Twitter Thread by Adam Bunch



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1. Well this seems like the perfect day for a thread about old baseball stadiums in Toronto.

It's a history that stretches all the way back to the 1800s and a place called the Toronto Baseball Grounds…



2. It might not look like it, but this is the very oldest image we have of a baseball stadium in Toronto — the only surviving visual representation of the city's first ballpark.

You have to zoom way, way in to see it…



3. …but here it is, standing on Queen Street on a spot overlooking the Don Valley.

It was originally known as the Toronto Baseball Grounds, but would soon be nicknamed Sunlight Park — in honour of the nearby Sunlight Soap Works factory.



4. Spectators could walk in off Queen St or ride up & park their carriage on the grounds. Admission was a quarter — plus an extra dime for the best seats in the house.

The sheltered grandstand could seat 2,000 people & there was standing room for another 10,000 beyond that.



5. A sellout at Sunlight Park meant that 10% of the city's entire population was at the ballgame that day.

When the stadium opened in 1886, even the Lieutenant Governor came out for the event. Someone in his entourage had their hat knocked off by a foul ball.

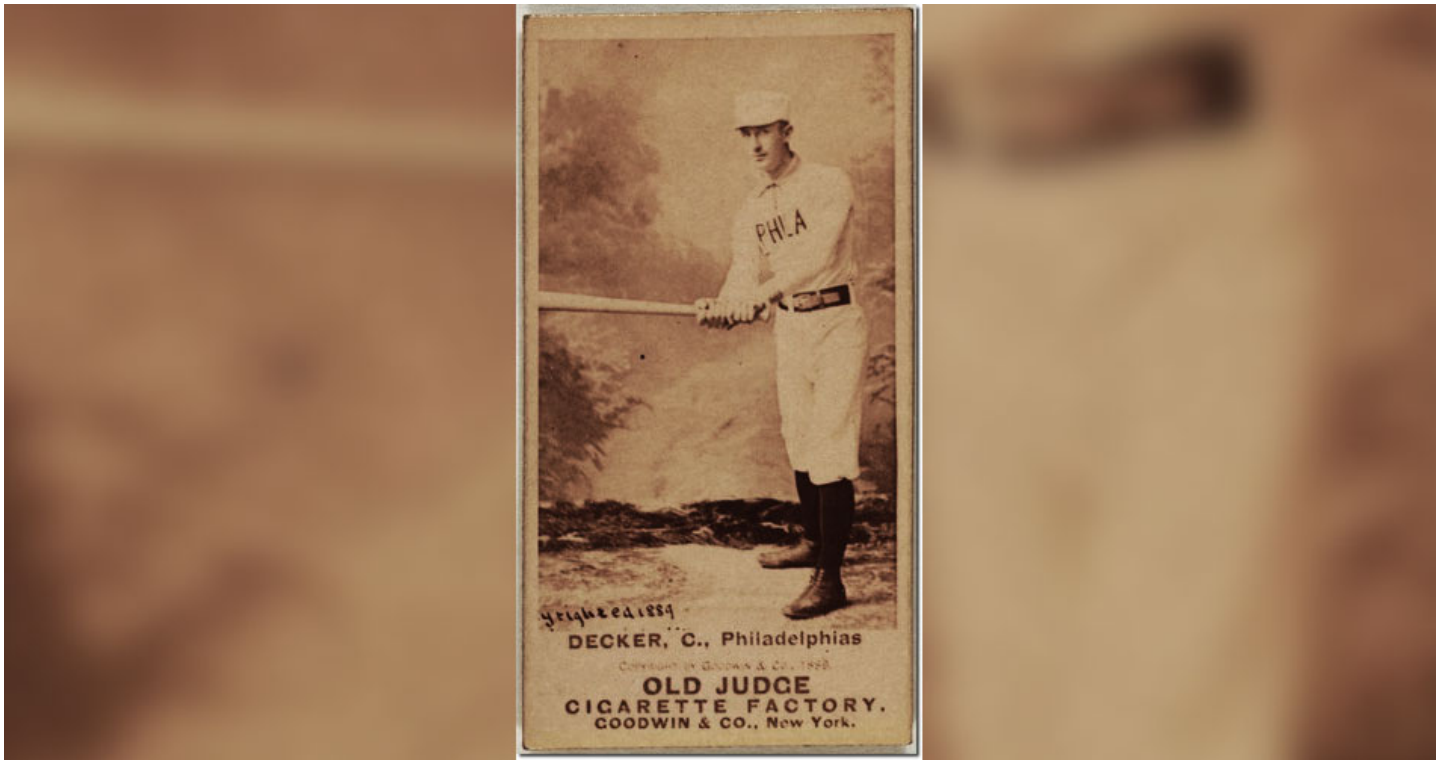


6. The Torontos got off to a great start, winning the city's first baseball championship in 1887

They were led by their alcoholic ace/slugger Cannonball Crane — who would soon be invited on an all-star world tour, getting drunk with his pet monkey in cities around the globe…



