

ODE TO A SUPER STADIUM

FOR OVER 40 YEARS, Memorial Stadium was a presence in the hearts of Baltimoreans, a stage for its legendary sports dramas. **BUT WHEN THE WRECKING CREWS** arrived in 2001, the end had come for the 60,000 seater. The beloved Colts had left town. The Orioles had moved to a sensational new retro park off I-95. An emotional debate ended in the decision to replace Memorial with an affordable housing and assisted living complex. **BEFORE DEMOLITION**, James Rosenthal of the Historic American Buildings Survey photographed the vacant stadium. Rosenthal and HABS historian Martin Perschler wanted to capture this important example of modernism in America, whose architecture had gone largely unappreciated. "You have a combination of European ideas coming into this very American structure," Rosenthal says. For its time, the design was on the edge. The Bauhaus-inspired lettering seemed foreign to people, prompting articles in the papers. And yet the place became a revered shrine to Baltimore sports. **MEMORIAL OPENED** in 1949. Five years later, with an added upper deck, it became the first baseball stadium with an open-air second level, the forerunner of what historians call the "super stadiums" of the '60s and '70s. **TODAY, STADIUMS ARE BUILT** by national firms, but the labor and materials that went into this one were local. The use of the signature Baltimore brick for the facade marked it as a city institution. **IN ITS FINAL YEARS**, Memorial was a remarkable anomaly: a professional sports venue in a residential neighborhood, where people offered their driveways for game-day parking with makeshift vending stands in their front yards. Those days are gone. But a lasting impression has been preserved on film.

