Steven M. Bedford

West Point's Michie Stadium

Balancing History and 21st Century Collegiate Sport Programs

Many of the stadia associated with major collegiate athletic programs were built more than 50 years ago and are associated with numerous great moments in sports. Some are located in National Register historic districts and their massive presence often forms an important component of college campuses. However, most stadia were designed for athletic programs whose level of competition was far less intense than today. Prized student athletes now often reject a college's overtures if the athletic facilities are not state-of-the-art. Television contracts to air Saturday afternoon gridiron conflicts are often dependent upon press box technological capabilities. These problems are most telling at our country's military academies, which are bound by federal regulations to preserve the historic character of their sites, but require modern facilities in order to attract the top student athletes and lucrative media contracts. The United States Military Academy's (USMA) efforts to upgrade West Point's Michie Stadium are a noteworthy case study.

As most of us know from our high school history, the geologic setting of the West Point area had its greatest influence during the Revolutionary War. The narrow width of the Hudson River at West Point, coupled with its sharp bend and swift currents, made this an ideal spot for colonial fortification. The Great Chain spanned the Hudson between Constitution Island and what is now the North Dock area and prevented British ships from sailing up the river beyond this point. American fortifications, including Fort Putnam and Redoubt #4, located 480 feet above river level and overlooking what is now Michie Stadium, gave the colonists control of the Hudson and the Highlands. This military strategy prevented the British from geographically splitting the colonies along the Hudson River.

The Academy, first established in 1802 at West Point, New York, has expanded over time to embrace thousands of acres and hundreds of buildings. However, it was not until the mid-19th century that U.S. Military Academy maps included the Michie Stadium parcel within official boundaries. Late-19th-century topographic surveys depict the area as low-lying and undeveloped.

In 1902, Congress appropriated $5,500,000 to improve the Academy's physical plant. A competition for the design of the improvements, held in 1903, was won by Cram Ferguson & Goodhue in association with the Olmsted Brothers firm. This massive project created much of the current USMA campus. The Academy's decision to embrace the Gothic style created what architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler described as an "inspiring success" ["The New West Point," *Architectural Record*, 29 (1911): 94]. The Lusk Reservoir, which adjoins Michie Stadium, was built in the first years of the 20th century and is depicted in the 1904 plans of proposed improvements to the entire military reservation. Mills Road, which defines the public approach to Michie Stadium, was also depicted on this early facilities plan. However, Cram

Aerial view of Michie Stadium, United States Military Academy, West Point (c. 1980). Photo by John E. Pellino.

Ferguson & Goodhue had made no provisions for an athletic stadium.

The creation of Michie Stadium dates from the period when college football began as one of America's great spectator sports and U.S. Military Academy teams were among the best in the country. Prior to the construction of the stadium, Army football games were held on the main parade ground and were viewed from temporary steel bleachers that annually required 1,600 man-hours to erect and an equal amount of time to disassemble and store. This use of the main parade ground prevented its use for any other purpose during football season and removal and erection of the bleachers were costly. In 1922, the Academy's superintendent formed a committee to investigate the issue of creating a new and permanent football stadium with seating for approximately 20,000 to be located somewhere within the Academy's reservation.

At the same time, several other colleges and universities, many of whom were U.S. Military Academy opponents on the gridiron, were in the process of building (or had just completed) equally large or larger stadiums, including among others Ohio State University (1920), Brown University (1926), Northwestern (1926), University of Pennsylvania (1923), Cornell University (1925), University of California (1921), Princeton University (1920), and the Rose Bowl (1925). Collegiate football powerhouses, Harvard and Yale, had completed their massive stadiums in the first decade of the 20th century. By 1931, there were 40 large stadiums in the United States whose capacity ranged from 20,000 to 125,000. Twenty-two of these stadiums belonged to educational institutions ["Stadium Planning and Design," *Architectural Record* 69: 151-176 (1931)].

After evaluating four potential sites on the Academy's grounds, the committee and superintendent agreed that open land adjacent to the Lusk Reservoir had sufficient room, adequate vehicular access, and proximity to the campus gymnasium. The site was a wet marshy area just to the west of Lusk Reservoir and was often described as a frog pond. Initial plans calling for wood bleachers similar to those at Yankee Stadium were submitted by Major C.P. Gross, USMA's Engineering Officer, in April 1923. In May 1923, it was decided to make the stadium suitable for both intercollegiate football and baseball, which would require additional land and a realignment of the road along Lusk Reservoir (The West Point Stadium, 1924).