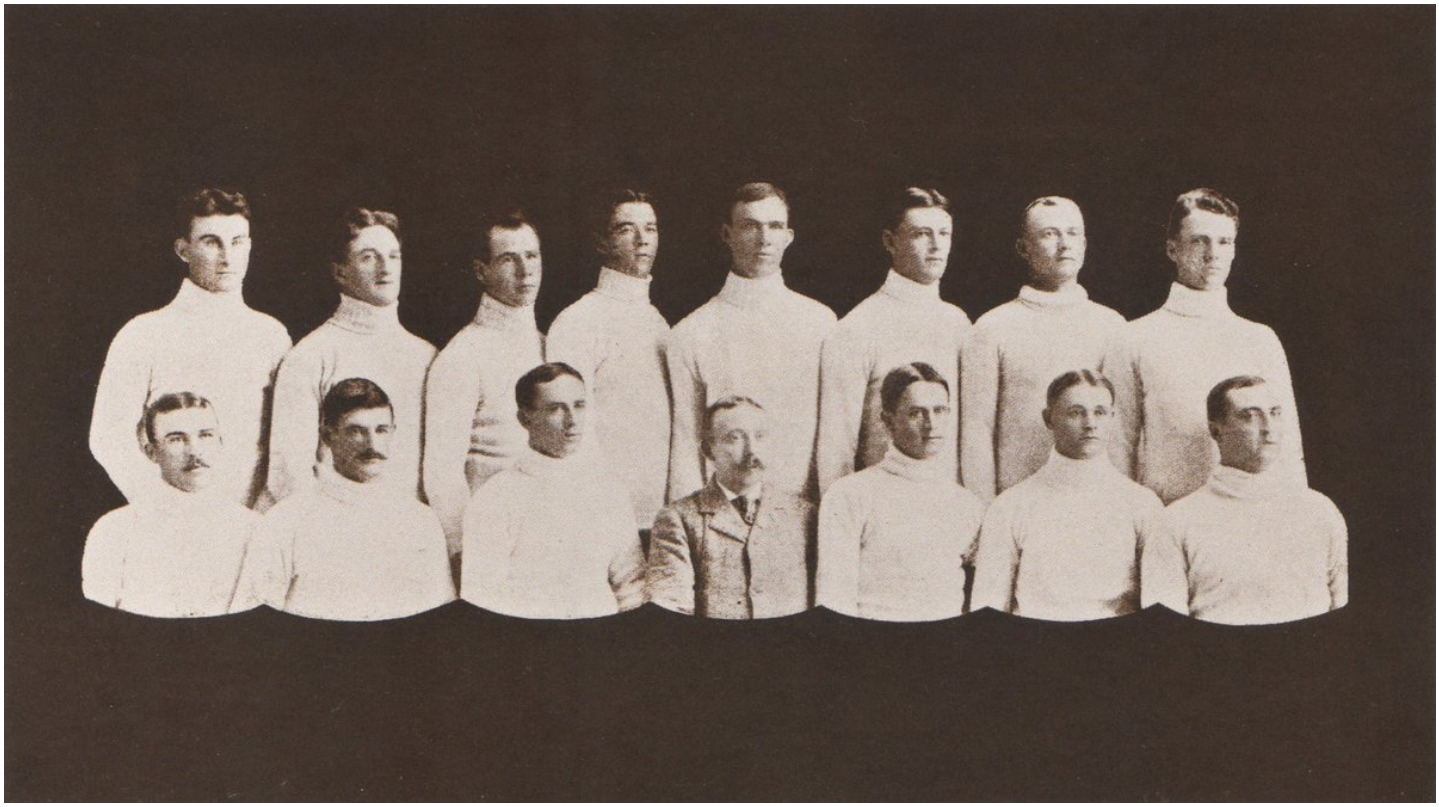
7. And catcher Harry Decker, a notorious con man who would go on to the become the star of the baseball team at San Quentin Prison.



