

Yankee Stadium (2008)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

Yankee Stadium is a venerable old broad, who has seen better days. I saw the sixth last Yankee game there forever, the summer of '08. She was battered and worn, chipping paint and scuffed walkways. The Yankees lost, despite Captain Derek Jeter's two hits — 1270 and 1271 — the most ever for a player at Yankee Stadium. The guy whose record he broke was named Lou Gehrig.

The game was, of course, just a sideshow. It was the crowd, a sell-out, representative of every kind of human being on this planet. I could imagine no examples who weren't there. They all lined up at the concession stand, which meant a half-hour wait for an eight buck Italian sausage and a nine buck beer. They all had a ticket, which meant we sat high above right field, somewhere near Hoboken. The critic next to me kept correcting the ump's calls on outside pitches — finally I said, "Man, what eyesight you got!" and then he started adding, "It appears!" to every call. But he kept correcting.

I saw the ghosts out there, in center field — clustering around the monuments, so they wouldn't impede the action on the field. I saw Whitey Ford, and Joe Dimaggio, and I think I saw Mickey Mantle, cavorting around out there on sacred ground where once they ruled. A shadow of the Babe; his house. I heard the cries of the crowds — 85 years of 80 games — that's nearly seven thousand hordes of rabid fans, plus those that turned out for popes and Louis-Schmelling fights and Notre-Dame/Army games ("Win one for the Gipper" echoes here) and soccer games and pro football and conventions for 123,707 Jehovah's Witnesses in 1950.

We yelled, we screamed, we managed our juicy Italian sausages with elbows cramped to our sides. We had a distant view of the field; the closest player was the right fielder, who was hidden from us by three layers of fans beneath us, and

the home plate vista was like a tiny video, little tiny men in white, you could almost see the pin-stripes, tiny men in grey, little men in umpire-dark. You'll get a better view in the new stadium, whose walls are visible out there behind center field. But the unparalleled view was the 57,743 other fans who stretched farther than a single vision could encompass. When they hosted all those Jehovah's Witnesses, they seated people in the outfield and asked ladies to remove their heels so they wouldn't poke holes in that sacred sod. They couldn't do that when we were there; the White Sox wouldn't have liked it. It was bad enough with us temporary Yankee fans at our moment in history.

Baseball fan Houston Hodges preaches about once a month at the Big Cove Presbyterian Church in the Hampton Cove area.