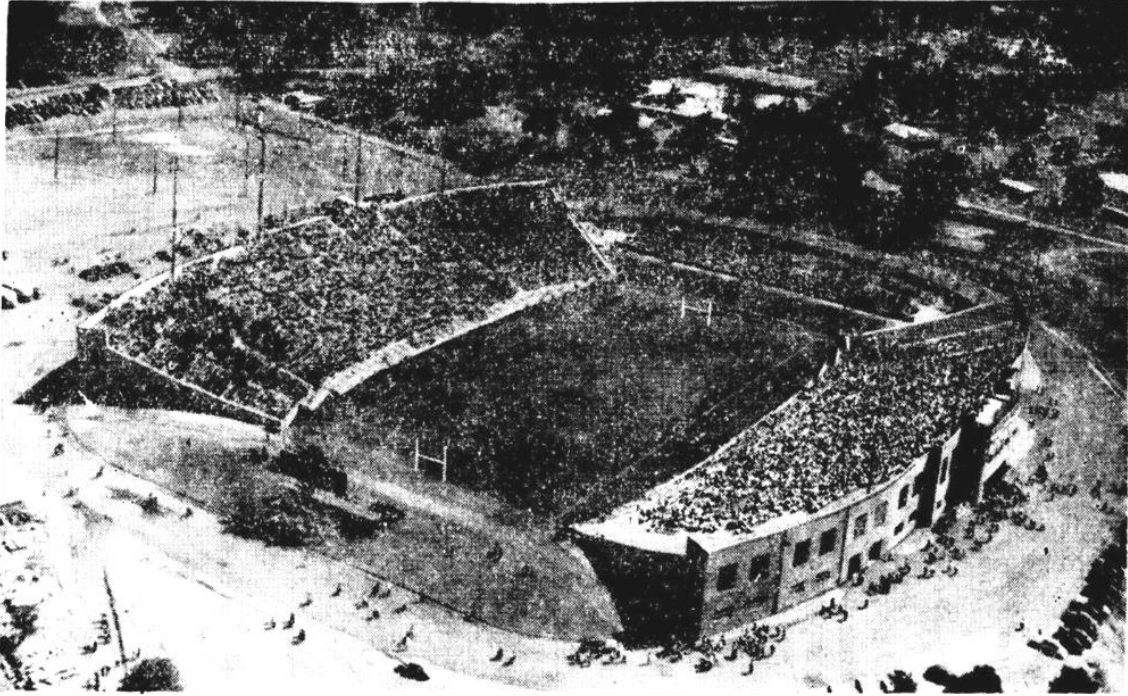


**Sandwiching in History  
War Memorial Stadium  
1 Stadium Drive, Little Rock, Arkansas  
Friday, July 12, 2019  
By Callie Williams**



War Memorial Stadium at completion in 1948

*Camden News*, Camden, Arkansas, 20 September 1948, page 8.

Good afternoon, my name is Callie Williams, and I am the Education and Outreach Coordinator at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Sandwiching in History” tour of War Memorial Stadium. I would like to give a big Thank You to Rick Tilley and his staff here at the stadium for helping us with the tour today. This tour is worth one hour of continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. Please see me or one of our other staff members after the tour if you are interested in this credit (there is a short survey card you will need to fill out).

Welcome to War Memorial Stadium. The original stadium complex was completed in the fall of 1948 inside the grounds of Fair Park. This stadium was designed to serve as a Central Arkansas

home for the Arkansas Razorbacks and was dedicated as a living memorial to the men and women who had served in the armed forces during World War I and World War II.

## **Fair Park**

The area around War Memorial Stadium was known as Fair Park at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was sometimes referred to as Little Rock's "Central Park". According to some reports, there may have been a State Fair on the surrounding land as early as 1916. During the mid-1920s, the city of Little Rock purchased the land that now surrounds the stadium from various individuals for "park and fair purposes" and officially named the area Fair Park.<sup>1</sup> By 1929, the park included a new golf course and was the official home of the State Fair grounds.<sup>2</sup>