8. By the end of the 1800s, the Torontos had morphed into a new team with a new name.

They called themselves the Maple Leafs — four decades before the city's hockey team started calling themselves the same thing.

And the team was now owned by the Toronto Ferry Company.



9. The company was run by Lol Solman — brother-in-law & business partner of the famous rower Ned Hanlan, whose family had been living on the islands for years.

Solman was always looking for new ways to lure customers to the islands.

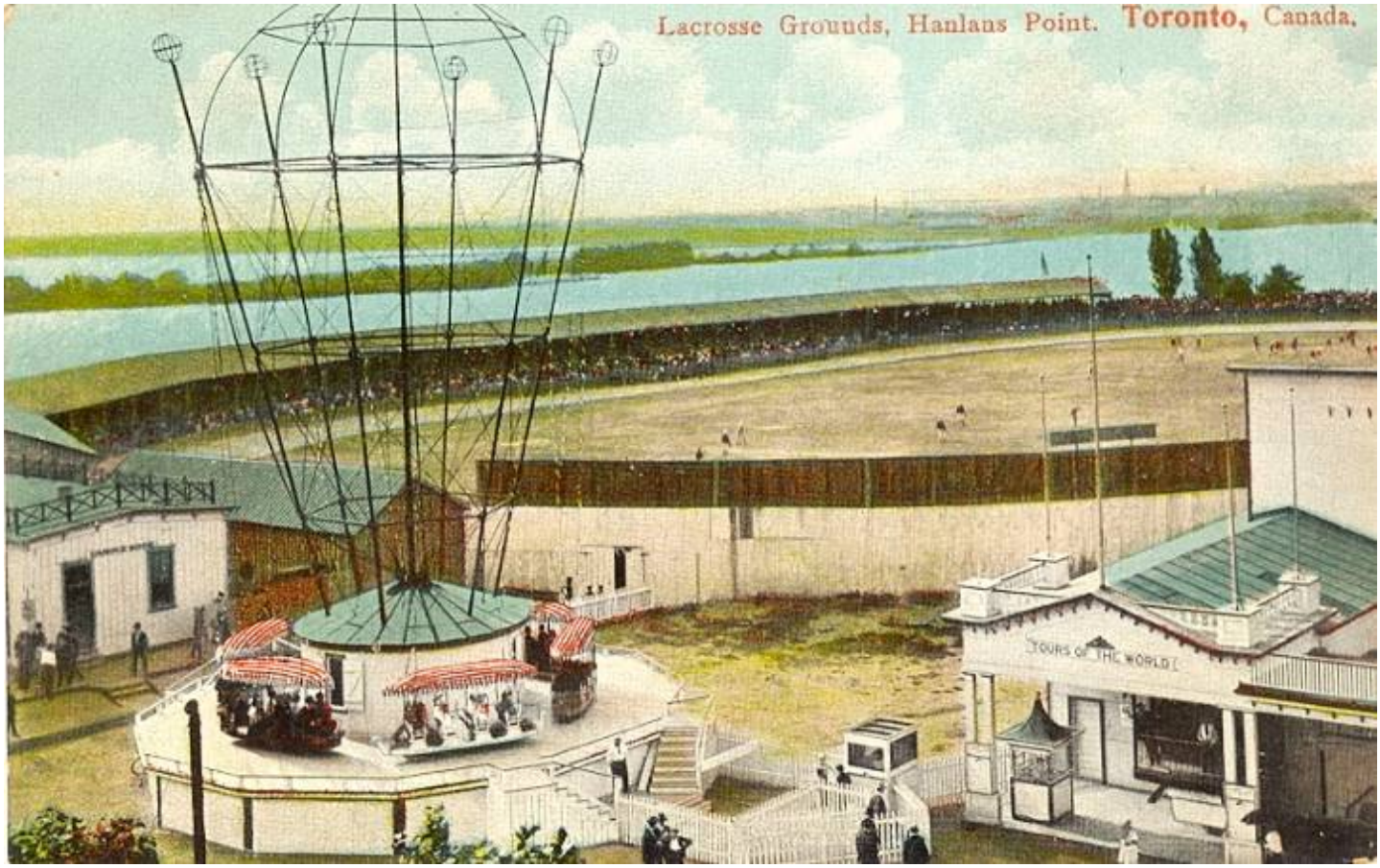


10. The Toronto Ferry Company already owned an old-timey amusement park at Hanlan's Point as well as the beautiful Hotel Hanlan.

Now, they added a sports stadium to their empire.

