

The Cincinnati Reds Home Field History

The Cincinnati Reds have played at eight ballparks, erected in five locations, since their professional debut in 1869.

Union Grounds was their first home, located about two blocks directly south of the future Crosley Field. The Reds played here from 1867 to 1870, when the team disbanded. Union Grounds was located just about where the fountain is now in front of the Cincinnati Museum Center (Union Terminal).

In 1876, the Reds reformed and built the Avenue Grounds, about one mile north of Union Grounds. This park was eventually discovered to be just too far from downtown to be practical. So, in 1880, they moved south again, to the Bank Street Grounds, located about two blocks north of the future Crosley Field. This stay was short-lived, also.

Losing their lease at Bank Street, [ironically, to the new Union Association, Cincinnati Unions (referred to as the Onions)] the Reds moved south two blocks to Findlay and Western, building League Park in 1884 on an old brick yard. They stayed at this location for 86 years, until 1970, playing in the three parks erected on this site [League Park (1884-1901), Palace of the Fans (1902-1911), and Redland/Crosley Field (1912-1970)].

Harry Hake designed Redland Field at a cost of \$225,000. The field remained Redland Field until 1934 when Powel Crosley, Jr. purchased the Reds, and the ballpark, and renamed the park Crosley Field.

In 1933, the directors of Cincinnati's Central Trust Bank hired Larry MacPhail to run the Reds. MacPhail's first task is to bring some talent to the team. In 1934, MacPhail convinces Powel Crosley, Jr. to purchase the controlling interest in the Reds and Redland Field. MacPhail's appeal was to Crosley's civic pride. Crosley did not want to see the city lose its team. He never anticipated making any money with the team; he only hoped to minimize his losses. He purchased both the team and the ballpark for less than \$500,000. **MACPHAIL INSISTED THAT CROSLY RENAME THE PARK AFTER HIMSELF, AND THE PARK BECAME CROSLY FIELD.**

Also in 1934, the original Redland Field scoreboard was extensively remodeled with an art deco flavor. Larry MacPhail was a promoter with a talent and flair for creating excitement. At the outset of the 1934 season, to quote Lee Allen (*The Cincinnati Reds*, 1948), "MacPhail had painted the park, he had dolled up the ushers, and installed cigarette girls so cute they made the customers want to smoke themselves to death".

During the 58 years the Reds played at Crosley Field, Crosley was also used for Negro League games, circuses, concerts, rodeos, boxing matches, auto thrill shows, parades, etc. Crosley was also the host to the first Major League night game, played under the lights on May 24, 1935.

Crosley Field was a great place to take in a ball game. So why, after all those years, did it finally die? The fan base moving to suburbia and the automobile killed it. Crosley had always been a ballpark that was walked to or arrived at on a streetcar. But, in the 1950's that all changed. The fans began driving themselves to the games, and massive traffic jams became a nightmare, both going to and leaving the ballgames. Game starts even had to be delayed at times due to the patrons being stuck in traffic. Under threat of the team leaving Cincinnati (probably for San Diego), the city began buying the surrounding property and building parking lots. With the surrounding neighborhood gone, Crosley Field lost its charm and character. It was now an island in a sea of parking lots. The neighborhood declined, and crime prevailed around the park. Patrons no longer felt safe going to Crosley Field, and police manned the roof of the park with binoculars and radios, trying to spot vandals and thieves working the parking lots. Enough was enough, and the decision was made to move.

Finally, in mid-season 1970, the Reds moved to Riverfront Stadium. This marked the first time the Reds had ever played anywhere other than the west side of Cincinnati. Crosley Field, now abandoned, became an impound lot for automobiles, and was finally torn down in 1972 for development as commercial property.

In the year 2003 the Reds moved from Riverfront Stadium (renamed Cinergy Field) to their new home, The Great American Ball Park, built right next door, as play continued through 2002 at Cinergy Field.