



John T. Browning

Another problem arose when the City of Moline wanted to coordinate the east-west traffic from 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue to 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue and run right through the field. The city also suggested that the school district replace Browning Field with the construction of a new bowl just east of the new high school. The estimated cost of the new bowl was considered to be too expensive and would require a court decision to throw out the 1910 will of John T. Browning. The will dated June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1910 mainly stated "to be held in trust forever by the City of Moline and dedicated to the public as and for a playground and athletic park, which shall be known and designated as the John T. Browning Park, Playground and Athletic Field".

The school board had replaced the cinder track and in 1995 spent \$436,000 to replace the south stands with the current all-metal stands. So with new lights, bleachers, all-weather track, Browning Field is in much better condition. Browning has hosted track meets, firework displays, May Day parades, Play Day for Moline grade school children and our two soccer teams.

Another big improvement for Browning Field came in 1986-87 with the creation of the Moline Booster Club. With a large group of volunteers, the club is a major factor in aiding the Moline teams. The club has repaired concessions stands and restrooms at Browning. In 2004, a new entrance from the east parking lot will be ready for the 2004 season. The new brick entryway will feature two-archways and the brick building will match Wharton Field House in appearance. The entrance will have a driveway that will allow cars to drop off fans right at the door. Future booster plans include reconstruction and updating the main concession stands and restrooms. The Moline Booster Club will conduct a fundraiser selling bricks, blocks and placement on a bronze plaque to pay for this beautiful addition to the ninety-year old Browning Field.

# Browning Field

## 1914 – 2004

Researched and Prepared by Jack Dye

John T. Browning was born on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1830 in Genesee County, New York. John moved to the village of Moline in 1858 as a lawyer and practiced law until his death in 1910. Mr. Browning served as the City Attorney of Moline and was the leader in writing new ordinances, as Moline became a city. He also served two-terms as a state representative from our district and was a leader in helping to write many pieces of legislation.

During his last illness in 1910, Mr. Browning planned on having a large granite monument built to honor his memory, but Dr. A.M. Beal, who was the President of the Board of Education, suggested that Mr. Browning turn his large pasture into a much needed athletic field. Moline High School football teams were playing at Riverside Park with no stands and little room. Mr. Browning agreed and added a codicil to his will, which gave the field to the City of Moline.

The period from 1912 – 1915 produced a football field and a superb baseball diamond. School officials asked the high school teams to assist the city in building bleachers and enclosing a part of the field with wire fencing. The next major step consisted of the entire plot being dug out into a bowl shape. The grading lowered the pasture nearly six feet below the level of the Avenue of the Cities. The extra dirt was used to fill two ravines on the property. From 1914 on Browning was the top high school field until the construction of Rocky's new stadium in 1938.

Browning Field was the home of professional baseball and football teams from 1920 to 1948. Baseball fans will remember the Moline Plows of the old Three-I League and the Moline Central Association. The Moline Illini and the Moline Reds played football in the Roaring Twenties at Browning.

One of the major highlights of baseball was an appearance on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1940 by Babe Ruth. Over 2,100 fans watched the Babe take batting practice. The right field fence was 368 feet from home plate and the Babe socked a few balls into Wharton's parking lot. Moliner's Glen Kron, a batboy for the visitors, Rich Bailey, a batboy for the Plows and Dave Cox who shagged balls for Babe Ruth, all remember that big event at Browning Field. Moline High School played their games at the diamond at Browning Field from 1945 to 1958.

The track at the field was originally cinders and wasn't replaced with an all-weather track until 1972. Further enhancements to the track were made in 1993, 1997 and 2004. Our state champions of 1960 trained on the old cinder track.

In the ninety years that Browning Field has served Moline, it has had some major problems. The crescent bleachers in the southeast area burned down in 1957 and were never replaced as stands. Today it is the main concession stand of the Moline Booster Club. The North-side wooden stands were damaged on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1969 when an old light pole fell into the stands during a windstorm. No one was injured but the stands were closed for a while for repairs. They were later replaced with the current metal bleachers. In 1973, new lights were installed to improve the illumination for the entire field. The ten poles became just four light stands. The new lights cost \$34,000 and were paid with profits from the concession sales.