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## Major League Baseball History on the South Boston Waterfront

The South Boston Waterfront has become one of the most desirable development districts in the country; new buildings seem to be opening every year and new concepts are proposed by wealthy developers for the various parcels on a regular basis. Closer to the Fort Point Channel, some of the historic buildings are being restored and have become fashionable offices and living space. Over 30 million square feet of growth is planned on the South Boston Waterfront.

As this transformation occurs, many longtime South Boston residents will remember industrial activity, railroad yards and a bustling port that was the South Boston Waterfront of days gone by.

SouthBostonOnline has generously allowed us to share the results of some historical research we have done on the South Boston Waterfront. We hope you enjoy this and future submissions.



**Boston Beaneaters Infield (clockwise from top): Fred Tenney, Herman Long, Jimmy Collins, and Bobby Lowe.**  
All images courtesy Boston Public Library, Print Department

The year, 1894. The team, Boston Beaneaters. The location, Congress Street Ball Grounds. During the second game of a doubleheader, Beaneaters second baseman Bobby Lowe shocked crowds at the Ball Grounds on the South Boston Waterfront knocking four homers in a single game - the first major

leaguer to achieve that feat. The Beaneaters, who were later renamed the Boston Braves, moved into the Congress Street Ball Grounds temporarily after their South End ballpark was destroyed in a fire. But they weren't the first ball club to call South Boston home.

In 1890, the Congress

Street Ball Grounds opened for business, just a few blocks from where the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center stands today. Also, the site proposed by developer Frank McCourt as a new home for the Red Sox a few years ago, was just around the corner from where this majestic double-decker baseball pavilion once stood. This 19th century waterfront ballpark was built for the Boston entry into the newly minted Players League at a time when teams did not have nicknames like Red Sox and Dodgers. Over a century before Barry Bonds was hitting homers from his waterfront stadium, South Boston had its own waterfront park.

Built on land filled by the Boston Wharf Company in the 1870s, the ballpark had a desirable location, just a few blocks from downtown merchants. On opening day, over 10,000 flocked to see Boston take on the Players League team from Brooklyn. Some spectators

watched from atop boxcars in the nearby railroad yards. A reporter at the time noted that "men and boys climbed like flies up the neighboring telegraph poles, sometimes perching themselves upon the very tops." Even in 1890, Boston fans loved to see a hard fought game between their team and one from New York.

The little known baseball grounds welcomed many of baseball's biggest stars in the 1890s. It also brought many Bostonians over the Fort Point Channel to the newly-filled area of the South Boston Waterfront. The Boston Wharf Company's architect, Morton B. Safford, who designed many of the buildings on the Waterfront, paid close attention to giving the new baseball pavilion top of the line accommodations. A unique aspect of his double-decker design was the ballpark's 75-foot tall towers that boasted majestic views of the Harbor.

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## MLB History

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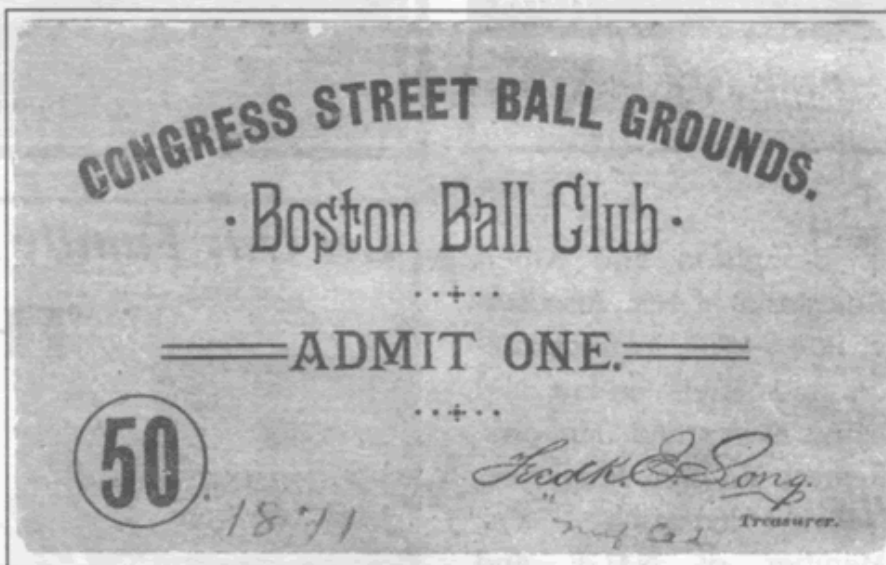
The Players League, which so eagerly embraced its home field, folded after only one year. But in that year, Boston won it all, with a venerable 81-48 record. The following season, the Congress Street Grounds hosted the American Association's Boston Reds during its swan song season.

The ballpark got its final chance in 1894 when the National League Boston Beaneaters moved in, at least temporarily. Despite Bobby Lowe's record breaking season in South Boston, the team returned to its rebuilt home in the South End.

Sometime around 1899 the ballpark was torn down to make way for the budding industrial sector that would soon come to characterize the neighborhood. Even though the ball grounds were gone, Boston's passion for baseball only grew stronger. Bobby Lowe continued his baseball career with the Beaneaters, and later in Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Detroit. However, he would always remember that historic day in May 1894. He later recalled: "I almost fell down when I saw the ball going for that fence-and over-the fourth time."



**Congress Street Grounds baseball pavilion under construction, c.1890. Original photo by Frank E. Porter.**



**Congress Street Ball Grounds season pass, c. 1890.**

There is much more to the South Boston Waterfront area than industrial buildings and parking lots, and this little known story of the Congress Street Grounds is just one example. In the 1890s, the South Boston Waterfront had a lot going on, as more businesses looked to the area for a home. Although the Congress Street Ball Grounds was only around for a few years, Bostonians came in droves to root on

their home team favorites. Years before Fenway took the area by storm, major league history was being made out on the South Boston Waterfront.

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