in mourning the worst tragedy in the city’s history.
The Veterans Memorial Field House was the brainchild of Max K. Jones, who, in his professional life, was manager of the Huntington Water Corporation. In his civic duties, he served as chair of both the Cabell County Recreation Board and the Cabell County Hospital Board. As such, Jones provided key leadership in the development of two area landmarks: the Field House and Cabell Huntington Hospital, which opened in 1955.²

The Cabell County Recreation Board (later known as the Parks and Recreation Commission and by other name variations at different times) had been authorized by the West Virginia Legislature in 1945. It was officially constituted in 1947 and functioned under the county’s Board of Park Commissioners. At the time, the board oversaw more than 20 playgrounds throughout the county. It comprised nine members, including three representing the city, three from the county, and three members of the board of education. In addition to Jones, the board included Herman Brown, Walker Long, Earl Heiner, Hugh Kincaid, Olin Nutter, Artie Holley, Kenneth Stettler, and Gwynn Edmonds.³

Jones believed that the board should play more of a role than just overseeing playgrounds. Since 1915, Marshall College (now Marshall University) and area high school teams had played basketball at the old Radio Center (originally called Vanity Fair) in the 600 block of 4th Avenue. That 3,500-4,000-seat facility had outlived its usefulness, particularly for Marshall’s basketball team, which had become an increasingly popular local draw following its national championship victory in the 1947 National Association for Intercollegiate Basketball (NAIB) Tournament. In addition, Radio Center had become a firetrap. Jones later recounted that his worst fear was that someone would yell, “Fire!” when the place was filled to the rafters. Jones and his fellow board members began building public sentiment for an arena that could serve the needs of Marshall, local high schools, and the entire community.⁴

The recreation board selected the site of Long Civic Field for the Field House’s construction. Between 1937 and 1942, Huntington had played minor league baseball at Long Civic Field in the old Mountain State League
as variously the Boosters, the Bees, the Aces, and the Jewels. Former Huntingtonian Joe Ferguson remembered how the area looked in the decade prior to the Field House’s construction, “It was an unused overgrown lot which backed up to what was then Long’s Civic Field (for baseball games but minus earlier demolished grandstands).”

In 1947, the county contracted with Huntington architect Lewis Stettler (1899-1956) to design what would become the Field House. Stettler, the brother of recreation board member Kenneth Stettler, had studied architecture at the Chicago Art Institute, specializing in “modern style and form.” His plans for an Art Moderne-style multipurpose facility closely resembled his design for a field house in Williamson, West Virginia, being developed at the same time (plans for the Williamson Field House were approved by the leaders of that town on November 14, 1949). He later would go on to design new gymnasiums for Logan and Man high schools in 1954. He also has been credited with designing “field houses” in Logan and Fairmont, West Virginia. Stettler’s original plans called for the Field House to “be constructed of concrete, brick, steel, and cinder-block with floors of terraza [sic] or concrete. The main auditorium will be floored with maple.”

It would take two additional years for Jones’s dream to begin taking shape.

The Construction

Authorizing the design was the easy part. Now began the uphill battle of funding the project. On January 20, 1949, the Cabell County Court approved the issuance of up to $800,000 in revenue bonds to construct the Veterans Memorial Field House. From day one—and throughout its history—the main challenge for the proposed Field House was funding. The commission came up with the idea of revenue bonds, which are different from a typical general obligation bond in that the debt is to be repaid from revenues generated by the facility. It was financed by five investment firms based in Cincinnati and Pittsburgh. To ensure repayment of the bonds, the firms required assurances that the Field House would be used for paying events at least 100 days per year. The field houses in Huntington and Williamson possibly were among the first instances where revenue bonds were used for public multipurpose facilities. At least in the case of the Huntington Field House, this strategy would prove problematic. The initial revenue bonds of $830,000—$30,000 more than the amount initially approved—were dated July 1, 1949. After a public meeting on July 11, the county officially adopted the bonds four days later. As part of this agreement, the county also committed to “make up any deficiency in such operating expenses,” which, as time would prove, would become a significant financial strain.

After waiting two years for the project to commence, the county held two groundbreakings in less than seven months. At about 10:15 a.m. on January 21, 1949, the morning after the commission initially approved the bonds, either Fireproof Products Company or McBride Equipment (depending on the source, but both of Charleston) drove the first eight pilings—one for each corner of the building. The pilings would provide information about foundation requirements and also become part of the building. At this unofficial groundbreaking, Stettler revealed some features of the building that had not been previously announced, including a removable basketball floor, a garage ramp, piping for local telecasts of games and other events, and a four-sided scoreboard that included built-in loudspeakers and a spotlight for boxing matches. Stettler noted that all of these features plus a concert stage would provide “a regular Madison Square Garden here for the people of Huntington.” The rest of the construction would have to wait for the bonds to be issued that summer.

The second, and more official, groundbreaking was authorized by the court on August 8, 1949. Pictured here are (left to right) county commissioners Frank Heiner and James Brady, school board superintendent Olin C. Nutter, county commissioner Artie Holley, architectural supervisor Claude Winters, architect Lewis Stettler, recreation board chair Max K. Jones (holding shovel), general contractor C. H. Jimison, and construction superintendent G. F. West. [image courtesy of the Huntington Herald-Dispatch]

C. H. Jimison & Sons Construction Company began clearing land for the Field House in August 1949. [image courtesy of the Huntington Herald-Dispatch]
occurred on August 8, 1949. Although there was not a formal ceremony, the event was attended by Jones, Cabell County Superintendent of Schools Olin C. Nutter, and Cabell County Court President Artie Holley. After the groundbreaking, the editors of Huntington's Herald-Dispatch applauded the efforts of these civic leaders while taking a potshot at those who had opposed the Field House, “A sorely needed facility, this improvement when completed will be a monument to the efforts of a committee whose resourcefulness and hard-working members refused to be discouraged by those hidebound, backward-looking influences which would do nothing about providing Huntington and Cabell county’s (sic) citizens with more and better recreational facilities.”

On the 10th, contractor C. H. Jimison & Sons Construction Company of Huntington began clearing the land. C. H. Jimison, who operated the company with his sons Clario “Jim” Jimison and Jack Jimison, also won the contract to build the new field house in Williamson. The company was known for constructing buildings on college campuses in West Virginia and Kentucky. C. H. Jimison & Sons would go on to build, among other structures, a parking garage, designed by Cass Gilbert Jr., at the West Virginia State Capitol Complex (1953); the West Virginia Education Association building in Charleston (1954); the Guaranty Bank Building in Huntington (1955); a controversial new ward building for Huntington State Hospital (1956), which brought the contractor under scrutiny, leading to fines by the state; a women’s dormitory at Marietta (OH) College (1959); Huntington’s Tri-State Airport terminal and control tower (1961); and an addition to the Raleigh County Bank building in Beckley (1973).

Only one month after the groundbreaking, national events began to affect the work progress. In September 1949, a national coal strike delayed construction and caused steel prices to skyrocket. As a result, the Cabell County Recreation Board scaled back the original plans, and the west balcony was not finished—a loss of more than 2,000 seats. Instead, it was incorporated into the Upper Concourse area, and bleachers were installed. Jones always felt that the west balcony would be completed in the near future simply by “knock[ing] down the west wall and install[ing] seats”; however, this never occurred—almost certainly due to a perpetual lack of funding. The commission also decreased the spaces between the permanent seats and eliminated some first-floor storage.

By the spring of 1950, work on the Field House had restarted, and, by May, C. H. Jimison & Sons had commenced work on the second story and balcony. By late summer, it was clear that the construction was going over budget, so the county issued a second revenue bond on October 18, 1950, for $175,000. As part of this added cost, though, the recreation board did decide to install what would become one of the building’s most popular early features: an artificial icemaker for the skating rink.

The building was completed in November 1950 at

In the early days, one of the most popular activities at the Field House was ice skating. Joe Ferguson remembers that he and his friends would buy their skates at Dudley’s Department Store on 3rd Avenue or Starr Sporting Goods on 4th Avenue and take them to the Field House. The children in the right-hand photo are Peter Bob Calhoun and Dena Thomas. [images courtesy of Marshall University, Special Collections]

The Field House was completed in November 1950. This photo shows the building before the adjacent baseball field had been developed. [image courtesy of the Huntington Herald-Dispatch]
a total cost of $1,087,700. Years later, Elmwood Wilson recalled operating one of two cranes that set the last two trusses, each of which he estimated weighed between 18 and 20 tons. Coincidentally, it was completed within a week of the dedication of Marshall’s new science building, which took away much of the Field House’s thunder—at least in terms of its coverage in local newspapers.

The new Field House theoretically could hold a capacity of 8,500 for concerts and 6,700 for basketball, including 4,000 seats and the rest bleachers; however, the maximum announced attendance for basketball rarely exceeded 6,500, with the exception of a standing-room-only Marshall game during the 1970-71 season (see Chapter 2 for more details). For a more complete description of the Field House, see Appendix A.

For the first couple of years, the facility was managed by Mike Lewis. Then, from about 1952 to 1971, the general manager was Harold Beach. Beach’s wife Margaret ran the concessions and assisted with accounting.

The Grand Opening

The first month at the Field House was action packed. The inaugural event, “Holiday on Ice,” was a four-day extravaganza beginning on November 13, 1950. One of the featured performers was Huntington native and international skating star Joan Hyldoft. On November 28, Marshall’s men’s basketball team had its first practice in the Field House, followed the next day by Huntington High School’s boys’ team. That night, Roy and Dale Rogers gave a rousing performance. Then, on November 30, 1950, the building was officially dedicated to the memory of Cabell County citizens who had sacrificed their lives during World War II. A concrete wall built into the Fifth Avenue side of the structure stated simply but profoundly, “ERECTED 1950 A.D. DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO GAVE IN FREEDOM’S CAUSE THE LAST FULL MEASURE OF DEVOTION—1917-1918, 1941-1945.”

At least from the standpoint of local newspapers, though, the real opening event would occur two days later, when the Marshall men’s basketball team played the first of its more than 400 games at the Field House.
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The Thundering Herd (which would be one of many unofficial Marshall nicknames until being adopted officially in 1963) dominated Fairmont State 84-34. Ironically, Marshall also had beaten Fairmont in the inaugural football game in Fairfield Stadium in 1928 by a score of 27-0. The new basketball court was a regulation 50 by 94 feet, and the entire maple floor was 60 by 120 feet. It was a big improvement over the smaller court and “cozy” confines at Radio Center. Head coach Cam Henderson described the new facility as “just about the answer to any coaches’ (sic) prayer. We have waited a long time for this but it was worth it.” For more details on Marshall basketball, see Chapter 2.