The Arkansas State Fair had been held since 1868 on various sites, including in Little Rock where the Governor's Mansion is now, as well as in Hot Springs. The State Fair seems to have been held in this park through the 1920s, and because of that association, this area became known as Fair Park. A permanent amusement park midway was established in the park in 1929. During the late 1920s, the landscape architectural firm of Pearse and Robinson of Chicago, IL, was commissioned to design a master plan for initial park development.<sup>3</sup> The basic layout suggested in their plan still exists today. During the 1930s, new structures were added to Fair Park included the beginnings of a city zoo, which included a cat house, monkey house, and a duck pond, as well as tennis courts, a golf clubhouse, the Travelers field baseball park with a large grandstand, a merry go round, a restaurant, a small store, and a dance hall. The Little Rock Zoo had been started in 1926 with 2 animals--a timber wolf and a circus-trained bear.<sup>4</sup> The zoo's first buildings were made of native Arkansas stone and constructed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) between 1933 and 1936. These buildings are still in use today, with the cat house converted into a restaurant (Café Africa).

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<sup>1</sup> City of Little Rock, Resolution 3705, 12 January 1925. Belle Spatz, "The Open Spaces: Growing Cities Need Park Lands, Placed and Equipped to Serve," copy in the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, War Memorial Golf Course, Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas.

<sup>2</sup> City of Little Rock, Resolution 1220, 15 April, 1929.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Silva, Sandwiching in History: Herschell-Spillman Carousel Tour, 3 December 2010. <https://www.arkansaspreservation.com/Learn-More/sandwiching-in-history-archives>.

<sup>4</sup> Conor J. Hennelly, "Little Rock Zoo," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Central Arkansas Library System, [www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net). 28 September 2016.

During the late 1930s, Fair Park was for a short time known as Overton Park, named by city officials in honor of then Mayor R. E. Overman. Unfortunately, less than a year after the park name was changed, Mayor Overman displeased city officials by pushing for a City Manager Style of city government and the city council soon renamed the area Fair Park.<sup>5</sup>

In 1936, a visit by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to celebrate the State of Arkansas's centennial was celebrated in Little Rock with the construction of a magnificent, yet temporary, large stage, grandstand, and sets of box seats and bleachers that would accommodate 25,000 people at the site of what would become War Memorial Stadium only a little over a decade later.<sup>6</sup> Although this temporary outdoor auditorium was soon disassembled, the surrounding area would continue to be used as a race track for several years with the site continuing to straddle the city's western city limits.

Starting in 1941, much of the land at Fair Park not used for the growing zoo and golf course was leased to Mr. Tom Fuzell for his amusement rides and concessions.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Fuzell would run his amusement park here for several decades, finally retiring during the 1970s. The amusement park, then known as War Memorial Amusement Park, was home to several carnival rides as well as laughing sally, Eric the Blue carpet Viking, and the "Over-The-Jumps" carousel. This amusement park eventually closed in the early 1990s, with the "Over-The-Jumps" carousel rescued from being disassembled and sold for parts by a dedicated group who eventually donated the restored carousel to the city for use in the Little Rock Zoo. The area that had been the fair midway and the War Memorial Amusement Park was redeveloped as Zoo parking.

In 1944, the City of Little Rock made an offer to re-host the State fair on the site of the park, but the Arkansas Fair Association turned down the offer. A year later the city offered the State Fair Association its current site along Roosevelt Road which was accepted as its permanent home. Also in the 1940s, the park was briefly considered, at least by the public, as the site for the planned Governor's Mansion.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Council, 'Peeved' at Mayor, Rename Little Rock Park," *Blytheville Courier News*, Blytheville, Arkansas, 23 February 1938, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> "Roosevelt Will Visit Hot Springs, Rockport and Little Rock June 10," *Journal Advance*, Gentry, Arkansas, 4 June 1936, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> City of Little Rock, Ordinance No. 6444, 1 June 1942. Amended several times through the 1960s.

<sup>8</sup> *Camden News*, Camden, Arkansas, 16 January 1948, p4.