Earth moving activities for the new stadium began in August 1923. Massive amounts of bedrock were removed from the southern edge of the Fort Putnam ridge and extensive filling was necessary to stabilize what had once been a low-lying, seasonally inundated area (Michie Stadium, photographic files, USMA Archives). As construction on the field progressed, the enthusiasm and support of USMA's athletic community increased and so did the overall scope of the project. Wood bleachers gave way to steel and finally to concrete. The Osborne Engineering Company of Cleveland Ohio, designers of Yankee Stadium, donated initial plans for a concrete stadium. By a special provision in the Military Academy Bill of May 1924, additional funds were loaned to the Athletic Board, the USMA entity responsible for the operation of the stadium. Construction then proceeded on a concrete stadium whose cost totaled approximately $300,000 (The West Point Stadium, 1924).

By December 1924, the broad, U-shaped stadium had taken its place on the western side of the football field. Its gothic towers and crenellation were in complete design harmony with the rest of the Academy. Formed in concrete, Gothic arches completed the image. The eastern side of the stadium was left open to accommodate a baseball outfield. During football season, wooden bleachers lined the eastern sidelines of the football field. Shortly after completion of the main body of the stadium, gothicized gates, panels and ticket booths were designed by Osborne Engineering and installed between 1925 and 1928 (The West Point Stadium, 1924; stadium files, USMA Archives). In 1928, the facility was christened Michie Stadium after Dennis Michie, the captain of the Academy's first football team. Lt. Michie was later killed in Cuba during the Spanish American War (letter, Major General Wm. R. Smith to Major General Fred W. Sladen, June 19, 1928, stadium files, USMA Archives).

Michie Stadium was the Academy's athletic home during the glory years of West Point football. During the mid-1940s, the Army football team was the best in the nation. Under the leadership of legendary coach Earl Blaik, Army was unbeaten for three years (1944-1946) and produced two Heisman trophy winners. "During World War II while commanding U.S. forces in the Pacific, (Douglas) MacArthur set the war

aside every Monday morning each fall to spend hours pouring over reports of Army's latest (football) game. After each victory, he wired congratulations; after each loss, he wrote lengthy advice to Coach Earl "Red" Blaik (Watson 1999).

In 1960, the historic core of the U.S. Military Academy was designated a national historic landmark. Approximately 15 years later, the U.S. Military Academy Historic District was established, which covers over 227 buildings including the Michie Stadium athletic complex. A National Park Service study (1993) concluded that more than 350 additional Academy buildings, located in the immediate area surrounding the historic district, are historically significant. Cultural resources within the USMA Historic District range from 18th-century redoubts to early-20th-century barracks, classroom buildings, chapels, and designed landscapes. Each building or structure, as well as the landscape, retains historic integrity and clearly conveys a strong association with military use and education.

Over time, structural and functional aspects of Michie Stadium have been altered or changed. In the 1960s, the eastern bleachers became permanent concrete structures, while several tiers of stands were added to the western side of the stadium as well. In order to accommodate the bleachers, the adjoining Mills Road was straightened and Lusk Reservoir was filled in slightly. Despite these alterations, Michie Stadium possesses sufficient historic and design integrity to be considered a contributing structure in the historic district.

Michie Stadium clearly does not exist in a vacuum. It is surrounded by historic resources of all kinds, most importantly Fort Putnam, which is open to the public, and Redoubt #4, located on the promontories above the natural bowl formed by Lusk Reservoir. Michie Stadium forms an important part of the viewscape in the area surrounding Lusk Reservoir. Due to the topography of the United States Military Academy, the stadium is not visible from the lower sections of the Academy and consequently any potential visual impact would be either on the approaches to the site or on vistas from above the stadium.

Corps of cadets cheering on Army football in Michie Stadium.

The stadium is bounded on the north by historic Fort Putnam, on the east side by Mills Road, which is an Olmsted-designed campus corridor, and Howze Field, an open grass playing field, on the south elevation. Michie Stadium's west side has been significantly altered over the last two decades. In the early 1980s, the 131,000-square-foot Holleder Sports Center was completed outside the southwest corner of Michie Stadium. Although the architecture of the hockey and basketball Holleder Sports Center complex is not reflective of the dominant historic elements of the landmark campus, it is fortunately separated and visually buffered from the main campus by Howze Field.