Early Struggles

From the outset, the Field House was plagued by financial problems. The recreation board seemingly had overestimated the facility's revenue-generating ability. The county was able to make its first annual revenue bond payment in 1951 but not without difficulties. Furthermore, the Field House began going into debt in terms of payroll and operating expenses. In May 1951, James Brady, Cabell County Court president, reported that a state audit had found that the Field House was running a $5,000/month deficit due largely to the bond payments; within two years, the Field House management would default on $37,000 in payments. That same month, Kenneth Stettler, chair of the recreation board's finance committee, appealed to the county commission to increase rental fees from $300 to $1,000 per day. The commission approved the increase, but, more than 20 years later, the $300 per day rate was still in place for most local renters, such as high schools.20

One of the first performances at the Field House was by Roy Rogers, “King of the Cowboys.” [image courtesy of Marshall University, Special Collections]

The Field House was dedicated to the memory of Cabell County citizens who had given their lives during World Wars I and II. [image courtesy of Marshall University]
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The building's financial woes continued. In June 1952, the Field House management had only $19,000 in the bank and needed to make a $37,000 payment on the revenue bonds. Rather than default, the management had to take cash advances from vendors. As would later become apparent, the management may have even accepted money advances from a concessionaire tied to organized crime. Years later, Olin C. Nutter reported that a company named West Virginia Sportservice, a wholly owned subsidiary of Emprise Corporation of Buffalo, New York, "advanced money against our percentage of concessions whenever we were hard up. As I recall, it was several thousand dollars." Max K. Jones, recalled that the finances "were gruesome in those days. You had to do things yourself." Sportservice held the contract for the Field House's food and drink sales from its opening in 1950 until 1971. One year after this contract ended, the U.S. House of Representatives' Select Committee on Organized Crime charged Emprise with knowingly doing business with and loaning money to organized crime figures.21

Nonfinancial problems also hounded the building for decades. Some became running jokes in the community. Legendary Huntington sportswriter Ernie Salvatore listed the unending problems as "poor acoustics, no air conditioning, wasteful first floor seating arrangements, and inadequate parking [as] the top four." Parking was a long-standing issue, particularly for popular events like Marshall basketball. Field House attendees often were forced to park many blocks away or risk being towed from the B&B Supermarket lot across 5th Avenue. As early as 1951, Jones requested that the Board of Park Commissioners purchase nearby land from the General Stores Company to use as parking for the Field House.

The board authorized Jones to approach the property owners; however, there is no record of any follow up, which suggests that General Stores may have rejected Jones's proposal out of hand.22

Despite these drawbacks, many considered the Field House to be the finest indoor arena in the state. From its opening, there was a push among some schools and sportswriters in southern West Virginia to move the state high school boys' basketball tournament closer to home—from Morgantown to Huntington—or at least to hold it at the Field House in alternating years. The tournament had been held at the Morgantown Field House since 1939, but some coaches had complained about the dormitories provided for athletes, and sportswriters grumbled annually about the Morgantown arena's poor lighting and bad seating arrangements. In making the case for Huntington, Charleston sportswriter A. L. "Shorty" Hardman wrote, "The Huntington field house is a 'lulu.'" Echoing the earlier claims of the building's architect, he added, "It is a miniature Madison Square Garden with every comfort and convenience you can think of. It makes the West Virginia U. field house look like Farmer Jones' barn. . . . And there's a perfect view of the playing court from every seat in the house." Some 20 years later, Salvatore still extolled the positives of the Veterans Memorial Field House and noted that it was the "prototype for scads of pretenders that followed, and [that it had] fulfilled its prime announced objective, i.e., to provide an activity center for Marshall, the county's public schools, and the public at large within the county."23

Throughout the early- and mid-1950s, the debt continued to linger over both the Field House and the residents of Cabell County. By 1956, the county and city
were subsidizing the Field House to the tune of $55,000 annually. In May 1956, voters approved a special levy to retire the Field House's bonded indebtedness of $940,000 over a three-year period. Even without the burden of paying back the revenue bonds, the Field House still struggled regularly to meet payroll and operating expenses. This would continue over the life of the building.

**The Fifties at the Field House**

Despite its financial woes, the Field House was quickly becoming a popular venue for sporting events, music, and family activities. One of its earliest and most consistent attractions was the Regional Golden Gloves Boxing Tournament, which moved into the Field House in 1951. Some Golden Gloves winners, like Huntington's Jimmy Lane, went on to successful professional boxing careers.

Among the other early draws were the West Virginia Catholic Basketball Tournament, which was held at the Field House annually from 1951 to 1977—at which time, the West Virginia State Catholic Association was dissolved, and most of its teams were merged into the Secondary Schools Activities Commission. The tournament had been moved to Huntington in 1948 and was played at Radio Center for the first three years before relocating to the Field House for the rest of its history.

All local high schools played their basketball games at the Field House at one time or another. And, by 1955, the southern West Virginia high school coaches and sportswriters had won their argument. Beginning that year, the Field House began hosting the West Virginia High School (Boys') Basketball Tournament in alternating years with Morgantown. The first year the tournament was played at the Field House, Huntington High, led by standout Leo Byrd, made it all the way to the Class A finals before losing to Mullens. Beginning in 1965, Charleston was added to the rotation of host cities. Then, in 1972, the tournament was moved to Charleston on a permanent basis.

Other popular events in the 1950s included high school commencement ceremonies, ice shows, horse shows, dances, conventions, professional boxing matches, concerts, Boy Scout expositions, the Harlem Globetrotters, sportmen's shows, garden clubs, swimming carnivals, and midget automobile racing. Joe Ferguson later recalled attending the midget racing, “It was really something to see these small racers circling the floor at dangerous speeds, avoiding bales of hay and steel girders.” Then, in 1959, the Rev. Oral Roberts's Crusade set new attendance records at the Field House.

It also was one of the few facilities of its kind accessible to African Americans in Huntington in the 1950s. Hal Greer, who grew up in Huntington and starred at Huntington's segregated Frederick Douglass High School and then at Marshall, recalled, “In the summer that was the only place we could go and play. I remember the field house as the biggest place around.”

While the Field House was closely associated with Marshall basketball, the college (later university) also rented the facility for other activities. Beginning in 1958, Marshall moved its annual Regional Science Fair to the Field House due to the event's growing popularity. The fair brought together hundreds of high school students from the Tri-state area. Marshall also held homecoming activities at the Field House and later began celebrating commencement exercises there.

The Field House also hosted political events over the years, including the state Republican Convention in 1952 and the state Democratic Convention in 1964. On October 10, 1958, about 4,500 Republican supporters turned out to the Field House to hear a speech by Vice President Nixon.

Marshall College (later Marshall University) was closely associated with the Field House from the time the building opened. This photo shows a dance held for Marshall’s 1953 graduating class. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Special Collections]

Above left: The Field House also attracted events of national interest, including the Miss USA World Pageant in 1962 and 1963. Shown here is Michelle Metrinko, 1963 Miss USA World. [image courtesy of the Huntington Herald-Dispatch]

Above right: “Bonanza” star Lorne Greene takes a ride around the Field House as part of a rodeo, held in conjunction with the 1963 Miss USA World Pageant. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Special Collections]
Events of the Fifties

Midget race cars were a popular spectacle at the Field House in the '50s. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Special Collections]

A spotlight mounted into the scoreboard made the Field House an ideal venue for boxing matches, including the popular Golden Gloves Boxing Tournament. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Special Collections]

In 1954, piano virtuoso Liberace's first appearance in Huntington broke an attendance record at the Field House. [image courtesy of the Huntington Herald-Dispatch]

Ice hockey was another popular spectator sport in the '50s. In 1956-57, the International League Huntington Hornets played their home games at the Field House. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Special Collections]

Between 1955 and 1969, the West Virginia High School Boys' Basketball Tournament was played at the Field House in alternating years. These photos appear to be from 1955, the tournament's inaugural year at the Field House, when local favorite Huntington High made it to the finals before losing to Mullens. [images courtesy of Marshall University, Special Collections]
President Richard Nixon. Nixon’s speech originally was scheduled for Charleston’s just-completed Civic Center; however, Charleston Mayor John Copenhaver decided that the capital city’s facility should not open with a political event.\textsuperscript{11}

**The Sixties**

Many of the most popular events from the 1950s, such as Holiday on Ice and the high school basketball tournaments, continued into the 1960s. There also were a number of special events. In 1962 and 1963, the Field House hosted the Miss USA World beauty pageant. Included in the 1963 festivities was a four-day rodeo, featuring guest star Lorne Greene of “Bonanza,” who rode a horse around the arena and, at one point, was thrown off, but unscathed. Then, in 1965, another celebrity appeared at the Field House. Bob Hope gave a free performance to help raise $25,000 to purchase grounds and equipment for Huntington’s Charles W. Cammack Children’s Center. Then, on November 27, 1966, Dick Clark brought his “Caravan of Stars” to the Field House. On this particular night, his lineup included the Yardbirds and 22-year-old guitarist Jimmy Page—this was an especially big draw since the band had canceled its performance in Charleston three days earlier due to illness.\textsuperscript{12}

By the late 1960s, the Memorial Field House was being used on average 204 days per year, including community-related events. However, the county felt that it needed to keep up with Charleston and its less-than-decade-old civic center. The county considered a $2 million, 212’ x 172’ addition to the Field House to the north that would have roughly doubled the size of the facility. In 1966, Huntington architect Walter S. Donat drew up plans for the addition, which would have included a 1,000-seat auditorium, a recreation area, and a space for arts and crafts. At the same time, Donat submitted plans to add more than 1,200 seats and a new roof for the Field House. The improvements also would have added approximately 1,000 parking spaces.\textsuperscript{13} It is not clear from historical resources why these improvements did not occur; although, given the ongoing financial struggles of the Field House, the assumption is that lack of funding was the major factor.

The end of the 1960s also brought the end of an era. March 1969 marked the last time the state High School Boys’ Basketball Tournament would be played at the Field House. The tournament would be held in Charleston in 1970 and in Morgantown in 1971. Beginning in 1972, the tournament would be located permanently in Charleston. The Field House, though, would continue to host the local regional high school tournament. The 1969 state tournament at the Field House offered one last great memory for the fans as two local teams won state championships in their respective divisions: Huntington won the Class AAA title, while Ceredo-Kenova took the Class AA crown.

**A Place for Mourning**

The history of Huntington and Marshall University changed forever on the evening of Saturday, November 14, 1970. Much like the national significance of tragic dates like December 7, 1941, November 22, 1963, and September 11, 2001, the date of November 14, 1970, will always be etched into the memories of West Virginians and the Marshall University community. On that night,
a chartered Southern Airways DC9 crashed on its approach to Tri-State Airport. The plane was returning from a Marshall football game at East Carolina. The crash claimed the lives of all 75 people on board, including 36 players, five coaches, eight staff members, 21 community members, and the five-person crew.

The community was stunned and shattered. Huntington and Marshall were closely intertwined, and virtually everyone knew someone who had died aboard the plane. At that devastating point in the city's history, the Memorial Field House served as a community center for mourning.

Field House manager Harold Beach quickly organized a memorial service to be held the day after the crash. It would occur exactly 20 years and two days after the building's first event and would result in some of the most moving and important moments in the Field House's history. Beach's wife Margaret recalled the effort her husband put into that event, "He worked day and night for that to get them suited for Marshall for the funerals. . . . He loved those boys. He loved those Marshall players."134

On the evening of November 15, more than 7,000 people filed quietly into the Field House, many wearing black armbands in memory of those who had lost their lives. The first several rows of seating were reserved for family members of the victims. The back of the stage was lined with black drapes, ornamented only with the Marshall University seal. Seated on stage were West Virginia Governor Arch Moore Jr.; East Carolina President Dr. Leo Jenkins; Marshall Acting President Dr. Donald Dedmon; Dr. Prince B. Woodard, chancellor of the West Virginia Board of Regents; Huntington Mayor Robert E. Hinerman; Marshall Student Body President Mike Gant; Robert Morgan, who represented the East Carolina student body; Ohio University President Claude R. Sowle and Provost Robert Savage; and, perhaps most touchingly, Marshall football co-captain Nate Ruffin, who had stayed in Huntington and missed the flight due to an injury.

