

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 1 **TINKER FIELD**
Orlando, Orange Co., FL

SUMMARY

Tinker Field is significant at the **local level** under **Criterion A** in the area of **Entertainment/Recreation** as one of the oldest remaining major league baseball spring training sites in Florida. It was initially constructed in December 1922 and was commemorated as "Tinker Field" during its grand opening on April 19, 1923. In 1923 the Cincinnati Reds signed a three-year contract to begin spring training at Tinker Field. Tinker Field is also significant to the City of Orlando under **Criterion B** because of its association with the baseball career of professional baseball player **Joe Tinker**. He was instrumental in bringing the Reds and spring training to Orlando, and in promoting the construction of the field. Furthermore, at the time of his death in 1948, Tinker was the only Floridian in the National Baseball Hall of Fame. The association of Major League Baseball with Tinker Field lasted from 1923-2000. The Tinker Building (NR 1980), also located in Orlando, is associated with Tinker's commercial endeavors in Orlando, rather than his baseball career. Joe Tinker is a historically significant figure primarily because of his successful baseball career. His later ventures into business and real estate were made possible by the acclaim and financial resources he amassed as a baseball player and manager.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Major League Baseball in Florida

The history of major league baseball spring training in Florida dates back to 1888. The Washington Statesmen (later the Washington Senators/Minnesota Twins) spent three weeks in Jacksonville preparing for the upcoming season. Connie Mack, a member and long time manager of the Philadelphia Athletics, recalled the negative attitude held toward baseball players at the time. They were turned away from many hotels and seen as unsavory. Florida was chosen for two major reasons. The consistently warm climate helped the players get in shape and perfect their skills, and it was close to many of the teams' home cities located in the Northeast and Midwest. Jacksonville became a popular choice because of the convenient transportation connections. Between 1903 and 1909, Jacksonville hosted the Philadelphia Athletics (1903), Cincinnati Reds (1905), Boston Braves (1906), and Brooklyn Dodgers (1907-1909). In 1914, the teams training in the state established the "Grapefruit League," in which teams played a five-week schedule of pre-season exhibition games against semi-pro teams and each other. Thirteen of the existing sixteen teams spent at least one pre-season in Florida from 1910-1920.¹

Due to travel restrictions, spring training in the South was interrupted during World War II. However, following the war came a boom to spring training in Florida. During the late 1940's and 1950's, between twelve

¹ William Zinsser, *Spring Training: The Unique American Story of Baseball's Annual Season of Renewal* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989) and Stephen Olausen and Sherry Piland, "Terry Park Ballfield," National Register nomination, 1995. On file at the Florida State Historic Preservation Office, Bureau of Historic Preservation, Tallahassee, Florida.

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and fourteen teams trained in Florida prior to the regular season. Between 1961 and 1977 the major leagues expanded from sixteen to twenty-six teams, and as a result, Florida's Grapefruit League increased from twelve to eighteen teams.²

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Major League Baseball in Orlando

The first major league team to visit Orlando was the Philadelphia Athletics in March of 1915. They played two pre-season games against the Birmingham Barons at the Fairgrounds. Philadelphia took the first game 9-2, while the second game ended in a tie, 5-5. The Barons were given a farewell banquet at the San Juan Hotel on the evening of the 25th. Orlando was a baseball-starved town and its citizens liked what they saw. In June of the same year, Bert Humphries, formerly with the Chicago Cubs, organized The Orlando Baseball Club. When he decided to leave in 1920, the club hired Joe Tinker to be their new manager.³