After the end of World War II, two major issues arose that eventually led to the construction of War Memorial Stadium. The first, was the desire by many to create a state sponsored monument to the veterans who had served and died during World War II. The second, was a growing need for a new stadium to host the University of Arkansas football games that were increasing in popularity. By the end of 1946, the idea of creating some type of living memorial to those who died and those who came back from the war was growing in Arkansas, with veterans groups and state legislatures and civic leaders discussing the need for some type of useful memorial space. In 1946, a football game at Central High's Tiger Stadium, the largest stadium in the city, pitted the University of Arkansas against Rice University to an overflow crowd. Immediately, several local business and political leaders saw a way to combine these two issues into one project. This included local insurance salesman Gordon Campbell, Razorback Booster President Chism Reed, Secretary of State Crip Hall, and Razorback football coach and athletic director John Barnhill, as well as the members of many of Arkansas veterans groups.<sup>9</sup>

### **Arkansas Football**

The first intercollegiate football game was played between Princeton and Rutgers in 1869 but nothing other than intramural-style football was played at the University of Arkansas until 1894.<sup>10</sup> The first football coach hired by the school in 1908, Hugo Bezdek, is credited with changing the school's mascot from the Cardinals to the Razorbacks. The coach told students at a pep rally that the football team "played like a band of wild razorbacks," and the name soon stuck. By 1916 the yearbook was renamed the Razorback and the school cheer, "Woo Pig Sooie!", and the logo of a red razorback was well established by the 1920s.

In the fall of 1946, a game played against Rice University at Tiger Stadium also known as Quigley Field (the main football arena at Central High School in Little Rock) was filled to overflowing. The stadium officially held 10,000 people and they had brought in bleachers from Russellville, Magnolia and other places to provide up to 6,000 extra seats but it still was not

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<sup>9</sup> "Arkansas War Memorial Stadium," *Arkansas Democrat*, Little Rock, Arkansas, 12 September 1948.

<sup>10</sup> Chad Seifried, et. al. "The Development of Razorback and War Memorial Stadiums," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Arkansas Historical Association, Autumn 2016, pp. 181-205.

enough.<sup>11</sup> In that same year, the team, composed of war veterans, recent high school graduates and "in-betweeners" tied for the Southwest Conference championship and put Arkansas in the Cotton Bowl. Also in 1946, the need for a new stadium was again highlighted by Razorback coach John Barnhill who made a very public point of scheduling the 1947 game against Texas at Crump Stadium in Memphis, making it an out of state home game. This helped to spur action on building a new stadium.

### **War Memorial Stadium**

By December of 1946, proposed legislation was being drafted to direct a new War Memorial Stadium to be built somewhere in the state. While many in the legislature agreed with the idea. The sticking point for its approval was who should pay for the new stadium.<sup>12</sup> By March of 1947, a compromise bill was approved by Governor Benjamin Laney that provided for the sale of bonds by both the state and the municipality where the stadium was to be constructed to finance the final construction costs. By July of 1947, sites were being considered by the new Memorial Stadium Commission with proposals from Little Rock, North Little Rock, West Memphis, and Hot Springs. In early August, the commission selected the Fair Park site in Little Rock, due in large part to its central location in the state as well as its natural setting and the fact that the area proposed was already a natural hollow. Immediately, the group representing the Hot Springs proposal were furious and started legal action to try to reverse the commission's decision.<sup>13</sup> The suit was soon abandoned and plans for the new stadium were kicked into high gear. By late August, the Little Rock architectural firm of Burks and Anderson was selected as well as the Osborn Engineering Company of Cleveland, Ohio, who would hopefully speed the design and engineering process along as they had already constructed several other major stadiums across the country.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Razorbacks won this game, 7 to 0, 9 November 1946, War Memorial Stadium, Arkansas Register Nomination, Files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas. "Porkers Plan Workout Today," *Camden News*, 8 November 1946, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> "Compromise On State Stadium Gets Approval," *Camden News*, Camden, Arkansas, 7 March 1947, p1.

<sup>13</sup> "Spa Protests Stadium Going to Little Rock," *Hope Star*, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 11 August 1947, p4.

<sup>14</sup> Fred Petrucelli, "Arkansas War Memorial Stadium," *Arkansas Democrat*, Little Rock, Arkansas, 12 September 1948.

The architectural firm of Burks and Anderson was a recent partnership of H. Ray Burks and Bruce Anderson.<sup>15</sup> Burks was born in Monticello, Arkansas, and studied architecture at Washington University in St. Louis. In 1917, he moved to Little Rock and worked with local architect James Bliss. In 1922 he started his own firm and designed many well-known structures including the original Museum of Fine Arts and the University of Arkansas Medical School (now Bowen School of Law), both in MacArthur Park; the Stebbins and Roberts Paint Company building which we will be touring next month, and the Pope County and Arkansas County courthouses. In 1945 he started a partnership with Bruce Anderson with their one major project being War Memorial Stadium.