The west side of the stadium is further compromised by a road system that abuts the stadium's security fencing and a series of terraced parking lots. Created by landfill, these lots are artificial terraces. As with the Holleder Sports Center, this road and parking complex is separated from the pedestrian-oriented main campus.

The U.S. Military Academy is in the process of upgrading its facilities around Michie Stadium. Life safety issues require a seismic retrofit for the stadium. In addition to creating improved training facilities, the USMA needs to improve structural and aesthetic conditions at the Michie Stadium complex in order to make the prospect of televising football games from the stadium more appealing.

Consequently, the USMA has proposed construction of the Kimsey Athletic Center-Randall Hall; erection of new scoreboards and a press box; and improvement of the lighting in the stadium. The athletic center will physically abut Michie Stadium's southern grandstand and be approximately 20 feet taller than the existing facilities; the new structure will visually subordinate, to some extent, the stadium. The eastern edge of the Kimsey Athletic Center-Randall Hall will be stepped back with a curved facade that somewhat echoes the architectural character of

Michie Stadium. The proposed new press box will rise one story above the existing press facility, while an electronic scoreboard will extend four stories above the northern grandstand. These impacts have been assessed by Historical Perspectives Inc. during a series of environmental studies.

Individually and collectively, these alterations pose difficult design choices due to the stadium's location within the viewshed of two Revolutionary War-era forts and in the middle of a nationally significant historic district. The U.S. Military Academy has initiated consultation with the New York State Historic Preservation Office with respect to creating a design concept that will minimize physical alterations to the historic integrity of Michie Stadium, be visually compatible with the national historic landmark district, and accomplish a much-needed facilities upgrade to ensure the successful participation of Army's 20th-century intercollegiate athletic programs.

References

Anonymous. "Stadium Planning and Design." *Architectural Record* 69 (1931): 151-176.

Kutz, Charles W. Map of a Part of the Reservation of West Point, New York. Prepared under the direction of Major Charles W. Kutz, Corps of Engineers, 1908.

National Park Service. United States Military Academy National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, 1979.

Oliver, Richard. *Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue.* New York: AHF, 1983.

United States Military Academy Archives. Photographic files (undated), Michie Stadium.

The West Point Stadium. Stadium files, 1924.

Correspondence, Major General William R. Smith to Major General Fred W. Sladen, Stadium Files, 1928.

Steven M. Bedford is an architectural historian with Fitzgerald & Halliday Inc. and is a consultant for the Michie Stadium environmental assessment. He is the author of John Russell Pope, Architect of Empire *(Rizzoli 1998).*

Ann-Eliza H. Lewis

Boston's Curious Bowling History

Boston is often defined by its history, which is made tangible in its architecture and complicated street patterns. Because it is home to great sports teams including the Red Sox, the Celtics, and the Bruins, those less interested in history often define Boston as a great sports town. Boston is also home to the largest and most complex construction project in the United States, the Central Artery Project. Better known as the Big Dig, this project includes replacing the elevated portions of Interstate 93 with a wider underground tunnel and building a third tunnel under Boston Harbor to Logan International Airport and a new bridge over the Charles River. The archeological investigations that preceded construction led to some of the more significant archeological excavations ever conducted in downtown Boston. Although Boston is not known as a great bowling town, this massive construction project has helped the city merge the historic with the sporting through a unique artifact, North America's oldest bowling ball.

It is not a particularly eye-catching artifact, but the bowling ball is certainly one of the most well-known artifacts in the Big Dig archeological collection. Archeologists recovered the ball from a privy at the Cross Street Site. This site was home in the 1600s to Katherine Nanny Naylor, the daughter of Rev. John Wheelwright, a prominent Boston minister who was banished from Boston for supporting the religiously radical Anne Hutchinson.

The archeological collection includes a typical variety of goods found in the home of a wealthy Boston merchant. The conditions in the privy were perfect for the preservation of organic materials, which includes the wooden bowling ball. The wheel-shaped bowling ball, which is more properly called a bowle, is made of lathe-turned oak and at one time held a small lead weight and had a decorative cover over the hole. It was recovered from the Cross Street privy in 1994, promptly identified as a bowling ball, and added to the list of interesting small finds. We were unprepared, however, for the crush of public interest in the bowle when its existence was announced in a local newspaper article about the Central Artery archeological collection.

It was this interest that led the Massachusetts Historical Commission to examine more closely the history of bowling in Boston. This