The Rev. Robert D. Cook of St. John's Episcopal Church led off the ceremony with an invocation. He was followed by the Rev. Charles H. Smith of First Baptist Church who read the refrain from the biblical book of Ecclesiastes, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven."135

Gant memorialized the dead, "We are all brothers in this hour. . . . We have lost so many like ourselves . . . the wounds are deep . . . something is missing and we feel it very deeply." He continued, "But never let us forget that we shared with these people the most important things we have to give—ourselves." After a short speech by Acting President Dedmon, Governor Moore walked to the podium and told the crowd, "These young people were our lives, and we had looked to them for a future." He added, "To forget for a moment this tragedy would seem to be a tragedy of a greater type. I hope all will build to create a greater university and greater state as a living memorial." Governor Moore was followed by Marshall music professor Jane Shepherd's singing of "The Lord's Prayer" and the university's chorus, directed by Dr. Paul A. Balshaw, performing "O God, Our Help in Ages
Past.” After a concluding prayer, the family members of the victims walked out as a silent hush fell over the Field House.36

The memorial service at the Field House was the first step in a long healing process that will never completely end for the collective Huntington and Marshall communities. More than 40 years later, people who were at the Field House that night of November 15 still have vivid recollections of how a city came together to shed tears and mourn as a family.

Changes in the Seventies

The Field House’s continual challenge to survive financially extended into the 1970s. Complicating the matter was the fact that Huntington was changing dramatically. Huntington was plagued by the same problems that many other cities experienced at that time. Beginning in the 1950s, the city had started losing manufacturing jobs, businesses, and, eventually, people in rapid succession. During the last half of the 20th century, Huntington lost 40 percent of its population.37

In the 1970s, the bottom fell out of the city’s economy, leading to a near panic among business and community leaders. In an attempt to reinvent Huntington, officials headed down the same road where many other cities were venturing—urban renewal. The new craze in urban planning was to tear down old buildings and ways of thinking and replace them with new trendy ideas. However, some leaders fought back against the changes, namely the ideas to route the new Interstate 64 through the center of Huntington or to build a new mall in the downtown area—in direct competition with existing merchants. As a result, the interstate was routed away from downtown, the mall was constructed near Barboursville, and business traffic in the heart of Huntington began to vanish. In downtown Huntington, old businesses and houses were demolished to make way for something that, at the time, was a pipedream. Huntington’s “Superblock” became a three-square-block parking lot and a running joke for more than three decades—until the eventual development of Pullman Square in the early 21st century.38

The urban renewal thinking extended to the Veterans Memorial Field House, which, by 1970, was at the height of its popularity. But, in the process of reinventing the city, civic leaders continually debated the purposes of the Field House and began to consider a new civic center as a replacement. At the heart of the matter, there was a constant struggle as to whether the Field House should be a commercial venture that made profits, a basketball arena for Marshall and local high schools, or a recreational center for the citizens of Cabell County. This identity crisis, which had beleaguered the facility throughout its existence, would intensify in the 1970s.

There were continual debates over how much the county should subsidize the Field House, how much rent that Marshall and others should pay to use it, and how much the facility should be open to the public as opposed to being reserved for potential money-making events. The Field House also suffered from what some saw as a lack of professional business oversight. As one example, the facility’s ice-making equipment seemingly disappeared at some point in the building’s history without any documentation of where it went or who acquired it. Given the facility’s questionable financial standing and its willingness to make deals to pay bills, actions like this certainly raised questions.39

Then, there was the growing potential for competition. By the early 1970s, Marshall and concert promoters were increasingly frustrated with the condition of the Field House and its lack of amenities. It seemed that, at least publicly, few civic leaders in Huntington were happy with the Field House. Ernie Salvatore summarized the city’s negative attitude about the Field House in 1973, “She sits there at Fifth Avenue and Twenty-Sixth Street a slightly faded, still youngish 23, already written off as a has-been.”40

Realizing that changes for the Field House were on the horizon, the county began placing a greater emphasis on one of the building’s original purposes—as a recreation facility for the community. In 1973, the county’s summer recreation program began offering children limited activities at the Field House. In August of that year, the county hired R. V. “Buddy” Graham to manage the building and oversee the county’s recreational activities. He was the third Field House manager hired in the last two years—following A. C. Chapman, who had served in the role from 1971 to July 1973, and John W. Raymond, who had served as interim manager until Graham was hired. Previously, the 35-year-old Graham had been Marshall’s golf coach, an administrative assistant to the Marshall athletic director, a real estate developer, and an administrator for the Southwestern Action Council.41

During the summer of 1974, the summer recreation activities were expanded and sponsored on a regular basis. The entire operation was managed from the Field House. As Graham noted, the main purpose of the program was to “give kids something to do.” Children were bused to the Field House to practice football under the tutelage of Marshall head football coach Jack Lengyel and his staff. They took part in league competitions in football, basketball, and girls’ softball, and also had opportunities to participate in swimming, gymnastics, and numerous other activities. Graham hired Jane Davis, originally from South Charleston, and Glenn Verbage of Huntington to help run the summer program—both at the Field House and at 21 playgrounds. Through the years, he also brought in student assistants from the university, including Mike Hamrick, who would later become Marshall’s athletic director.42

During the 1970s, Graham continued booking old reliable acts such as Holiday on Ice and the Harlem Globetrotters. Some of the non-basketball activities included various tennis exhibitions involving stars Rod Laver, Bjorn Borg, Vic Seixas, and Roy Emerson. One of the more unusual events was a Thanksgiving 1974 rental in which local residents showed their support for
Chapter One  The Veterans Memorial Field House

Evangelical Christians in Kanawha County who were protesting the introduction of what they considered to be controversial English and language arts textbooks. Thousands of protesters in Kanawha County had shut down schools and businesses and had attracted the attention of national news outlets. The Huntington support protest was relatively small by comparison, as only about 200 area residents showed up at the Field House.

During the 1975 and 1976 seasons, the Marshall baseball team played its home games at Woody Williams Field, adjacent to the Field House. During those years, the rules stated that any ball hit onto the roof of the Field House was a ground-rule double.

One change in the 1970s was that Graham began booking bigger-name performers, such as Bachman-Turner-Overdrive, Seals and Crofts, Olivia Newton-John, Conway Twitty, and Loretta Lynn. Some of the events, particularly rock shows, reflected signs of the changing times. In April 1976, city police made a combined 60 drug-related arrests at two rock concerts at the Field House in consecutive weeks. Graham was forced to crack down on people sneaking alcohol and illegal drugs into the facility. Still, by expanding the types of offerings and by managing expenses more closely, the Field House was being operated at a profit for the first time.

In 1977, the Field House hosted its last West Virginia Catholic Basketball Tournament. To keep alive the spirit of the event, though, the Rev. Robert Wanstreet and Judge Robert Conaty, the principal and president of Huntington’s St. Joseph High School, respectively, proposed a new idea. The state’s seven Catholic high schools plus Ceredo-Kenova would begin playing a new annual tournament at the Field House hosted by St. Joseph. The St. Joseph’s Central Catholic High School Basketball Invitational, known familiarly as the St. Joe Invitational, was held annually at the Field House from 1978 to 2012 and expanded to include other schools. The St. Joe Invitational was much more than just a basketball tournament. It also featured cheerleading competitions and skits involving cheerleaders, majorettes, players, and coaches. Former St. Joe coach Ed Fry, who once wore a toga as part of a skit, remembered that “the kids really got into the skits, sometimes more than the game.” During the last three decades of the Field House’s history, the St. Joe Invitational would prove to be the building’s most popular perennial event.

After taking on the job as Field House manager, Graham had identified three major issues with the facility: inadequate acoustics for both concerts and speeches; the floor, which had to be removed and replaced for various events; and a lack of air conditioning, which limited the chances of booking major summer events, not to mention making participants in the summer recreation program incredibly uncomfortable in the sweltering Huntington heat. Throughout its history, the building had relied on large ceiling exhaust fans for heat relief.
He quickly set out to address these issues, and the county backed him by making its largest investment in infrastructure improvements since the opening of the Field House. First, the new acoustic ceiling and wall tiles (west wall) were installed. Previously, the sound had been so bad that the Field House was losing concerts to the Charleston Civic Center, and, in some instances, Huntington residents were driving to Charleston to see a show instead of going to see the same band at the Field House. Graham noted that with the old acoustics, “The good shows lose money at the Field House because of the sound system and won’t come back.” At the same time, a new tartan floor was installed. The tartan floor was a replacement for the original concrete floor; it also could be used by the community as a basketball court—a new removable court was used for Marshall and high school basketball games. Shortly thereafter, the building was painted green and white.59

Even as the civic center concept gained momentum, Graham still felt the Field House upgrades were necessary, stating at the time, “Memorial Field House is the major recreation spot in Huntington and Cabell County, and the Civic Center apparently is still years away. Therefore, we should get the Field House into good shape and not let it go to waste just because a Civic Center is in the planning stages.”60

In 1974, the building was valued between $2.5 and $3.0 million, including nearly $550,000 in improvements in the previous two years. In addition to the acoustical ceiling ($66,700) and tartan floor surface ($59,898), the county also installed a new central air system ($60,700). Regardless of whether the city or county would try to replace the Field House, Graham felt these improvements would keep the facility relevant and continue attracting events. The county also renovated the adjacent Woody Williams Field (known previously as the Bill Mire Memorial Baseball Field but renamed for the World War II Medal of Honor recipient), including a new drainage system, batting cages, sod, bleachers, fencing, and lighting; it was used for various activities, including soccer. One of the rejected ideas, which would have made the Field House much more competitive with the Charleston Civic Center and other larger venues, was to expand the seating.51

Despite the improvements, civic leaders continued to push for a new facility that would combine the concert functions of a civic center with the needs of Marshall basketball. Due to frustrations with the Field House, the thinking of city and Marshall leaders had been trending in this direction for some time. Civic leader and future mayor Jean Dean later outlined the concept, “The plan was to build a Civic Center on top of the flood wall, and include a Marshall basketball arena and a performing arts theater.” There were several major problems. First, there was never an actual plan, just a concept. Second, citizens eventually rejected the initial civic center bond issue, which forced planners to scale back the concept considerably. Third, Marshall was not included in the conceptual planning stages for the proposed facility. As Marshall President Robert Hayes later recalled, “I told the City Council that we would have to work out the details. One of the councilmen told me to go back and work on a med school and the city would build the civic center.”62

After reaching this impasse, the county considered deeding the Field House outright to Marshall in hopes that the university would not build a competing basketball/ concert arena. Their argument was that since the Field House would be losing concerts and some sporting events to the civic center, Marshall could use the Field House to expand its physical education activities while still playing basketball there. The county, however, would have stipulated as part of any agreement that the Field House not compete directly with the new civic center.53

Local newspapers supported the idea because it would have expanded upon the physical education functions of Marshall's on-campus Gullickson Hall (built in 1961). In addition, turning over the Field House to Marshall would have prevented the Field House from being a “political football, tossed about with entirely too much frequency.” Like the city leaders, local newspaper editors also worried that a new Marshall athletic complex might compete directly with the new civic center. The “Big Green Field House,” as it began to be called, would be much less likely to do so because of the building’s inherent concert limitations.54

Talk of Marshall taking over the Field House rumbled about the community for some time until school President Hayes publicly rejected the notion. In a 1976 letter to the county commission, he cited Marshall's issues with the Field House, particularly its long distance from campus and its lack of “multi-purpose capacity.” He added, “It is only marginally satisfactory as a rented facility for intercollegiate basketball until such time as a more appropriate facility can be provided” and noted that Marshall is “moving rapidly to finalize plans for development of a multi-purpose campus facility which would meet indoor athletic needs.” The Cam Henderson Center would open on Marshall’s campus in fall 1981.55