It was not long before Tinker, also a former Chicago Cub, had the city thinking about major league baseball. In March of 1921 Tinker's team played in two exhibition games at the fairgrounds against a group of major league players organized by his friend, Clark Griffith. The game showcased the pitching of Walter Johnson. Inspired by the demonstration, the city decided to build a new field. In December of 1922, Orlando finished construction on a new ballpark that was state-of-the-art for the time. It was constructed just to the south of Lake Lorna Doone and cost \$50,000. The new park was larger than the New York Yankees Field, with a distance from home plate to the right field fence of 278 feet. It was 310 feet to left field and 425 to center. The Orlando Bulldogs began to train at the facility on March 20, 1923, and that same month, the Cincinnati Reds signed a three-year contract to begin spring training at the new facility. On April 19, 1923 Orlando Mayor E.G. Duckworth gave the address, officially dedicating the field to Joe Tinker. On that day all businesses in town closed and 1,700 fans witnessed the Orlando Bulldogs defeat the Lakeland Highlanders 3-1. Joe Tinker was the vice-president of the club at the time.⁴

Major league spring training officially began in Orlando with the arrival of the Cincinnati Reds. Additionally, the field has hosted the Brooklyn Dodgers (1934-1935), Washington Senators/Twins (1936-1999), and Orlando Rays (2000). When the field was not hosting major league spring training, it was used by the local franchise of the Florida State League. Established in 1919 with six charter members, the League was an affiliation of minor league teams at the class D level, then the lowest placement on the professional baseball hierarchy. Tinker

² Olausen and Piland.

³ Eve Bacon, Orlando: A Centennial History, Vol. I. 1821 to 1925, Pioneer Era and the First Fifty Years of Incorporation. (Chuluota, Florida: The Mickler House, 1975), 303-347.

⁴ Bacon, 303-347; Orlando Morning Sentinel, 19 April 1923, p. 9; Dylan Thomas to Leslie Divoll, personal communication 1980; City of Orlando, Real Property Records.

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Field has seen such famous players as Warren Spahn, Rod Carew, Jackie Robinson, and Stan Musial. It was actually while pitching for the Daytona Beach Club in 1940 that Musial dove for a ball and dislocated his shoulder at Tinker Field. This injury ended his pitching career and he transitioned to become one of the greatest hitters of all time.⁵

Joe Tinker

Joe Tinker was born in Muscotah, Kansas, July 27, 1880 and began his baseball career in 1899 with a semi-professional team in Coffeyville, Kansas. He arrived in Orlando in December of 1920 to manage the Orlando Tigers, a local Florida State League baseball team. Prior to this, he had a successful playing and managing career in professional baseball. Tinker played in several smaller leagues in a few western states before he was sold to the Chicago Cubs in 1902. In his tenure with them, the Cubs captured the National League pennant four times (1902, 1907, 1908, 1910) and the World Series twice (1907, 1908). Tinker was never a strong hitter, batting just 262 lifetime, but was considered one of the best fielders of his era. He led the National League shortstops four times in fielding percentage, three times in total chances, twice each in putouts and assists, and once in double plays. Additionally, he had great speed and stole, on average, 28 bases a season for the Cubs. On July 28, 1910, he tied a major league record by stealing home twice in one game.⁶

Tinker and his teammates, Johnny Evers and Frank Chance, called attention to fielding skills. Together they developed new ways to defend against the bunt, hit-and-run, and stolen base, and developed the rotation play. The prowess they displayed for fielding was forever immortalized by a New York writer, and loyal Giants fan, on July 10, 1908 when he wrote a poem about Tinker and his teammates that appeared in the New York Evening News:

These are the saddest of possible words:
"Tinker to Evers to Chance."
Trio of bear cubs, and fleeter than birds,
Tinker to Evers to Chance.
Ruthlessly pricking our gonfalon bubble,
Making a Giant hit into a double-
Words that are heavy with nothing but trouble:
"Tinker to Evers to Chance."⁷

⁵ Tom Tinker to Jon Miller, personal communication, 2 July 2003; Pat Anthony to Jon Miller telephone communication, 1 July 2003

⁶ Martin Appel and Burt Goldblatt, Baseball's Best—The Hall of Fame Gallery (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977), 362-364.

⁷ Ibid.

