

L.C. Anderson High School Stadium: Segregated Landscape in the Capital City

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What is now Interstate 35 in Austin, Texas, originally served as the dividing line between a white Austin to the west and an African American and Hispanic Austin to the east. While Texas' capital city was not originally planned as a segregated city, leaders soon organized the city into two halves, divided by East Avenue (what is now IH 35). On one side was the downtown business district along Congress Avenue, the University of Texas, and most of the city's paved roads. On the other side was the African American high school, a growing black business district, and industry, railyards, and flooding. When city planners created this so-called "Negro District" in the early twentieth century, African American institutions were beginning to flourish in east Austin. Samuel Huston College was a coeducational institute of higher learning for black students. Anderson High School was the city's sole black high school. Churches, businesses, and other institutions opened in east Austin. The Austin Black Senators, a semi-professional baseball team part of the Texas Negro League, played games at the Samuel Huston baseball stadium.¹

Across East Avenue, the white business leaders flourished and planned paved roads, parks, and boulevards along Shoal and Waller Creeks. Texas legislators flocked to the city's hotels and restaurants while in session at the capitol. The University of Texas grew as the state's flagship white university. Austin High School served the white students of the city. Austin High students played football, baseball, and track and field at the University of Texas fields and at an open field adjacent to their high school. When the university told Austin High to find another place to play, the Austin Public Schools (APS) decided to improve the field known as House Park. Anderson's students had to share their field with Huston College, over a mile away from their high school building.²

It was not until 1953 that APS provided Anderson High School students with a new school building and a stadium adjacent to the high school, something that Austin High had in the 1930s. The new "Yellow Jacket Stadium" served as a community center and place to watch African American sports in east Austin for 20 years, until the Austin Independent School District (the successor of APS) closed the black high school in an effort to "integrate" Austin's public school system. The stadium itself then suffered from neglect until rescued from its fate as a parking lot by a former Anderson football player. Today, the Yellow Jacket stadium remains the only historic place associated with the African American Anderson High School and its role as a community institution.

Early Black Sport in Austin

¹ "Huston-Tillotson University and the Downs Field Legacy," available online at: <https://htu.edu/wp-February-content/uploads/2016/10/DownsFieldMakingtheCase.pdf>, accessed 17 February 2020; Koch & Fowler, "A City Plan for Austin, Texas," 1928.

² Schenk, Brian, "School History," available online at: <https://www.austinhghmaroons.org/history-of-ahs.html>, accessed 5 August 2019; "Huston-Tillotson University and the Downs Field Legacy."

Even organized sport in the capital city was segregated by race. White Austinites cheered on the University of Texas Longhorns in football, basketball, baseball, track and field, and other collegiate sports. Austin High School provided white students the opportunities to play sport, while parents flocked to the school's gymnasium and other sporting fields to support their students. The Austin Senators, a minor league baseball team that played off-and-on in Austin, held its games just south of the river on South Congress Avenue. The city's largest park, Zilker Park, only allowed whites in the famous Barton Springs pool.³

The city's African Americans followed organized sports through their educational institutions as well. Huston College began playing football and baseball on a field in deep east Austin in the early 1900s. Black high school students played wherever they could find the space, mostly sharing Huston's sports field. The counterpart to the Austin Senators, the Austin Black Senators, also played at Huston's field. There were no city parks open to black Austinites for sport.⁴

By the time engineering firm Koch & Fowler made recommendations to the City of Austin for a citywide plan, Austin's African Americans were moving to the east side of the city, across the wide boulevard known as East Avenue. Koch & Fowler's 1928 city plan recommended that Austin continue its concentration of African Americans by only providing segregated city services in east Austin. The city agreed, and began to develop city resources for blacks in east Austin. Out of that plan came the purchase and construction of Rosewood Park, which opened in 1930. Rosewood Park, situated closer to the African American business district and residences as compared to the Huston College Stadium, had two baseball fields, tennis courts, and a swimming pool. The opening of the park gave another community center to watch and participate in organized sport.⁵

In addition to Rosewood Park, the 1928 City Plan recommended the construction of a "complete negro play-field in conjunction with the negro high school." This space, the report stated, should "be provided with ample and adequate play ground space and facilities similar to the white schools of the city."⁶ Austin Public Schools did not move as quickly as the city of Austin in securing appropriate sporting grounds for black Anderson High School. Anderson High School continued playing its football and baseball games at the Huston College Stadium until 1939. Huston College Stadium was 1.1 miles away from Anderson High School, down an unpaved and rutted 12th Street (Figure 1).⁷

³ Koch & Fowler, "A City Plan," 1928.