This photo shows the Field House after the completion of nearly $550,000 in improvements in 1974. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Special Collections]
Marshall had clearly outgrown the Field House for its basketball needs. By the 1970s, many colleges and universities, including West Virginia University, had upgraded or were in the process of upgrading their basketball facilities to aid recruiting. Graham noted that it was still an ideal facility for community events but that it had outlasted its usefulness as a home for college basketball, “I’ve been in high school gyms that are nicer than this. I’m not saying it’s bad, but it’s a 27-year-old building.” He also noted that the Field House could continue to attract smaller trade shows but that larger conventions, such as the state grocers conventions, were beginning to look toward newer and larger facilities. Graham also charged, correctly as it turns out, that the biggest problem for both the Field House and the proposed civic center was a lack of available hotel rooms—a problem with which Huntington would struggle for years.56

As a result of the split with Marshall, the city went its own direction and developed a civic center that was not designed for basketball. The Huntington Civic Center (now Big Sandy Superstore Arena) opened in September 1977 and immediately booked acts that would have been too big for the Field House, including Aerosmith, Tom Jones, the Doobie Brothers, and Kiss. Sadly, the biggest act ever appeared. Elvis Presley had been booked to open the new arena but died suddenly a month before the event. Instead, the civic center opened with the “Parade of Progress” trade show. In addition to cutting into the Field House’s potential business, the opening of the Huntington Civic Center caused one other ripple effect. It prompted Charleston to expand its 20-year-old civic center.57

For the first time in its history, the Field House had direct competition from a similar venue—actually, a much more modern and larger venue. The tension between the Field House and the Huntington Civic Center—or rather, their owners, Cabell County and the City of Huntington, respectively—arose almost immediately. At a city council meeting, Councilman Bob Bailey publicly derided the Field House management for “undercutting” the civic center’s ticket prices.” The conflict came to a head in early 1978, when both facilities hosted concerts on the same night: Kenny Rogers at the Field House was pitted against Sha Na Na at the civic center. An editorial in the Huntington Herald-Dispatch took the city’s side, “Memorial Field House has served this community well and/as the scene of various athletic events and a recreation program of some sort, could continue to do so for many years. But we fail to see any justification for continuing to operate it in direct competition with the Civic Center.” The editorial went on to recommend that the Field House be transferred to the county board of education, with the implication that it be used solely for basketball and recreational activities.58 This transfer to the board of education eventually would occur in 1986.

After the opening of the civic center, Glenn Verbage, who succeeded Graham as Field House manager about 1980, began booking more high school basketball doubleheaders, concerts, and boxing—while continuing the summer recreation program—to make up some of the lost income. While he continued to pull in successful acts, Verbage took some criticism when a 1980 NBA exhibition game flopped—only 1,500-2,000 attended; to break even, the Field House had needed about 3,000. But, in the world of arena management, these are the chances that have to be taken. Verbage noted the upside to and the challenge facing the facility, “The field house is paid for and I feel my job is to keep the building open and active without losing money.”59

The Last Thirty Years

The opening of the Henderson Center in fall 1981 was another blow to the Field House, now more than 30 years old. Marshall basketball comprised 35 percent of the facility’s income—$900 rental per game and about $50,000 per year in concessions. Verbage kept booking reliable standards such as Holiday on Ice, hosted the regional portion of the West Virginia Band Festival, and even picked up some shows that the civic center could not handle for one reason or another. In some instances, certain acts that had been regulars at the Field House continued coming back to the older venue rather than moving to the civic center. In other cases, some groups preferred the more family-oriented atmosphere of the Field House. One example was a 1981 gospel concert that was relocated to the Field House due to beer sales at the civic center. The concert coordinator did not want attendees to think the performers were condoning beer drinking. The city council had only recently approved beer sales at the civic center on a trial basis to support the financially strapped Huntington Convention and Visitors Bureau.60

There was a growing sense, though, that with the opening of the civic center and the Henderson Center, the Field House’s days were numbered. Other than ads for upcoming events, articles about the Field House’s
activities, which used to appear like clockwork, were much less visible in local newspapers. While short-term maintenance apparently was kept up—although no records survive to account for this—long-term maintenance seemingly was either deferred or rejected. The 1980s marked the beginning of a long, gradual, downward spiral. In particular, installation of a new roof could have prevented many of the problems that afflicted the Field House in its final years; however, the county was financially strapped during the 1980s to make upgrades to all of its parks and recreational facilities. Simply put, there was only so much money to go around. By contrast, in 1981, the city of Williamson replaced the roof on its field house, which was the same approximate age of the Veterans Memorial Field House. As a result of this new roof and other improvements made about that same time, the structure in Williamson remains in relatively good shape more than 30 years later and is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places.\textsuperscript{61}

According to Graham, it was commonly acknowledged that the building, while still functional for some activities, had outlived two of its main purposes—as a venue for Marshall basketball and for major events and rentals. It had been bypassed in time by arenas like the Huntington and Charleston civic centers and was quickly becoming obsolete for anything other than local high school basketball and smaller-scale events.\textsuperscript{62}

Because of the financial liabilities related to and increasing obsolescence of the Field House, it seemed that no entity of county government wanted to take on full responsibility for the aging facility. In 1986, the Field House was transferred to the Cabell County Board of Education. In addition to high school basketball games, the county schools held other activities at the Field House, including regional cheerleading competitions. Ten years later, the “political football” was tossed around again. In 1996, the board of education turned the
Field House over to the Greater Huntington Park and Recreation District.53

One of the final blows to the building was the consolidation of the old Huntington and Huntington East high schools into a new Huntington High. The new high school featured a modern 2,100-seat gym, which eliminated the need to play basketball at the off-campus Field House. Huntington High did play a few more games at the Field House during the 2006-07 season when O. J. Mayo and Patrick Patterson led the Highlanders and played before packed crowds.64

While the building was physically grinding down, some events still drew good crowds. During the first decade of the 21st century, the Field House was home to a professional indoor football team: the Huntington Heroes.65 It also was the home rink for a county-sponsored roller hockey program, part of the Greater Huntington Park and Recreation District’s nationally recognized health and recreation program.66

During its later years, the Field House was not used nearly as much as in its heyday; however, it continued to play host to an array of events, including circuses, the long-running annual Kiwanis pancake festival, wrestling exhibitions, comedy shows, model train shows, American Kennel Club dog shows, an event for ham radio operators, boxing matches, and various concerts.67

While the Veterans Memorial Field House hosted many activities and events over the years, it will always be most closely associated with one thing: Marshall basketball.
Chapter 2
“Herd Heaven”
The Legacy of Marshall Basketball at the Field House

If you ask community members what they remember best about the Field House, depending on their ages, some will mention the ice skating, others will note the Golden Gloves competitions, many will recall high school basketball games and tournaments, but, by far, the activity most closely associated with the Field House was Marshall basketball. For the first half of the building’s history, players and fans helped transform the Field House into “Herd Heaven,” which, in many years, gave Marshall one of the most dominating home-court advantages in the nation.

As noted in Chapter 1, the history of Marshall men’s basketball at the Field House began on a high note with an 84-34 drubbing of Fairmont State on February 2, 1950. During that first season at the Field House, 1950-51, Coach Cam Henderson led his team to a mediocre 13-13 record. By this time, Henderson was already a living legend and one of the most influential coaches in basketball history. Generally credited with inventing the fast break and the zone defense, Henderson had turned Marshall into a national basketball power. His teams had dominated the old Buckeye Conference in the late 1930s and then won the NAIB national championship in 1947. As noted earlier, this championship and the growing popularity of Herd basketball had driven the initial need for the Field House.

Following a 15-11 campaign in 1951-52, Marshall began a spectacular run that would continue throughout the decade. Under the leadership of Walt Walowac, the Herd dominated competition, posting a record of 20-4 in 1952-53 and going undefeated (13-0) at the Field House. That season, Marshall also picked up its most lopsided victory at the Field House—a 113-57 shellacking of Virginia Tech.

Walowac’s 1,982 career points would stand as a Marshall all-time record until being broken by Skip Henderson in 1987-88.

The next season, Marshall’s first year in the Mid-American Conference (MAC), was an off-season at 12-9; however, the team still managed to win 9 of 11 at the Field House. Then, the Herd was dominant again in 1954-55, going 17-4, including 12-0 at the Field House—its second undefeated home season in three years and the only two times Marshall would ever go undefeated at the Field House.

During a three-year span, Marshall won a school record 24-straight home games at the Field House. It began with the last five games of 1953-54, continued through all 12 home games in 1954-55, and lasted through the first eight contests of 1955-56, finally ending with a loss to Morehead State. Not coincidentally, this period also paralleled the career of Charlie Slack, the greatest center in Herd history. Slack remains third nationally on the NCAA’s all-time rebounding list.

Charlie Slack (#17 on the left) was a dominating presence in the middle between 1952 and 1956. He remains third nationally on the NCAA’s all-time rebounding list. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Athletic Department]

Walt Walowac, a graduate of Logan High, played in Marshall’s first game ever at the Field House and starred on some of Cam Henderson’s last, and most dominating, teams (1950-54). [image courtesy of Marshall University, Athletic Department]

Cam Henderson was an innovative trailblazer who coached Marshall’s basketball team from 1935 to 1955, including the team’s first five years in the Field House. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Athletic Department]

Huntington’s own Hal Greer broke Marshall’s color barrier, put up phenomenal stats for the Herd (1955-58), and then went on to a hall of fame career in the NBA. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Athletic Department]

As noted earlier, the growing popularity of Herd basketball had driven the initial need for the Field House.
During his senior season, he led the nation in rebounding with a 25.6 average. To demonstrate Slack's dominance during this period, his four years (including his freshman year) remain the top-four single-season rebounding seasons in Marshall history.

Throughout Cam Henderson's hall of fame career, he had never coached a player like his next recruit. A Huntington native, 6'2" guard Hal Greer was a standout at the city's African American Douglass High School. By signing with Marshall, Greer not only broke the school's color barrier but also became the first African American to play college athletics at a traditionally all-white college or university in West Virginia.

It turned out that Henderson's greatest recruit would also be his last. Due to ill health, Henderson resigned in 1955 and died the following year. He was replaced by Jule Rivlin, a former star from Henderson's great Marshall teams of the late 1930s and his first All-American. In 1955-56, Rivlin's first season at the helm of Marshall, his team went 18-5 and won the Mid-American Conference championship. To demonstrate the strength of this team, Greer, a future hall of famer and one of the NBA's 50 Greatest Players, was only fourth on the team in scoring—trailing Slack, Cebe Price, and Paul Underwood. The 1955-56 Herd team advanced to its first NCAA Tournament, losing to rival Morehead State in the first round.

For the 1956-57 campaign, Rivlin's most heralded recruit joined the varsity team as a sophomore: forward Leo Byrd of Huntington. Rivlin also added a 5'10" forward from Moundsville named Sonny Allen, who, after his playing career, would go on to a long coaching career. Despite a star-studded team that featured Greer and Byrd, the Herd missed the presence of Slack, who had graduated. Due largely to the loss of Slack, in 1956-57, the Herd's record dropped to 15-9, and the team lost...
the MAC title to Miami by three games.