Bruce Anderson was born in Newport, Arkansas, and grew up in the Little Rock area before studying architecture at Alabama Polytechnic Institute and then the Harvard Graduate School of Design. He returned to Little Rock in 1929, and due to the stock market crash he ended up working for several years as a draftsman with the firm of Wittenberg and Delony. He then worked with Arthur McAninch before working as part of the Allied Architects, a loose partnership of architects that worked specifically on war related projects during the early 1940s. He then served in the US Army as a Captain and was stationed as Chief of the Engineering Branch at the Pine Bluff Arsenal. After partnering with H. Ray Burks in 1945, the War Memorial Stadium would be the pair's only large joint project, as Burks died in 1948 before the stadium was finished. Both Burks and Anderson were been credited in the reporting on the stadium's planned opening dedication ceremonies as the main designers of the stadium as well as the forces behind the idea to use as many Arkansas sourced construction materials as possible, especially the aluminum used throughout the structure for finishes.<sup>16</sup> After the completion of War Memorial Stadium, Anderson would continue in practice until the 1980s and would work on several collegiate projects across the state. Anderson passed away in 1985.

The design of the stadium took advantage of the already existing natural depression of the site to create a large bowl structure composed of two separate section of tiered concrete steps supporting bleachers to the east and west with an original seating capacity of just over 31,000.

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Witsell, Gordon Wittenberg, and Marylyn Jackson, "Bruce Anderson" and "H. Ray Burks," *Architects of Little Rock: 1833-1950*, The University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, AR, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Fred Petrucelli, "Arkansas War Memorial Stadium," *Arkansas Democrat*, Little Rock, Arkansas, 12 September 1948.

The central field was laid out without a surrounding track space to allow the stands, and thus the fans, as close to the action as possible. The main entrance is on the east facade, with a raised and extended central bay features an Art Moderne design with curved corners and horizontal banding throughout the facade. Above the main entry gates tall aluminum letters spell out “WAR MEMORIAL STADIUM” while three large aluminum plaques depict football players in action. The large roll up doors throughout the stadium are original and we will see several sets of them as we walk around the stadium. The two wings of the stadium that were completed in 1948 were designed so that the end zone seating sections could be added at a later date to complete the bowl we see today.

The Stadium has been identified with both the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles of architecture. The Art Moderne and Art Deco styles grew out of new styles of European expressionism in art and design after World War I. The Art Deco style grew out of a new aesthetic that combined fine craftsmanship and rich materials in new sleek forms and was named after the 1925 Exposition Des Arts Decrotifs which inspired the internationally popular style. The Art Moderne style, which is often more horizontal in design and referred to as Streamline Moderne, focused on the aesthetics of speed and efficiency, finding design inspiration in streamlined forms and new commercial materials. It was thought by many designers that the best physical expression of the new modern understanding of the world after the terrors of World War I was in the sleek, often curved, streamlined forms of the Moderne style and the style is often associated with the 1933 Chicago World Fair.<sup>17</sup> The streamlining of the Art Moderne style followed during the 1930s with the influence of industrial designs, including ships, airplanes and automobiles. The lack of construction of major architectural projects during the Depression years led to this new Moderne style often finding expression in consumer products, store fronts, and interior decoration.<sup>18</sup> The War Memorial Stadium, with its use of large scale sleek signage and large figural decorative aluminum panels along the façade shows echoes of earlier Art Deco traditions with the rounded nature of the building and the horizontal banding of the entire stadium’s exterior a characteristic of later Art Moderne streamlined designs.

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<sup>17</sup> McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 465-466. David Handlin, *American Architecture*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 210.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 211.