⁴ "Downs Field," available online at:

ftp://ftp.austintexas.gov/PARDPlanningCIP/McKnight_HistoricResources/East_Austin_PARD_resources/Downs%20Field/Downs%20Field%20History_2015-03_SS_2nd%20ed.pdf, accessed 17 February 2020.

⁵ Marshall, Sarah. "Rosewood Park: A Historic Icon of Austin's East Side," *Preservation Austin*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Summer 2019), 3-6.

⁶ Koch & Fowler, "A City Plan," p. 57.

⁷ "Negroes Will Protest Purchase of Stadium," *The Austin American*, 25 December 1938.

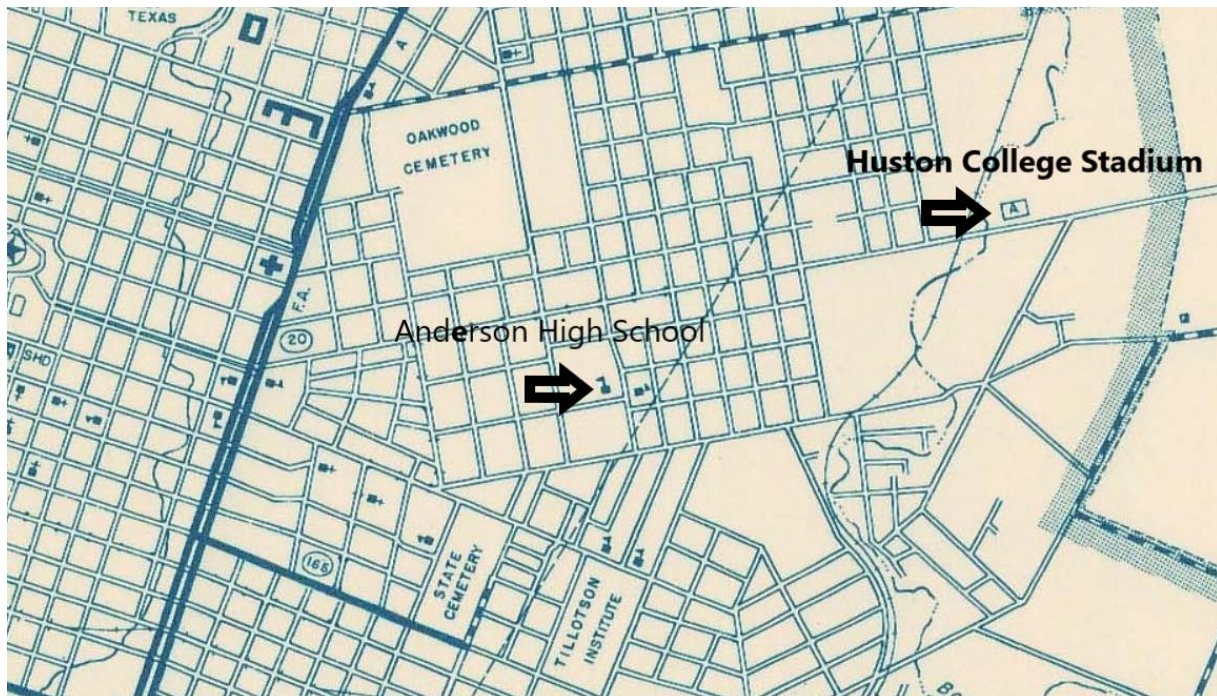


Figure 1. Map showing location of Anderson High School and shared sport field. Texas Highway Department, 1936.

A Tale of Two High Schools

Early black public education began in some of Austin's freedmen communities scattered across the new capital city. Black educators founded early schools in Robertson Hill, Clarksville, Masontown, and Gregorytown. What became Austin's first African American high school opened in 1889 in Robertson Hill, on the corner of San Marcos Street and East 11th Street. Enrollment quickly caused overcrowding, and a new, two-story frame high school opened in the early 1900s to replace the old school. This was known as the Olive Street School.⁸

The Olive Street school quickly became unsuitable as a public high school, and the Austin Public School system built a new, larger brick high school nearby on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Comal Streets. This school opened in 1913 as E.H. Anderson High School, named after Prairie View Normal School's first black president. E.H.'s brother, L.C. Anderson, was principal of Austin's black high school from 1896 through 1928, and upon his death, the school was renamed L.C. Anderson High School.⁹ Anderson High School began organizing sport teams in the early twentieth century, first focusing on football and basketball. After Rosewood Park opened in 1930, Anderson began using some of the park fields for baseball teams and marching band practice.