Marshall's record improved slightly to 17-7 in 1957-58, and the team led the nation in scoring. It also was Greer's senior season. During 1957-58, he averaged 23.6 points and 11.7 rebounds per game. Over his career, he scored nearly 1,400 points and posted an incredible .545 field goal percentage (on nearly 1,000 attempts). He went on to excel in the National Basketball Association (NBA) with the Syracuse Nationals (1958-63) and Philadelphia '76ers (1963-73), which he helped lead to a national championship in 1967. After his retirement, he was elected to the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame.

With the loss of Greer, the team fell to 12-12 in 1958-59. During one losing streak, Marshall dropped three in a row at home at the Field House. Despite the down season, All-American Leo Byrd's senior season was one of the astounding in Marshall history. His 704 points ranked second in the nation and remained the Marshall record until Skip Henderson topped it in 1987-88. In addition, Byrd's 29.3 scoring average that year is still a school record.

Although it ended on a bit of a down note, the 1950s was a stellar decade for Marshall basketball, including a MAC championship and its first appearance in the NCAA Tournament. The '50s also was a great decade for basketball at the Field House. At the end of the 1950s, the Herd's all-time record at the Field House stood at 96-88. In addition, Byrd's 29.3 scoring average that year is still a school record.

Unfortunately for the Herd, the 1958-59 campaign was a sign of things to come. The early '60s were relatively lean years, as the team posted records of 10-13 in 1959-60, 11-12 in 1960-61, 10-13 in 1961-62, and 7-16 in 1962-63. During the 1962-63 season—Rivlin's last—the Herd managed to win only two games away from the Field House and suffered one of its worst losses in history at defending national champion Loyola (Chicago): 103-58.

The following year, Rivlin was replaced by Ellis Johnson, a former star at nearby Ashland (KY) High School. As a collegiate player, he had led the University of Kentucky to its first national title in 1933. Johnson had been the first of Kentucky head coach Adolph Rupp's many All-Americans. With Johnson in charge, the Herd's downward slide continued briefly, but the momentum would soon shift back in Marshall's direction. During his first two years, he suffered through seasons of 6-17 in 1963-64 and 4-20 in 1964-65. This latter season was the all-time low point in Marshall basketball history. It marked Marshall's worst record percentage since its inaugural 0-1 season in 1906-07 and its worst home record at the Field House: 3-11. Remarkably, although Marshall men's basketball would have other down years, 1964-65 would be its last losing season at the Field House. The team would never again drop below the .500 mark in the friendly confines of the Field House.

Everything began to change in 1965-66, when Johnson settled on an all-sophomore starting lineup that featured George Stone and Bob Redd. The Herd posted a 12-12 record—the first time the team had broken even since the 1958-59 season and its worst home record at the Field House: 3-11. Remarkably, although Marshall men's basketball would have other down years, 1964-65 would be its last losing season at the Field House.

During a home game against Toledo, Johnson was frustrated over
the officiating. Noticing that a stray dog had wandered into the Field House, he brought the dog over to the bench, placed glasses on the dog, and pointed it out to the referee as an obvious jab at the officials. The action earned Johnson a technical foul but, more importantly, a memorable place in Marshall and Field House lore.

Things continued to improve in 1966-67 with the arrival of a 5-11 sophomore point guard from Mullens, West Virginia, named Lewis J. “Danny” D’Antoni. Leading fast break after fast break, D’Antoni seemed to elevate every other player’s game to another level. Along with D’Antoni, Stone, and Redd, teammates Jim Davidson and Bob Allen made 1966-67 a season for the ages. The team posted a 20-8 record and won twice in the National Invitational Tournament (NIT) before losing in Madison Square Garden to Marquette in the semifinals. A high point was George Stone’s 46 points against Nebraska in the second round of the NIT. The Herd also created some magical moments at the Field House, losing only once at home (again to rival Morehead State). In addition, during the 1966-67 season, the fans set a Field House attendance record of 61,000, an average of more than 5,700 per game.

That same season, Herd fans apparently began letting out years of pent-up emotions, as several controversies transpired at the Field House. The first occurred when Ohio University lost a game after officials overruled a potential last-second tying shot by the Bobcats. After the game, an Ohio University spokesman vented his frustrations about the Field House crowd, “The worst thing is when those fans get unruly and start throwing pop corn, soft drinks and pennies after they object to an official’s call. It’s about time somebody put a stop to that.” Then, in February, Marshall handed Toledo its first loss of the season, but the game was marred by a five-minute melee in which Herd fans poured onto the court and a Rocket player was knocked unconscious. A week later, Bowling Green coach Warren “Porky” Scholler went on a tirade after his team lost by four at the Field House. Scholler asserted that the officials had cheated his team because they were intimidated by the fans, “They are afraid to call things. . . . It takes a real man to work there.” Renowned Toledo sportswriter Tom Loomis put it this way, “Going into Marshall’s field house is like walking into mafia headquarters waving a pistol. You may be hurt.” Regardless of whether the protests were justified, the Field House was quickly earning a reputation as one of the most difficult road arenas in the nation for visiting teams.

The Herd followed up 1966-67 with another successful campaign, although not as satisfying as the previous year. In 1967-68, the Herd went 17-8 and set another single-season attendance record at the Field House: 77,300, for an average of nearly 6,000 per game. In a road game, Marshall even pushed national title contender Houston, led by Elvin Hayes, to the brink but lost 102-93. In the last home game of the season, Marshall scored a school-record 131 points to beat Old Dominion, coached by former Marshall player Sonny Allen. Then, in a heartbreaker, it lost to St. Peter’s in double overtime of the opening round of the NIT.
The next year was a disappointment, as Johnson lost seniors Stone, Redd, and Allen from the previous year’s squad. The Herd finished 9-15. Before the 1969-70 campaign, a scandal rocked Marshall. The NCAA had discovered that boosters were giving illegal gifts to players and recruits. As punishment, the NCAA placed Marshall on one year’s probation. Marshall admitted to mistakes and released the following statement, “A carefully documented investigation of the athletic program at Marshall University has indicated irregularities and violation of regulations in the areas of recruiting, financial admissions, practice and control of athletic funds.” The MAC then suspended Marshall from the league indefinitely, forcing the school to become an independent in athletics. In its discussion, the MAC Council of Presidents cited the NCAA violations; however, the council also noted other deficiencies, including the “long standing matter of inadequate facilities.” As part of a potential MAC reinstatement, Marshall committed to building a new 15,000-seat basketball arena—replacing the Field House—and expanding Fairfield Stadium from 11,000 to 25,000 seats for football.

The next two years, the Green Gals went 18-17 and 14-8; during this latter year, 1974-75, the Marshall women were victorious in their first matchup at the Field House with cross-state rival West Virginia University. After that, however, the women’s team began a slide that bottomed out with a 3-18 season in 1977-78. After an 11-16 year in 1978-79, the Green Gals rallied to go 20-12 in 1979-80; unbeknownst at the time, a 50-47 win over Cleveland State on February 23, 1980, would be the Green Gals’ last victory at the Field House. The next season, the last at the Field House, was the worst in the history of Marshall women’s basketball, as the Green Gals posted a record of 1-28. During that dismal 1980-81 season, Marshall won its first game and then lost 28 straight, including all games at the Field House. Its home finale was a 76-45 blowout loss to East Tennessee State. The final season at the Field House also marked Lawson’s last with the team and the last time the team would be known as the Green Gals. Marshall adopted the Lady Herd nickname in 1981-82, the inaugural season at the Henderson Center.27

Beginning in 1969-70, Russell Lee led the Herd in scoring three consecutive years. Lee remains fourth on Marshall’s all-time scoring list. [Image courtesy of Marshall University, Athletic Department]
Marshall for its mistakes off the court. In one game at Morehead State, Herd coaches and players were called for a collective six technical fouls. Still, the players gave their all for the home fans, and the fans responded in kind. Way talked about the home court advantage at the Field House, “Having all the students there cheering is worth seven or eight points for us.”76

Another positive note was the emergence of sophomore Russell Lee, who was destined to become one of the greats in Marshall history.

The 1970-71 season would be tumultuous for a very different and tragic reason. Two weeks before the start of the season, a plane crash took the lives of 75 people, including nearly all of Marshall's varsity football team and coaches and a number of school faculty and community members (see “A Place for Mourning” section in Chapter 1).

Despite the pall that hung over the university and community that season, the men's basketball team managed to improve its record to 16-10, thanks to the leadership of Lee and the arrival of "Danny" D'Antoni's little brother Mike, who had turned down national recruiting offers to play for the Herd. During that year, Marshall also beat Ole Miss to win the first Marshall Memorial Invitational Tournament—inaugurated as an annual event to honor those killed in the plane crash. Years later, Lee remembered that Ole Miss star Johnny Neumann had walked into the Field House and called it a "dump." Lee responded, "I'll show you a dump."

The 1971-72 season was another magical year for the Herd. Stewart Way went back to his former position as a Marshall assistant, switching places with former assistant Carl Tacy, who became head coach. Lee and D'Antoni led Marshall to a 23-4 mark, its best record in 25 years. One of the highlights was a 110-107 victory over No. 8-ranked St. John's at the Field House. For only the second time in its history, the Herd qualified for the NCAA Tournament but lost to Southwestern Louisiana in the first round, 112-101. In the final national rankings, Marshall was 12th in the AP poll and 18th in the UPI poll.

At one point in late February, Marshall had been as high as 8th in the AP.

In 1972-73, Tacy moved on to become head coach of Wake Forest, and the school brought in Bob Daniels as his replacement. At Kentucky Wesleyan, Daniels had won two NCAA College Division national championships. With Marshall, however, he would never be able to match his earlier success. The Herd missed Lee, who had moved on to the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks. It was a season of "ups and downs." Marshall started 7-1 but then lost three of its next five. But, Mike D'Antoni and three fellow seniors—Ty Collins, Bill James, and Randy Noll, a transfer from the University of Kentucky—picked up momentum as the season went on. After a January 31 loss at South Carolina, the Herd won its last eight regular-season games, including an upset in which Oral Roberts suffered its first loss on its home court in 53 games. Marshall finished 20-7 and went on to lose to Fairfield, 80-76, in the first round of the NIT.

Even with the loss of D'Antoni and the three other senior starters, Marshall was able to post a 17-9 record in 1973-74. These previous four seasons (1970-74) had been glorious years for fans at Field House, where the Herd had amassed a home record of 51-6. Things were about to change again, though.

The 1974-75 campaign saw Marshall fall back to the .500 mark at 13-13. The low point was an 87-61 pounding by Akron in the last game of the season—the Herd's third worst loss at the Field House ever and worst home performance since a 34-point loss to Bowling Green during the dismal 1963-64 campaign. Things did not get any better in 1975-76, as the Herd finished 13-14. The bottom fell out in 1976-77 as Marshall dropped to 8-19, including a 6-6 record at the Field House. By the end of the season, the Field House was barely half full for games.79

At end of the 1976-77 season, Daniels turned in his resignation. Marshall first tried to hire former Herd player Sonny Allen to replace Daniels, but Allen turned down the offer and remained as the head coach at Southern Methodist University. In declining the job, he noted
27

Chapter Two “Herd Heaven” The Legacy of Marshall Basketball at the Field House

The high expectations placed on Marshall basketball and said that “not just anyone can coach in Huntington.” Instead, Marshall turned to Stu Aberdeen, an assistant at the University of Tennessee who had recruited the Volunteers’ two recent All-Americans Bernard King and Ernie Grunfeld. Aberdeen was a highly motivational coach who brought a high-energy level to his team and to the community. He also tried to conjure the “ghosts of the Field House” by paying tribute to past Herd legends and exhorting the crowds to rock the building with thunderous noise.