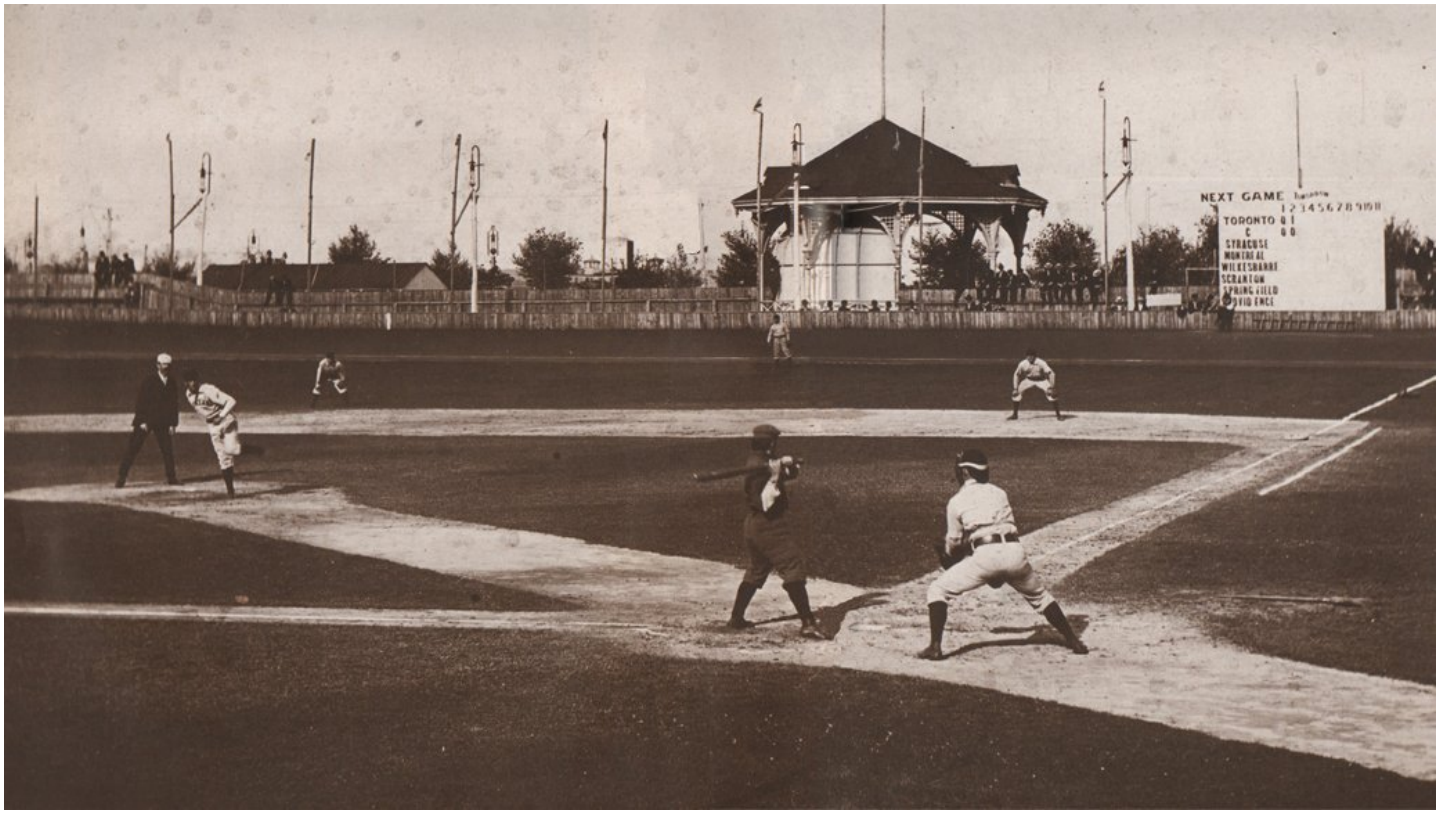


11. So it was at Hanlan’s Point that the Toronto Maple Leafs played most of their home games for the next 30 years, playing right beside the amusement park's Circle Swing ride:



12. In this game played at an earlier version of the Hanlan's Point Stadium in 1897, you can still see evidence of the old Victorian era rules.

The umpire stood behind the pitcher. And there was no mound either — the pitchers threw off flat ground:


NEXT GAME
TORONTO
C
SYRACUSE
MONTREAL
WILKESBARRE
SCRANTON
SPRINGFIELD
BUFFALO