⁸ "New Anderson High on Most Attractive Sight," *The Austin Statesman*, 25 August 1953.

⁹ "New Anderson High on Most Attractive Sight;" Kharen Monsho, "Anderson, E.H.," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed 6 August 2017, available at: <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fan57>; Karen Monsho, "Anderson, Laurine Cecil," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed 6 August 2017, available at: <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fan56>.

Austin High School opened in 1881 for the white students of the city. The school grew quickly and in 1925 moved into a large, three-story brick school on the corner of 12th Street and Rio Grande Street. Near this school was an open, unimproved playing field donated to the City of Austin for the “white children of Austin under 21 for purposes of recreation.” After the University of Texas asked Austin High to find a new field to play football, Austin Public Schools began improving this field in 1937. With new stadium seats, a press box, scoreboard, and fence, this football field and practice facility was adjacent to Austin High School and easily walkable by students for recreation, practice, and football games (Figure 2).¹⁰



Figure 2. House Park Stadium and Austin High School Scrimmage, 1952. Photograph in Austin History Center collections.

In response to the improvements at Austin High School, as well as the recommendations of the 1928 City Plan, APS proposed acquiring the Huston College Stadium as the stadium and playing field for Anderson High School. APS stated they were interested in this field because the open land adjacent to the high school was too expensive and the city council refused to let Anderson take part of Rosewood park for the stadium. African American leaders protested

¹⁰ “7,000 Will Hear M’Craw Praise Constitution,” *The Austin Statesman*, 17 September 1937.

APS's decision, noting that the stadium was a far walk from the school "through hazardous traffic arteries" and would hamper the school's efforts in physical education.¹¹

Regardless of the protests, APS purchased the stadium and dedicated it in October 1939. The Anderson High School stadium had bleachers for 1100 viewers, a restroom, and lights. Huston College continued to share the field with Anderson, playing college football on Saturday nights. As part of the segregated Prairie View Interscholastic League, which governed black high school competitive events, this stadium hosted the 1942 state football championship, which Anderson won 40-0.¹²

With the purchase of the Huston College Stadium for Anderson High School football, there was no place for the African American minor league baseball teams to play on a regular basis. In 1949, the City of Austin opened Downs Field, an enclosed and lighted baseball stadium with seating for 600, at the end of 12th Street near its intersection with Springdale Street. This field served as the home for the Austin Black Pioneers baseball team, as well as Anderson High School's baseball team. In 1954, Sims Elementary School opened on the site of the first Downs Field, and Downs Field moved to the old Anderson High School Stadium, no longer in use since Yellow Jacket Stadium opened in 1953.¹³

A Move Toward Equalization

Several factors came together in the late 1940s and early 1950s, resulting in a new high school building for Austin's African American students. In addition to the school's athletic fields being over a mile from campus, the school building itself was old and overcrowded. It was the only school remaining in the school district to use coal for heating. Some floors did not have bathrooms. Classrooms needed improved lighting and access to electrical outlets. Science classrooms did not have permanent equipment. Students in home economics classes practiced sewing on discarded aprons from the white high school. The cafeteria could not feed all the students in the school and was "a slight jump ahead of being unsanitary."¹⁴

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began a national campaign to highlight these inequalities among black and white school facilities across the nation. The NAACP started by challenging states that did not have college or professional schools for blacks, while operating schools for whites. Texas, and the University of Texas, was one of those states and schools. Houston post office employee Heman Marion Sweatt, with the backing of the NAACP, sued the University of Texas in Austin (UT) in 1946 for admission to its law school. Instead of breaking the color line and admitting Sweatt to UT, Texas lawmakers scrambled to put together a separate law school for Sweatt to attend.¹⁵

Austin's Negro Citizens Committee pressured APS to improve black education in Austin. They demanded improvements to Anderson High School and asked for teaching of black history

¹¹ "Negroes Will Protest Purchase of Stadium," *The Austin American*, 25 December 1938.