Thanks to two freshmen, Greg White and Ken Labanowski, Aberdeen was able to bring the Herd back to respectability with a record of 14-15—Marshall’s first in the Southern Conference. Marshall’s Carlos “Bunny” Gibson also had a remarkable year in which he set a single-season NCAA record at the foul line with a .944 free throw percentage and set the all-time Marshall single-game scoring record at the Field House by pouring in 50 in a 24-point win over the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga. It also was a good year for the fans. In the last few years under Daniels, attendance at the Field House had dropped off significantly. During Aberdeen’s first season, overall home attendance increased, including four sellouts.

In 1978-79, Marshall fell back to 11-16. Then, another shock hit the Marshall community on June 11, 1979, when Stu Aberdeen died suddenly of a heart attack. He was replaced by assistant Bob Zuffelato. Aberdeen had left Zuffelato with a stock of good players, including one of his last recruits, Charles Jones. Unfortunately for the Herd, another of his last recruits, Leo Rautins, decided to transfer after Aberdeen’s death and went on to a stellar career at Syracuse. In 1979-80, under Zuffelato, the Herd went 17-12. Then, in 1980-81, Marshall’s last season at the Field House, the Herd put up an 18-10 mark and lost only twice at home. On February 16, 1981, in its last game at the Field House, the men’s team defeated Liberty University, 75-63.

Over the years, Marshall had a dominating advantage in home games at the Field House, as the students sat virtually right on top of the court. In the Herd’s 31 years in the Field House, Marshall posted an astounding 296-113 home record.
Chapter Two “Herd Heaven” The Legacy of Marshall Basketball at the Field House

Carlos “Bunny” Gibson had a memorable season during 1977-78, posting an NCAA single-season record with a .944 free throw percentage. That year, he also set a Field House record by putting up 50 points in a game against the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Athletic Department]

Like the D’Antonis, Greg White—another point guard from Mullens—also wore #10. A member of the final Herd team to play at the Field House, White still holds Marshall’s all-time assists record. [image courtesy of Marshall University, Athletic Department]

Marshall’s Record at the Field House

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Chapter 3

Bidding Farewell to the Field House

During the first decade of the 21st century, the Field House continued to be used sporadically for some high school basketball games, graduations, and special events. The county sought funds to implement some long-overdue repairs, most specifically, replacing the standing-seam roof. The failure to fix this problem over the years had led to significant water damage to the structure. Dating back to the 1970s, when development plans for the civic center and the Henderson Center were still on the drawing board, the county had debated the future of the Field House but ultimately deferred most long-term maintenance decisions. With the roofing and electrical issues that emerged in the 21st century, the Field House's problems reached a critical mass.

In 2006, the county had plans drawn up to repair the roof with an elastomeric coating, address roof drainage and gutter problems, and fix the wiring issues; however, county leaders decided that the cost of the repairs would be prohibitive. The county determined that it could no longer make substantial investments in a building that was being used less and less. In 2008, it considered demolishing the Field House and using the site for a new consolidated middle school; however, in the end, another location was chosen.52

Hoping to eliminate its financial burden, the Greater Huntington Park and Recreation District began negotiating with Marshall University to take over the site. In April 2011, Marshall announced a $5.4 million project to demolish the Field House and replace it with a soccer stadium complex. The project would also include a $100,000 veterans’ memorial park—in keeping with the original dedication of the Field House. In addition, the Veterans Memorial Soccer Complex would be made available to local schools and community groups.53

Marshall commissioned architects AECOM of Kansas City, Missouri, to study whether the Field House could be renovated and incorporated into the new site. AECOM found that the building was too badly deteriorated, “Given the extreme state of disrepair, contamination, and investment required there are few legitimate opportunities to re-use the existing field house building for any of the proposed soccer venue. . . . The entire project budget would be consumed and exceeded through this exercise leaving no resources available to construct the field and stands required for the competition venue.” It was estimated that renovating the Field House would cost $3 to $4 million, including $1.75 million for the roof alone.54

With its last days in sight, the 62-year-old Veterans Memorial Field House was fixed up for three last events in early 2012, beginning in January with the 35th annual St. Joe Invitational Tournament. Starting in 2013, the tournament would move to the Big Sandy Superstore Arena. Dr. Hans Dransfield, a 1977 St. Joe graduate, watched his son play in the last tournament to be held at the Field House and said, “The tournament itself isn’t just the brick and mortar of the building, but it’s a tradition in sportsmanship and community. I think the field house should be remembered like a grand old lady. There are so many fond memories. It’s sad to see it torn down, but all good things come to an end.”

A 1966 St. Joe graduate, Tom Houvouras, added, “It’s really the end of an era. The field house has been a great venue for high school basketball, and it’s no secret many people are sad to see it close. It really hasn’t sunk in yet. I’d say when we finish the tournament tonight, that’ll really be the end of the field house, and it’ll be time for us to move on.”

The penultimate event was the fourth annual Hospice of Huntington Beach Party. Then, on February 10, 2012, the Field House opened its doors one last time and welcomed back nearly 100 of Marshall's greatest basketball legends and the fans who had shaken the walls at Herd games between 1950 and 1981. The fans yelled the old Field House chant of “Bring on the Herd!” and former Herd players were introduced one at a time. Each walked past a line of 75 American flags—in honor of the 1970 plane crash victims—held by current Marshall athletes. After the introductions, many of the legends took the court for an alumni game, led by honorary coaches Hal Greer, Sonny Allen, Jack Freeman, John Milhoan, and Charlie Slack.56

The farewell event attracted many of Marshall’s all-time greats. Walt Walowac returned for the building’s swan song. He had held Marshall’s career scoring record for more than three decades and had played in the Herd’s first game in the Field House against Fairmont State in December 1950. The festivities also included popular players from the later years of the Field House, including Ken Labanowski and David Wade, a local high school star who had elected to play for his hometown college. Russell Lee, the All-American from the 1971-72 Tournament team who had outscored Ole Miss’s Johnny Neumann 42 years earlier in the same arena, recalled a “lot of fond memories” but noted that the “fans stand out the most.” As the Herald-Dispatch observed, though, “The loudest ovation was for 75-year-old Hal Greer.” In one of his rare visits back to his native Huntington, the hall of famer was noticeably moved by the fans’ response, “signing autographs and posing for photos late into the night.” The memories came rushing back for Greer—from playing at the Field House as a teenager to dazzling fans as a collegiate star. As he thought back, the 10-time NBA All-Star said humbly, “To this day, my four years at Marshall were the best four years of my life.”57
Chapter Three Bidding Farewell to the Field House

At the farewell event for the Field House, Russell Lee shows off the same form that made him one of Marshall’s all-time greats. [image courtesy of Marshall University]

In February 2012, the Field House became “Herd Heaven” again, as fans welcomed back Marshall basketball players from the 1950s through the recent past. [image courtesy of Marshall University]

Few will remember the score of the farewell game, but the approximately 2,000 fans in attendance likely will never forget this once-in-a-lifetime gathering of the greatest Herd players paying their last respects to a vaunted hall of memories. For many fans, that last visit to the Field House probably brought back memories of the “best four years” of their lives as well.

Charlie Slack (1952-56): “I clearly remember the many great victories, including the MAC championship that we had at the Field House. However, my fondest memory is the unequivocal and warm support we had from the greatest fan base in the country.”

Sonny Allen (1956-59): “Our fans then were true fans! They had great sportsmanship, cheered for us, and congratulated the other team even if they beat us.”


Mike D’Antoni (1970-73): “I have been in basketball for 52 years, and the best four were the years I had at Marshall playing in the Field House. I can still feel the excitement that the Herd fans generated night in and night out.”

Marshall’s plans to demolish the Field House understandably evoked a flood of memories and some consternation in the community. On March 19, Marshall hosted a public meeting at the Memorial Student Center regarding the proposed demolition and the new soccer complex and park.

At the meeting, 85-year-old Navy veteran John Bartholomew summarized what the loss of the building would mean to veterans while also pinpointing the unrealistic profit-making expectations placed on the Field House over the years, “The Field House was built as a memorial, not a money maker, and I think it’s a shame they’re going to tear it down.” Karen Nance, a local historian and preservationist, argued that the “field house is a significant piece of our history and heritage, and I would like to see it saved for my children and grandchildren. You have to remember, you’re removing another generation’s way of remembering the veterans and you can’t put that back.” She suggested that if the entire building could not be saved, the concrete dedication wall should be preserved.89

Marshall agreed that since the new facility will be dedicated to veterans, it would be fitting and appropriate to preserve the original dedication wall. It will be incorporated into the facade of the new soccer stadium. Marshall also preserved the Field House’s original 1950 dedication plaque and plaques honoring the military branches and will display them in the new complex. The Greater Huntington Park and Recreation District auctioned off many of the nonstructural interior features of the Field House, including the basketball floor.

At the farewell event for the Field House, Russell Lee shows off the same form that made him one of Marshall’s all-time greats. [image courtesy of Marshall University]
As fans said “goodbye” to the Field House, they saved the loudest ovation for hall of famer Hal Greer. Standing beside Greer are (left-right) John Mayfield, Sonny Allen, and Walt Walowac. [image courtesy of Marshall University]

(which has been relocated to the Big Sandy Superstore Arena), scoreboards, many of the seats, and even section markers. The interest spurred by the auction showed the Field House’s lasting significance to Huntingtonians and Marshall alumni across the land.98

After the pending demolition was announced, people’s recollections of the Field House flooded in from near and far.

Former Huntington East High School (HEHS) student C. J. Adkins posted in his blog, “The Field House (as it was known to all of us in the east end) played a big role in our lives. . . . There were many warm days in the spring when my classmates and I would run the three blocks down 5th Avenue in our gym clothes, to play touch football or softball games during our Phys Ed period, then back to HEHS for our showers.”99

Sports broadcaster Frank Giardina, who had started his career in the Field House press box, remembered two iconic non-athletes from Marshall basketball in the ’70s, “[Bud] Dailey is still the best public address announcer I have ever heard, and [Leo] Imperi would always sing the National Anthem before each home game in elegant fashion.” He also commented, “No one can take the memories or the place that the Field House held in our state’s sports history.”100

Perhaps nobody summed up the community’s feelings about the Field House better than Joe Ferguson, who had watched the building rise from an “unused over-grown lot” back in 1950, “The field house . . . entertain[ed] my generation in so many ways. It is part of my Huntington ‘memory tapestry’ that, after all of these many years, I can still vividly recall and enjoy during quiet moments.”101
A Field House Scrapbook
Notes

1 Clyde Beal, “Exercising with Memories at the Veterans Memorial Field House,” Huntington Herald-Dispatch, March 29, 2011.