War Memorial Stadium in Arkansas was one of many stadiums built across the country during 1948 and 1949. In news reports of the time, it was noted that over \$30,000,000 was being spent on new athletic plants at the nation's colleges (that's over \$300,000,000 in today's dollars) with War Memorial Stadium costing over \$1,000,000 – now over \$10,000,000.<sup>19</sup> With just over 9 months of construction since the beginning of the project, the stadium was barely finished in time for the first home game of the 1948 Arkansas Razorback football season on September 18, 1948, against Abilene Christian. The stadium's final cost standing at roughly 1.25 million dollars. In newspaper accounts it was reported that the concession stands and some of the restrooms were still unfinished and the stadium was still without its windows along the exterior facades. It should also be noted that the stadium was at least partially segregated during its first years of use in the late 1940s and early 1950s, at least in terms of the restrooms provided “with facilities for Negroes” in the east stands.<sup>20</sup>

Before the kickoff of the game, Maurice "Footsie" Britt, former Razorback star and war hero, performed the formal dedication for War Memorial Stadium.<sup>21</sup> Britt, a Lonoke Congressional Medal of Honor winner who had lost an arm in the Italian campaign, stated to the crowd of just over 27,000 people that the stadium was for "the memory of her native sons and daughters who have given so much that we might have our freedom." He also noted that “the state could give no more fitting or appropriate memorial to her dead of the two World Wars. A stone monument may commemorate the heroic deeds of Arkansas boys and girls who gave their lives, but such a shaft is not a living thing. Neither is an athletic field, nor a stadium. However, a stadium comes to life on days like today.” After Britt's address the flag was raised by a color guard of representatives of the armed forces, a group of at least 30 high school bands played the national anthem simultaneously, and then the game began. The crowd at the game was apparently a sight to behold, with newspaper accounts noting that during the hot summer afternoon the crowd was: “attired in new suits, with the smartest of new accessories and this season's unusually becoming small hats, gals of all ages did Arkansas proud... a stubborn majority clung to summer clothes ... chambray and seersucker dresses ... Others, including the wife of a well-known business man,

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Eck, “Building Boom For Athletic Plants On Among Nation's Colleges, \$30,000,000 To Be Spent,” *Northwest Arkansas Times*, Fayetteville, Arkansas, Thursday, 22 July 1948, p4.

<sup>20</sup> Petrucelli, “Arkansas War Memorial Stadium,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 12 September 1948.

<sup>21</sup> “New Stadium Dedicated Memorial to War Dead,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 19 September 1948, p1.



wore pajamas and straws as confidently as if it had been July.”<sup>22</sup> At half time, three fighter planes of the National Guard flew low over the stadium. During the game, Arkansas showed off its new innovation of separate dedicated groups for offence and defense and bested Abilene Christian 40 to 6.<sup>23</sup>

In 1949, another dignitary visited Little Rock and dedicated the entire park as War Memorial Park. President Harry S. Truman, who was visiting Little Rock to attend the annual reunion of the 35<sup>th</sup> infantry division (Truman’s World War I outfit), walked as part of a parade by the division and then spoke at the stadium during the formal ceremonies for the parks dedication on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1949.<sup>24</sup> President Truman’s address was carried on a nationwide radio broadcast and replayed on newsreels across the county. He noted that: “We are here to dedicate this beautiful park to the dead of two world wars, whose memory we should always hold dear. The brave men who lost their lives in those wars would approve of the way you have chosen to honor them. This park will be a place of rest and recreation. It is fitting that a war memorial should be something that can be used and enjoyed by the people. Nothing could be more appropriate than to devote a war memorial to those values of human life which our soldiers died to preserve--the values of freedom and peace.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1949, the National Football League used War Memorial Stadium for a game between the Philadelphia Eagles and the Los Angeles Rams with former Arkansas Razorback Clyde “Smackover” Scott playing for the Eagles.<sup>26</sup> The first night game took place on September 20, 1969, and since its opening, the stadium has hosted more than 200 Arkansas Razorback football

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<sup>22</sup> “Minor Trial By Fire Undergone At Opener,” *Arkansas Gazette*, Little Rock, Arkansas, 19 September 1948, p1.

<sup>23</sup> “22,000 Expected At Porker Tilt,” *Camden News*, Camden, Arkansas, 18 September 1948, p8. “New Stadium Dedicated Memorial to War Dead,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 19 September 1948, p1.

<sup>24</sup> “Truman Declares Reduction of Aid to Europe Would be ‘Great Gain for Communism,’” *Blytheville Courier News*, Blytheville, Arkansas, 11 June 1949, p1. “Plans Complete For Truman Talk,” *Camden News*, Camden, Arkansas, 2 June 1949, p1.