¹² "Perfect Anderson Completed '42 Championship Sandwich," *Austin American-Statesman*, 23 October 1992.

¹³ "City, School Officials Reach Agreement on Downs Field-Anderson Site Swap," *The Austin Statesman*, 14 July 1953.

¹⁴ Austin Public Schools, "Evaluation of the Anderson High School, Report of the Visiting Committee," 1948; "Retired Teachers Recall Anderson 'Good Old Days,'" *Austin American-Statesman*, 29 August 1971.

¹⁵ Laverne, Gary. M. *Before Brown: Heman Marion Sweatt, Thurgood Marshall, and the Long Road to Justice*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010, p. 215.

in the schools.¹⁶ With the state and national NAACP pushing for equalized schools, the state legislature trying to equalize higher education opportunities, and scrutiny from local black parents and the Citizens Committee, APS knew it needed to provide improved black schools.

State governments and school districts across the South scrambled to build schools that were “separate but equal” to white schools. After decades of neglect and disinvestment in black education, these shiny new “equalization schools” were a last-ditch effort to prevent being ordered by the courts to desegregate schools. Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina developed an elaborate system of state sales taxes and government oversight to build thousands of new schools for black students in those states. Virginia appropriated millions of dollars in the state budget to build new black schools. Other states, like Louisiana, Alabama, and Texas did not have statewide equalization programs, but local school districts rushed to equalize their schools.¹⁷ APS’ 1953 construction of a new Anderson High School, along with a gymnasium and football stadium, reflected this equalization push.

In addition to the demands swirling around equalization and desegregation, Austin’s population was growing quickly. The post-World-War-II baby boom, as well as the urbanization of Texas, led to families moving into Austin for work and well as families growing as men returned from fighting and began to settle down. However, Austin still only provided services to its African American residents in east Austin. The only black junior high and high school in the city were in east Austin. Even if African Americans chose to move elsewhere in the city, they still needed to send their children to schools in the east.

The Yellow Jacket Stadium

Austin needed to construct new white high schools to accommodate the city’s growth, and it planned football stadiums at both new schools. To ensure that black parents were satisfied with the new black high school and not interested in pushing for desegregation of the white schools, APS ensured that all new high schools had sufficient classroom and lab space, as well as recreational space.

The new Anderson High School sat on a 21-acre site in east Austin, perched on a hill just off Rosewood Avenue. In directions to bidders for the design of the school, APS directed that the new school should be limited to only two stories, with one-story wings as “desirable.” The roofs would be flat, with no parapet. The exterior would consist of brick masonry, with the interior having smooth masonry walls. APS found a combination of metal casement and glass block windows as “considered desirable” and noted that wood was not to be used in windows. The school plant must also have a steam heating system, hot water, and regular drinking fountains.¹⁸

There would be eight regular classrooms, with the following specialized classrooms: art, typing, accounting, general business, home economics, woodworking, metalworking, drafting, vocational agricultural, music, physics, chemistry, and speech. The new school would have a cafeteria to seat a minimum of 225 people, a library with a classroom, and a

¹⁶ AISD Board Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1949.

¹⁷ Rebekah Dobrasko, “Other States,” www.scequalizationschools.org, accessed 28 October 2017.

¹⁸ Austin Public Schools, *Agenda for the Construction of the Proposed New High School for Colored*, prepared by Division of School Plant, 26 April 1950.

gymnasium/auditorium combination with a stage and locker rooms. To support student life, APS called for a student lounge, with space for social activities as well as a room for yearbook and newspaper publications. Over two thousand square feet of office space was necessary to allow for offices, a conference room, work room, and teachers' lounge.¹⁹

The site had sufficient space for the construction of a football and practice stadium as well. The new stadium, known as the Yellow Jacket stadium after Anderson's mascot, was situated in a "bowl" lower than the school building itself. Two sets of concrete steps led from the school to the stadium. The stadium had a fieldhouse with lockers, offices, and equipment rooms, bleachers, a concession stand, and lights for the field.



Figure 3. The 1953 L.C. Anderson High School Sits at a Higher Elevation than the Yellow Jacket Stadium, 2017. Photograph by Rebekah Dobrasko.