12 Salvatore, “The Field House: A $100,000 a Year Steal.”


Endnotes The Veterans’ Memorial Field House in Huntington, W.Va.: A History

16 Cabell County Commission Records, November 14, 1950.
17 Lavender, “Field House Memories: Readers Share Their Memories of Huntington’s Long-time Fixture.”
33 “Huntington Plans Larger Field House,” Charleston Daily Mail, January 18, 1967; Walter S. Donat, “Proposed Addition to Memorial Field House” and “New Roofing for Veterans Memorial Field House,” architectural drawings, 1966, Marshall University Special Collections. Note that these drawings include the proposed plans for the addition and the new Field House roof but not the proposed additional Field House seating or expanded parking.
34 Lavender, “Field House Memories: Readers Share Their Memories of Huntington’s Long-Time Fixture.”
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40  Salvatore, “The Field House: A $100,000 a Year Steal.”
42  R. V. “Buddy” Graham, personal communication, May 2, 2012; Evans, “Field House: Kids to Usher in a New Era”; “Built-In Checks in Program Will Guard against Goof-Offs.”
50  Hardin, “New Field House Manager Wants to Hear from Public.”
52  Massey, “The 1970s: From Marshall Plane Crash to Buffalo Creek, the Decade Tested Wills.”
53  Moran, “Cabell’s Court Commissions Study On Field House Gift to Marshall.”
54  “Should Memorial Field House Become Big Green Field House?” Huntington Herald-Dispatch, February 18, 1975.
55  “MU Wouldn’t Be Interested In Field House, Hayes Says,” Huntington Herald-Dispatch, April 16, 1976.
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61 Canfield, “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Williamson Field House.”
85 Pierson, “End of Tournament Means Beginning of End for Veterans Memorial Field House.”
86 McCann, “So Long, Field House.”
87 McCann, “So Long, Field House”; “Hal Greer Back in Huntington for Field House Finale”
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89 Hendricks, “Public Speaks Out on Field House Project.”
90 Rosenberger, “Last Events Coming up at Field House.”
91 Adkins, “Saying Goodbye to an ‘Old Friend.’”
93 “Newly Built Arena ‘HUGE’ and Included Ice Skating.”
Appendix A
Description of the Veterans Memorial Field House
Veterans Memorial Field House
Based on an Inspection by Stan Bumgardner
on May 8, 2012

Location and Setting
The Veterans Memorial Field House was built in 1949-50 in Huntington, West Virginia, as a multipurpose recreational facility for the community, home for Marshall College (later Marshall University) basketball and local high school basketball teams, and event venue. It extends west and north from the corner of 5th Avenue and 26th Street (see plat of the property in Appendix B). It is located about six blocks east of the easternmost portion of Marshall University’s campus, which is located just east of the heart of downtown Huntington. The neighborhoods immediately to the north and west are mostly residential, while the areas to the south and east—lining 5th Avenue—are commercial in nature. It is adjacent to Woody Williams Field, a ball field used for multiple purposes and named for West Virginia Medal of Honor recipient Hershel “Woody” Williams. A chain-link fence surrounds the field. Lighting towers, which were installed in the 1980s, surround the field.

The two-story Moderne-style Field House consists of a steel frame construction on a concrete pile foundation. The roof has a flat deck, the exposed portions of which are covered by rubber membrane. On top of the deck is a built-up standing-seam roof system, which covers all but a small border area (where the membrane roof is exposed). This system is hipped on the corners of the east and west ends and forms ridge lines that parallel those ends of the building. Another ridge runs east-west between these ridge lines through the center of the building. A small space between the flat roof and base of the built-up roof system forms a narrow internal gutter around the building, which includes roof drains at regular intervals. The built-up roof includes 10 large vents that presumably are hooked into exhaust fans in the ceiling of the main arena. Other smaller vents are located closer to the perimeter and likely ventilate the Upper Concourses and concession areas. From early photos, it appears that the standing-seam roof was built directly on top of the original membrane roof at a fairly early point in the building’s history—possibly within the first 10 years of its completion.

The walls are masonry: brick and slag block with some poured concrete, including the window sills and dedication wall. The building is essentially rectangular with four diagonal corner entrances. It measures approximately 117’ x 41’ x 200’ x 41’ x 117’ x 41’ x 200’ x 41’. The main entrances are on the southwest, southeast, northeast, and northwest corners.

The only original architectural drawings that have been located are a series of revised electrical plans, dated May 1949 (see Appendix C). Although newspapers and county commission records indicate that full design drawings were submitted by architect Lewis Stettler in 1947, these could not be located. A thorough search was conducted by the Greater Huntington Park and Recreation District and Marshall University. In addition, the author conducted unsuccessful searches at the Cabell County Courthouse and West Virginia State Archives. The aforementioned electrical plans, dated two years after the initial drawings, were located in the files of the Greater Huntington Park and Recreation District and turned over to Marshall University Special Collections, located in the James Morrow Library. The research also uncovered drawings for additions and repairs that were never implemented. These include a proposed addition and new roof in 1966 and roof and electrical repairs in 2006.

Ownership of the building was transferred from the Greater Huntington Park and Recreation District to Marshall University in May 2012. It is scheduled for demolition in June 2012 to make way for the new Veterans Memorial Soccer Complex.

Field House Exterior
Southwest Facade
This is one of four primary entrances to the Field House. The facade is mostly brick. It includes three sets of metal-and-glass double-hung doors, divided by columns. A slightly angled overhang with a chrome veneer provides shelter from the weather for patrons, and the columns continue above it. This overhang wraps around to the south and southeast facades, picks up again on the northeast, wraps slightly onto the north, and occurs again on the northwest, again wrapping slightly onto the north. Downspouts are spaced periodically to drain water from these overhangs; however, many no longer exist or are no longer functioning fully due to rotting and other damage.

The top portion features six sections of glass block windows. The top middle section includes a six-by-four pattern surrounded by two sections of five-by-four configurations, with no louvered windows. The bottom three sections include a six-by-nine pattern in the middle surrounded by two five-by-nine patterns; each of the three bottom sections includes a rectangular louvered
window centered in the second row from the top. This is the same set of windows described below in the West Balcony section. These windows are surrounded by concrete on all sides except the bottom, which is brick. At the top of this facade are five, evenly spaced, applied, gold stars.

A digital “Welcome to the Veterans Memorial Field House” sign has been removed and will be repurposed.

**South Facade**
The veneer from the overhang on the Southwest Facade wraps around and continues along the entire extent of the South Facade. It divides the elevation visually into lower and upper sections. This facade is dominated by a center brick section that protrudes from the two sections on either side and that features the concrete dedication wall. The dedication wall is centered horizontally on the brick section and extends vertically to cover the entire upper section of the elevation. It reads as follows:

**ERECTED 1950 A.D.**
**DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO GAVE IN FREEDOM’S CAUSE**
**THE LAST FULL MEASURE OF DEVOTION**
1917-1918
1941-1945

This wall includes top and bottom lighting for nighttime viewing. Marshall University plans to incorporate this dedication wall into the facade of its new soccer complex on the site.

The dedication wall is surrounded by two vertical sections of glass block windows—each in a four-by-eighteen configuration with a rectangular louvered window in the second row from the top. The windows are surrounded by concrete on all sides except the bottom, which is brick. These are the same windows described below in the south (exterior wall) concession area of the South Upper Concourse. The rest of this center section is brick. At the top, there are two applied gold stars on either side of the dedication wall. The bottom section of this center part features two small vents and what used to be two sets of glass block six-by-three windows. However, at some point, the louvers and many of the glass blocks were removed to allow for the installation of two air-conditioning window units. At the time of the inspection in May 2012, one of these air conditioners had been removed, and the space it once occupied had been boarded up.

On either side of the dedication wall are two lengthy spans divided vertically into four sections each by concrete columns. Like the dedication wall, these spans also are divided horizontally by the wrapping chrome overhang. The bottom section is brick, and the top is painted concrete block.

The lower level includes six fifteen-by-three glass window block sections with two louvers each in the middle row. These are located in the South Lower Concourse ticket offices and concession areas. For one of these sections, the louver and several glass blocks have been removed to allow for the installation of an air-conditioning window unit, which was still in place in May 2012. The upper level of this elevation (on either side of the center dedication section) features eight glass block window sections in four-by-four configurations with louvers centered on the second row from the top.

On the east end of this elevation, there are four ticket windows covered by hinged pieces of plywood. The west end includes two boarded-up ticket windows.

**Southeast Facade**
This elevation is identical to the Southwest Facade. The glass block windows are the same ones described below in the sections on the Southeast Balcony and the East Upper Concourse.

**East Facade**
This elevation consists of brick on the lower level with painted concrete block on the upper portion. The entire elevation is divided into six vertical sections by brick columns. The lower level includes six sets of glass block windows—each in a seven-by-three pattern with a rectangular louvered window centered in the middle row. In the middle of this elevation are two fire exits. These are the same features described below under East Lower Concourse (east side).

The upper level consists of three fire escapes with two doors each. These are the same features described below under East Upper Concourse. It also includes six light fixtures that appear to be original. There also are three downspouts that connect with the roof drains. In the middle part of the upper level are three evenly spaced vents.

At the top of the elevation are six evenly spaced sets of glass block windows—each with a five-by-four configuration and a rectangular louvered window centered in the second row from the top. The center dedication section is brick. This elevation is identical to the Southwest Facade with one exception: The space between the two window sections is finished in brick rather than concrete. The glass block windows are the same ones described below in the sections on the Northeast Balcony and the East Upper Concourse.

**Northeast Facade**
This elevation is identical to the Southwest Facade. The center two sections are built out slightly and feature a soffit at the top created by the north broadcast booth/press box. The lower level features a boarded-up ticket window on the east end of the elevation, five sets of boarded-up double-hung windows, and another boarded-up ticket window on the west end of the elevation. These are the
same windows described below in the section about the ticket office and concession stands under North Lower Concourse.

The upper level features three sets of fire escapes, with two doors each. These are the same fire exits described below under North Upper Concourse. By the time of the May 2012 inspection, the fire escape stairs had been removed. Like the East Facade, there are six light fixtures that appear to be original. At the top of this elevation are 10 equally spaced sets of glass block windows—each has a four-by-four pattern, with a rectangular louvered window centered in the second row from the top. The center two of these windows are in the broadcast booth/press box area. The louvered window has been removed from one of the sections for the purpose of running conduit and a pipe to an external heat pump unit at the base of the wall. These are the same windows described below under North Balcony.

This elevation also includes two downspouts connected to the roof drains.

Northwest Facade

This elevation is identical to the Northwest Facade. A baseball scoreboard (used for games at Woody Williams Field) is still installed on this elevation.

West Facade

This elevation is identical to the East Facade with the following exceptions. There is a loading dock garage door (the physical door is relatively new, but the garage entrance was part of the original design) on the northern end of this elevation. Most of the external mechanical and electrical units are installed at the base of this elevation (e.g., three heat pump units, conduit, electric meter, water meter and line). Conduit and pipes extend from one of the West Balcony window sections to the heat pumps. In addition, instead of the six sets of glass block windows on the lower level (as seen on the East Facade), the West Facade has only two sets of six-over-six double-hung windows; another window was boarded up with plywood at some point and used to run conduit and pipes to the mechanical room. Finally, unlike the East Facade, there are no small vents.

Field House Interior

General

The masonry walls of the building are almost entirely cinder block on steel construction. One exception is noted below for the South Lower Concourse. All of the fixed seats (with backs) are located in the south, north, and east balconies, while the lower section of the building (north and south sides) and the West Balcony include only bleachers (see below for more complete descriptions). For a seating plan, see Appendix D. The theater-style folding chairs are all wooden with wooden seat backs with iron end caps; the bleachers are all steel-supported wooden planks.

Main Floor

The main surface of the auditorium/court area comprises a tartan floor, which was installed in 1974. It replaced the facility's original concrete floor. The floor extends to walls on the east and west ends and to bleachers on the north and south sides. It includes red semicircles on the east and west ends that appear to have been painted for hockey after 1974. Closer to the center of the floor are blue semicircles, apparently painted in 1974, for basketball. A blue center circle for basketball is in the middle of the floor.