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In the days before radio, Tinker became a successful Vaudeville performer. In fact, he was regarded so highly, that in 1913 he considered switching to a career in Vaudeville, but instead signed a deal with the Cincinnati Reds as shortstop and manager. Following that year, Tinker resigned as manager and was sold to the Brooklyn Dodgers. Unhappy with the situation, Tinker jumped his contract and joined the new Federal League as manager and part owner of the Chicago Whales. He used his influence to attract other players, announcing, "You are invited to come to the Federal League quarters in Chicago and discuss terms. Even if you decide not to sign a contract, all your expenses will be paid by the Federal League." The new League had built or renovated eight ballparks in time for the 1914 season. One of the new fields, later renamed Wrigley Field, was for the Chicago Whales. Under Tinker, the Whales won the Federal League pennant in 1915, but the league folded the same year. The Whales owner then purchased the Chicago Cubs and hired Tinker as manager. Joe Tinker left the Cubs after the 1916 season to become manager and president of the Columbus team in the American Association. He then became president of the American Association.⁸

In the 1920s, Tinker went to Florida, where he was very successful managing the Orlando Tigers of the Florida State League. In 1921, "Tinker's Tigers" won the League championship, thereby winning the Temple Cup. Mrs. William Chase, whose then-deceased husband had been the owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates, donated the cup. During those years, Tinker also became involved in the Florida Land Boom. Along with his business partner, Roy C. McCracken, he formed the Tinker-McCracken Realty Company, Inc., a land development and real estate firm in Orlando. The venture was very successful monetarily. Tinker's first residential development in the Orlando area was known as Lawson Park (1921). This was followed by Tinker Heights and Jamajo in 1923. Jamajo was so named because of the joint effort by Ja-(Dr. Jason Pitts), ma (his wife Maude), and jo-(Joe Tinker). Members of the Cincinnati Reds purchased many of the first lots.⁹

In 1925, Tinker built a small commercial building on West Pine Street in downtown Orlando for his company's headquarters. The "Tinker Building" was reputed to have cost \$90,000 at the time. This building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 and is representative of Tinker's contribution to Orlando's commercial development. He also operated a bar and billiard parlor.¹⁰

Although he had become a businessman, Tinker still kept his hand in baseball. He spent his leisure time teaching baseball skills to youths at the Joe Stripps School of Baseball, and was a regular at Tinker Field. In his later years he scouted for the Washington Senators. It was actually Tinker's friendship with Calvin Griffith (owner of the Senators) that helped Orlando to land spring training in 1936. The Washington Senators/Minnesota Twins trained there every year after that until 1999. There is monument to Clark Griffith at

⁸ Charles Einstein, ed., *The Third Fireside Book of Baseball* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), 260.

⁹ Dan G. Deibler, "Tinker Building," National Register nomination, 1980, on file at the Florida State Historic Preservation Office, Bureau of Historic Preservation, Tallahassee, Florida; *Orlando Evening Star*, 27 July, 1948, p. 1; Calvin Griffith to Leslie Divoll, personal communication 18 January 1980

¹⁰ Deibler.

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Tinker Field that was erected in 1968 to honor the owner who helped to forge a second home for his professional baseball team in Orlando (Photo 8).¹¹

Like many investors in the Florida Land Boom, with the collapse of the Boom in 1926, Tinker lost most of the fortune he had made in land development, mostly because of lawsuits filed against him as he reached the end of his life. He died of complications from diabetes on his birthday, July 27, 1948. Just prior to his death, one of his legs was amputated as a result of the diabetes. A major consolation during these difficult years was his election to the Pro Baseball Hall of Fame in 1946; he was the first Floridian to receive this honor. Tinker not only transformed the way baseball was played defensively, but also played a significant role in introducing Major League Baseball to Orlando. He helped to forge a relationship between the city and the sport that lasted from 1923-2000.¹² Joe Tinker is historically significant primarily because of his successful baseball career. His later business ventures in the Orlando area were made possible by the acclaim and financial resources he amassed as a baseball player and manager. Tinker Field, therefore, best represents Joe Tinker's significance to the City of Orlando.

¹¹ Deibler; Orlando Evening Star, 27 July 1948; Calvin Griffith to Leslie Divoll, personal communication 18 January 1980.

¹² Greg Thompson to Jon Miller, personal communication 18 July 2003.