<sup>25</sup> Harry S. Truman, Library and Museum, Address in Little Rock at the Dedication of the World War Memorial Park, 11 June 1949, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/120/address-little-rock-dedication-world-war-memorial-park>.

<sup>26</sup> War Memorial Stadium, <https://www.wmstadium.com/>. Aaron D. Horton, "War Memorial Stadium," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*. Central Arkansas Library System, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1 November 2018.

games as well as games by many other Arkansas Colleges and Institution, including Arkansas State, University of Central Arkansas, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and several NCAA Division II schools in the Gulf South Conference. The Stadium also hosts a variety of high school team football games including the well know “Salt Bowl” game between rivals Benton and Bryant, as well as a variety of other collegiate and high school competitions and athletic camps. The Rangers, of the National Premier Soccer League, are also at home in this stadium.

While the stadium is often associated with sporting events, it has also hosted a wide array of other entertainments; including concerts by the Rolling Stones, Billy Joel, Elton John, The Eagles, George Strait, and N’Sync. In 2017, concerts returned to War Memorial Stadium with a performance by Guns N’ Roses which was enjoyed by a crowd of 25,000 fans. Other distinguished events include Reverend Billy Graham’s two revivals held here, one in 1959 and one in 1989. The 1959 event is thought to be the first time that the seating in War Memorial Stadium was fully desegregated as Billy Graham insisted, despite pressure from some local authorities due to the charged atmosphere of the ongoing Little Rock Central desegregation crisis.<sup>27</sup>

The stadium is a late example of the Art Deco/Art Moderne styles on its original east entry facade. However, the west facade has undergone significant alteration since 1947 and a large percentage of its original features have been obscured by the addition of a larger press-box and elevator shaft. This press box was rebuilt in 2010 during a major renovation of the stadium. In the late 1950s the north and south end zone seating areas were built and later attached to the east and west sides to complete an enclosed playing field.

In September of 2008 the city rededicated the stadium on its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary and opened the new privately-funded Sturgis Veterans Plaza to the west of the stadium. The centerpiece of the plaza is the 25 foot sculpture *Stars & Stripes* by Loveland, Colorado, artist Kathleen Caricoff.<sup>28</sup> Over the last year, the stadium has undergone a new improvement campaign with updates to the internal systems, the playing field, and locker rooms. Today, the seating capacity of the stadium stands at 54,120 and the stadium includes several large spaces that are available for the public to

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<sup>27</sup> Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, <https://billygraham.org/video/taking-ropes-segregation-part-4/>, accessed 1 July 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Evin Demirel, "Stadium Dedicated to State's War Dead," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Little Rock, Arkansas, 20 September 2008.

rent for special occasions or meetings, including the press box and lettermen's club. In 2017, Governor Hutchinson signed a bill that placed the stadium under the direction of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism.

I would again like to thank the staff of the stadium, including Mr. John Latch and Mr. Rick Tilley who provided us with information for today's tour. The staff here is dedicated to their jobs and help keep the over 250 events a year held here running smoothly. As Mr. Tilley stated, they are "in the memory business" and this stadium has definitely provided many great memories for many people since its construction over 70 years ago.

I will be leading a walk around the stadium's concourse which will start with a walk through the administrative offices to see the great historic images of the field they have on display. We will then head around the stadium to see a few historic features and then we will finish at the press box at gate 7. If you are unable to walk with us around the stadium, my colleague will be heading directly to the press box at gate 7 where you can ride the elevator to view the wonderful view of the stadium and city before exiting back here at gate 9.

Thank you again for coming, and please join us for our next Sandwiching in History Tour at the Stebbins and Roberts Office Building and Factory (Now Cromwell Architects) at 1300 East 6<sup>th</sup> Street in Little Rock on Friday, August 2nd. Also, please join us on Saturday, September 18<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. for our Walks Through History Tour in Downtown Lake Village, starting at the Chicot County Courthouse on Main Street.

#### Stadium Walk:

- Gate 1 – original main entry, most of the gates around the stadium are original to the 1948 construction of the structure
- Renovated original bathroom space now turned into new technology and security spaces
- Hollow clay tile and concrete walls and structure are original – red cinder block sections are later additions or renovations
- Home dressing room near gate 9 – recently under renovation
- Visitor dressing room near gate 3 – recently under renovation
- Press Box above gate 7

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