On both the north and south sides, there are 10 sections of bleachers, each with nine rows. The ceiling in this area features a drop ceiling with acoustical tiles (installed in 1974) in large sections (10 x 8). Ductwork cuts through the southernmost and northernmost sections of tiles.

Historically, the facing of both the east and west balconies had scoreboards mounted on the railings; however, by the time of the inspection in May 2012, these had been removed and sold at auction. In addition, retractable basketball backboards used to be mounted to the strut channel; these, too, had been removed by May 2012.

The facing of the East Balcony features the words “Veterans Memorial Field House” in brown block letters. In the center of the east elevation is a stairwell leading to two dressing rooms on the Upper Concourse (see below for the description of the East Upper Concourse). This elevation also includes what appears to be an original water fountain.

On the west elevation of the lower level, there are two offices with three doors—at some point, one of the doors was blocked off to expand the more central office. Both include an adjoining restroom. On the south end of the west elevation, there is a large maintenance office with a panel for the lighting system, an adjoining mechanical room, and two sets of six-over-six double-hung windows. As with the east, this elevation includes what appears to be an original water fountain.

South Balcony

This area features five uneven sections, divided by four entrances, each with 13 rows. In terms of seating, the sections range in number from 13 to 32. A total of 24 steps lead to the press box/broadcast booth, which is centered on this elevation. The press box/broadcast booth is divided into two identical sections. Both are built of painted cinder block, with wooden counters and framing. On the exterior wall, there are four equally spaced sets of glass block windows on either side of the press box/broadcast booth. Both sections of the press box/broadcast booth include one set of glass block windows. On this elevation, each of the 10 sets of windows has a four-by-four pattern, with a rectangular louvered window centered in the second row from the top; all are painted yellow.
Southeast Balcony
This area features 13 rows divided into two sections. A corner entrance area divides the lower section, allowing for only one to three seats on either side of the first nine rows. The top four rows—above the entrance—include six to eight seats each. The exterior wall includes three sections of adjacent glass window block sections: a six-by-four configuration surrounded by two five-by-four patterns. There are no louvered windows in this set; all windows are painted yellow. These are the same windows that comprise the upper three sections of the window feature described above in the section on the Northeast Facade.

East Balcony
This area features three uneven sections, divided by two entrances, each with 13 rows. The number of seats in each row varies from 14 to 30. The exterior wall includes six sets of glass block windows—each with a five-by-four configuration and a rectangular louvered window centered in the second row from the top; all are painted yellow.

Northeast Balcony
This area is identical to the Southeast Balcony. It features 13 rows divided into two sections. A corner entrance area divides the lower section, allowing for only one to three seats on either side of the first nine rows. The top four rows—above the entrance—include six to eight seats each. The exterior wall includes three sections of adjacent glass window block sections: a six-by-four configuration surrounded by two five-by-four patterns. There are no louvered windows in this set; all windows are painted yellow. These are the same windows that comprise the upper three sections of the window feature described above in the section on the Northeast Facade.

North Balcony
This area is identical to the South Balcony. It features five uneven sections, divided by four entrances, each with 13 rows. In terms of seating, the sections range in number from 13 to 32. A total of 24 steps lead to the press box/broadcast booth, which is centered on this elevation. The press box/broadcast booth is divided into two identical sections. Both are built of painted cinder block, with wooden counters and framing. On the exterior wall, there are four equally spaced sets of glass block windows on either side of the press box/broadcast booth. Both sections of the press box/broadcast booth include one set of glass block windows. On this elevation, each of the 10 sets of windows has a four-by-four pattern, with a rectangular louvered window centered in the second row from the top; all are painted yellow.

West Balcony
The West Balcony is an anomaly in this mostly symmetrical arena. Originally, it was intended to mirror the East Balcony; however, due to cost overruns during the construction, the plans were scaled back. Technically, it is not a built-out balcony but rather part of the Upper Concourse; historically, though, it has always been referred to as the West Balcony. As a result, architecturally, its features are an amalgamation of the upper concourses and balconies.

The West Balcony is a flat poured concrete platform. It features four sections of built-in bleachers with 12 rows each. The walls are covered in acoustical tiles that appear to date to improvements made in 1974. Above these are six sets of glass block windows—each in a five-by-four pattern with a rectangular louvered window centered in the second row from the top; all are painted brown. The louvered window on one of these has been removed to allow for the running of various mechanical, electrical, and plumbing pipes and perhaps conduit.

Structurally, there is a drop-off to the first floor near the north end of the West Balcony. This cut-out area was used to create additional clearance for the loading dock/garage ramp entrance on the first level. Although no longer in place when the building was inspected in May 2012, a wooden platform used to cover the drop-off, allowing patrons to access a stairwell to the Lower Concourse located in the northwest corner.

Each corner of the West Balcony (northwest and southwest) features a stairwell to the Lower Concourse and a ca. 1974 air-handling unit. Each corner wall features six sections of glass block windows. The top-three sections include a six-by-four pattern in the middle surrounded by two five-by-four configurations, with no louvered windows. The bottom three sections include a six-by-nine pattern in the middle surrounded by two five-by-nine patterns; each of the three bottom sections includes a rectangular louvered window centered in the second row from the top. All windows are painted brown.

South Lower Concourse
The west end of the north (seating/arena) side of this area includes a temporary partition built to cover the backside of the bleachers. The east end of the north side includes a built-out area with stone veneer that was used to display plaques honoring the different military branches and the 20th-century Medal of Honor recipients from West Virginia. Just east of this space on the south (exterior) wall, there used to be a dedication plaque for the building. By the time of the May 2012 inspection, all of these plaques had been removed for reuse in the new soccer complex.

Between the temporary partition and the built-out plaque area, the north side of this concourse consists of a storage room, an office, another storage room, another office, and an electrical/mechanical room. The south side consists of a built-in ticket office with two exterior ticket windows; a three-bay concession stand; two offices (each with a small vent and a six-by-three glass window block section that has been partially replaced by an air-conditioning window units); two restrooms; an interior ticket office; a storage room; another three-bay concession stand with stainless steel stationary sinks; and...
another ticket office on the western end of the elevation, with four exterior ticket windows and one interior ticket window. Each concession stand features two sets of glass block windows with fifteen-by-three configurations with rectangular louvered windows centered in the middle row. However, at some point, in the westernmost stand, the louver and some of the glass blocks were removed from one of the sections to allow for the installation of an air-conditioning window unit.

Southeast Lower Concourse

This area features only three sets of glass-and-metal double doors.

East Lower Concourse

The east (exterior wall) side of this area consists of six sets of glass block windows—each in a seven-by-three pattern with a rectangular louvered window centered in the middle row. In the middle of this elevation (with three sets of windows on either side) are two fire exits.

The west (seating/arena) side consists of two small utility closets, a locker room with restrooms and showers, two storage rooms, another locker room with restrooms and showers, and two more small utility closets. Both locker rooms have exits that lead to the main floor.

Northeast Lower Concourse

This area features only two sets of glass-and-metal double doors and one set of plywood-and-metal double doors.

North Lower Concourse

This concourse is on the backside of the building (the other three sides were much more visible to the public). The south (seating/arena) side of this area does not include a temporary partition, so the backside of the bleachers is accessible on the west and east ends—unlike the South Lower Concourse.

In the center part of the south side of this concourse is a storage room, an office, a meeting room with headboard wainscotting and an adjacent room that includes a sink and counter, and an electrical/mechanical room. The north (exterior wall) side includes a ticket office with one exterior ticket window (with also one six-over-six double-hung window) and two three-bay concession stands (each with two sets of six-over-six double-hung windows).

Northwest Lower Concourse

This area features only two sets of metal-and-glass double doors and an electrical room.

West Lower Concourse

There is not a West Lower Concourse; rather, the area that would serve as the concourse comprises a series of offices (described above in the Main Floor section).

Southwest Lower Concourse

This area consists only of three sets of glass-and-metal double doors, with a floor-mounted railing between each set.

South Upper Concourse

On the north (seating/arena) side are four stairwells leading from the Lower Concourse and four sets of steps leading into the seating area. This area also includes two three-bay concession stands on the north (seating/court) side and one two-bay concession stand on the south (exterior wall) side. The space for the concession stand on the south side is made possible by the portion of the South Facade that is built out for the dedication wall. The exterior wall in this concession area features two four-by-eighteen configurations with rectangular louvered windows centered in the second row from the top. These are the same windows described above in the section on the South Facade.

East Upper Concourse

Each corner (southeast and northeast) in this area includes one stairwell leading from the Lower Concourse and a set of steps leading into the seating area; the main part of the East Balcony includes two more stairwells from the Lower Concourse and two more sets of steps leading into the seating area. Each corner also includes a ca. 1974 air-handling unit and three sections of glass block windows—the middle section is a six-by-nine pattern surrounded by two five-by-nine patterns, all with louvered windows centered in the second row from the top. These are the bottom three sections of the large glass block window features visible on the exterior southeast and northeast facades.

Between the two corners, the east (exterior wall) side includes six fire exits. The west (seating/arena) side includes a public men's restroom, a water fountain, two larger restrooms/dressing rooms with showers and steps leading down to the main floor, and a public women's restroom.

North Upper Concourse

On the north (exterior wall) side are six fire exits. On the south (seating/arena) side are four stairwells leading from the Lower Concourse and four sets of steps leading into the seating area. This area also includes two three-bay concession stands on the south (seating/court) side. Unlike the South Upper Concourse, there is not a concession stand on the exterior wall—just the fire exits.

West Upper Concourse

This area actually is the same as the West Balcony. See above for a description of the West Balcony.
Appendix B

Plat of Survey for the Greater Huntington Park & Recreation District Showing Property in Block No. 248 City of Huntington Cabell County, West Virginia
Appendix C

Veterans Memorial Field House
Alternate Electrical Plan
Submitted by Lewis E. Stettler
May 1, 1949
Appendix D

Veterans Memorial Field House

Seating Plan
Appendix E

Veterans Memorial Field House
Photographs

All photographs taken by Rick Haye, Marshall University photographer
December 2011
Southeast Facade, Veterans Memorial Field House
Northeast Facade, Veterans Memorial Field House
Dedicated
To those who gave
in Freedom's cause
The last full measure
of devotion
1917-1918
1941-1945
Erected 1930 A.D.

Dedication Wall, South Facade, Veterans Memorial Field House
Main Floor, Bleachers, and Acoustical Ceiling Tiles, Facing Northeast, Veterans Memorial Field House
Main Scoreboard, Veterans Memorial Field House
Plaques Honoring Military Branches and West Virginia’s 20th Century Medal of Honor Recipients, South Lower Concourse, Facing North, Veterans Memorial Field House
MEMORIAL FIELD HOUSE
1950

DEDICATED TO THOSE MEN WHOSE SELFLESS DEVOTION
AND CIVIC PRIDE CREATED THIS FIELD HOUSE AS A
MEMORIAL TO OUR HEROIC DEAD TO BE HELD
IN TRUST FOR THE WELFARE OF THE LIVING

MAX K. JONES
HERMAN BROWN  OLIN NUTTER
WALKER LONG  ARTIE HOLLEY
EARL HEINER  KENNETH STETTLER
HUGH KINCAID  GWYNN EDMONDS

Dedication Plaque, 1950, South Lower Concourse, Facing South, Veterans Memorial Field House