The new Yellow Jacket Stadium quickly became the center of Austin's black community. Most of Austin's black residents attended Anderson High School, and continued to support the school either as parents or as community members proud of their alma mater. The school held football games, marching band expos, and celebrations on their field. In 1957, Anderson once

¹⁹ Ibid.

again hosted the PVIL State Football Championship and came away victorious. A crowd of over 8,000 people watched the Yellow Jackets win at the new home stadium.²⁰ Located adjacent to the high school and much closer to the heart of the black community than the previous field, Yellow Jacket Stadium served as a community center of celebration of achievement and of the future. It was one of the only places in the black community to gather and watch organized sport.

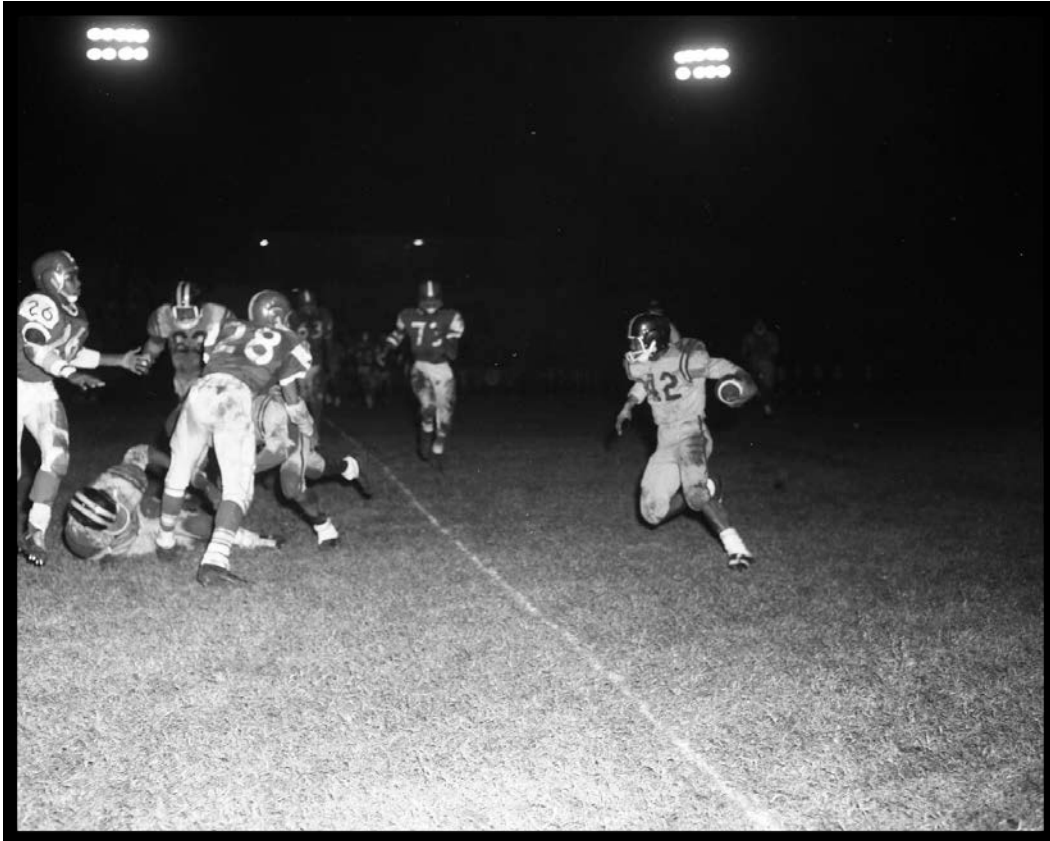


Figure 4. L.C. Anderson High School Plays a Football Game at Night, 1960. Photograph by Neal Douglass, through Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht33584/>, accessed February 17, 2020

A Lost Landscape of Segregation

Yellow Jacket Stadium served the community for less than twenty years. Soon after construction of the new school and stadium, the United States Supreme Court declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional. Austin Public Schools, now the Austin Independent School District (AISD) implemented a “freedom of choice” plan, where high school students of any race could choose to attend any Austin high school. While a handful of black students began attending white high schools, no white students chose to attend Anderson High. After a decade of unsuccessful racial integration using the “freedom of choice” plan, the

²⁰ “Anderson Triumphs 22-14 for the Title,” *The Austin American*, 14 December 1957.

United States Department of Justice sued the school district for remaining racially segregated. Ultimately, in 1971 AISD chose to close Anderson High School and bus its students to other high schools in the city as the solution for integrating the public school system.

Although the Anderson High School building and stadium were less than 20 years old, the school and stadium represented a proud community center and institution. The Anderson football team, the marching band, track and field, and debate team were all award-winning sports and organizations (Figure 5). The school proudly displayed all the trophies and ribbons won by the students. When AISD closed the school, it ensured that there would be no more Anderson Yellow Jackets. The trophies and ribbons were put in storage, and lost for several years.²¹ The memories of Yellow Jacket team victories and being one of thousands at the Yellow Jacket Stadium became distant as AISD required the community to send its high school students to schools all over Austin.



Figure 5. Anderson High School Football Team Poses for Photograph in New Stadium, 1961. Photograph by Neal Douglass, through Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht19308/>, accessed February 17, 2020

The newly-created Austin Community College (ACC) moved in to the old Anderson High School building in 1982. ACC quickly found there was not enough parking on the school site for

²¹ "Defunct School's Trophies Scattered," *Austin American-Statesman*, 30 March 2012.

its commuter student base, and so the college looked to the Yellow Jacket Stadium to solve the parking problems. ACC paved over the stadium's field. ACC left the old Anderson site in 1989, and AISD opened the Alternative Learning Center on the campus. The stadium remained a parking lot, although the concrete stairs, ticket booth, concession stand, and fieldhouse also remained unused but intact.²²

Reclaiming a Community Landscape

In 1993, former National Football League player Thomas "Hollywood" Henderson learned of the fate of his old stadium playing grounds. Aware that east Austin lost its community center when the high school closed in 1971, Henderson was determined to do something to give back to the now-fractured African American community in east Austin. Henderson worked with AISD, which had no interest in the old football field or maintaining it, and raised funds to remove the concrete and restored the playing field sod. Henderson declared that Yellow Jacket Stadium was a part of the community, and once the field was sodded and irrigated, he started booking community football games and events at the Yellow Jacket Stadium.²³

Later, in order to add a track to the stadium, Henderson underwent a hunger strike, asking for the community to donate funds for the track. Henderson also updated the bleachers and added new bathrooms at the stadium. The East Austin Boys and Girls Club moved into the old Anderson High School gymnasium, and the Yellow Jacket Stadium was becoming a community exercise center again (Figure 6).²⁴

²² "Group Tackles Football Field Plan," *Austin American-Statesman*, 19 August 1993.

²³ "Henderson Spreads Recovery Message in 'Hollywood,'" *Austin American-Statesman*, 8 November 1993.

²⁴ "Ex-Football Pro Fasts for Eastside Track—No Food," *Austin American-Statesman*, 30 September 1997; "Before Center is Built, Youth Boosters Come," *Austin American Statesman*, 20 November 1997.



Figure 6. Yellow Jacket Stadium Today, 2017. Photograph by Rebekah Dobrasko.

In 2019, AISD embarked on a redevelopment of the old Anderson High School, which involved demolishing the historic 1953 school and rebuilding a new one on its footprint. However, the historic Yellow Jacket Stadium remains. AISD is interested in incorporating the stadium into its facilities master plan after decades of neglect. House Park remains an active white high school stadium, continuously serving the community as a football stadium and sport center.

The Yellow Jacket Stadium is the only remaining place associated with the African American Anderson High School. One of the earlier sites of the school on Olive Street is now a pocket park. The 1913 Anderson High School building burned in the 1980s, and a new Kealing Middle School building sits on that site.²⁵ With the demolition of the 1953 school building, the historic stadium precariously holds on to its site, fighting to remain a community asset.

Along with Rosewood Park and Downs Field, the Yellow Jacket Stadium remains on the landscape as a place of segregated sport in Austin. Rosewood Park served the entire African American community as a place to play pick up baseball games, swim, and listen to the

²⁵ "Pocket Park Packs Deep History," available online at: www.austintexas.gov/blog/pocket-park-packs-deep-history, accessed 6 January 2020.

Anderson High School marching band practice before games. The current Downs Field remains a baseball field. That landscape changed from a college football stadium, to the home field of the Anderson Yellow Jackets for the first half of the twentieth century, to a minor league and college baseball stadium again. Yellow Jacket Field remains the place where almost all of Austin's African American community gathered, either as students, parents, teachers, or supportive members. The landscape has been neglected, altered, and reclaimed again by the community of east Austin, serving as a reminder of the historic L.C. Anderson High School Yellow Jackets.