



They've heard all sides of this, so why not find the real McCoy?" asks Ruth McCoy, 89, whose husband was the nephew of former Pawtucket Mayor Thomas P. McCoy, namesake of the stadium where the PawSox have played since 1970. The new owners of the team want a new ballpark built on the Providence waterfront. The Providence Journal/Bob Breidenbach

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'The real McCoy' cries foul over plan to move PawSox

Ruth McCoy says abandoning the stadium championed by her husband's uncle, former Pawtucket Mayor Thomas P. McCoy, would be a "crime."

EAST PROVIDENCE — Ruth McCoy never met her husband's beloved Uncle Tom, who died before she and Billy met.

A bachelor, Uncle Tom had no children of his own, but he adored his five nephews and took them on trips to visit national parks and baseball stadiums, she'd learn from her husband. Once a semiprofessional baseball player, Tom didn't make it in the big leagues — so he worked, in politics, she said in a recent interview with The Providence Journal.

"All I heard about was Uncle Tom," Ruth McCoy recalled at Tockwotton on the Waterfront, the senior living community where she now lives. "Billy loved him."

That uncle — Thomas P. McCoy — would become mayor of Pawtucket in 1936.

Thomas McCoy rose to become a powerful Democratic Party boss and hoped the baseball stadium he built, among efforts to help his city recover from the Great Depression, would become his legacy. Yet opponents dubbed the project McCoy's Folly — the city had to replace 60 concrete piers intended to hold up the stadium after they sank into swampy quicksand, and critics decried lucrative contracts awarded to McCoy's allies.

When Municipal Stadium opened on July 4, 1942, the \$1.5-million stadium was the most expensive in the country, according to sports economist Victor A. Matheson at the College of the Holy Cross.



Thomas McCoy died in office in 1945, and the stadium was renamed in his honor the next year — the same year Ruth Barry met William J. "Billy" McCoy, Tom's nephew.

Ruth McCoy, now 89, wants the new owners of the Pawtucket Red Sox to know "how sorry the family is" about their plans to leave behind McCoy Stadium and build a new stadium in Providence, on land west of the Providence River and east of Dyer Street.

The new owners are meeting privately with state leaders, after their initial proposal for up to \$150 million in state subsidies over 30 years — plus no city property taxes — was widely rejected as unfair to taxpayers.

"Ridiculous," Ruth McCoy calls it. "There's no need for it, and it's quite an insult to the people of Pawtucket."

The owners have said they might leave Rhode Island if they don't reach a deal with the state — Ruth says that would be a "crime."

But much worse, she says, would be leaving Pawtucket: "It's a crime, a bigger crime."

Ruth was a child when Mayor Thomas McCoy attracted federal money from the Works Progress Administration to help build the stadium at Hammond Pond. She doesn't know why he chose its location, but she remembers the city's youth lost their favorite winter skating pond: "We used to skate there as children, and we were furious."

But Billy told her Uncle Tom had strong views: "He thought the children of Pawtucket should not have to play in the roads," she recalls. He wanted a place where parents could come and watch their children's sporting activities. "The whole purpose of it was community."

Ruth and Billy married in 1948 and raised four boys and a girl in Pawtucket.

These days, Ruth has plenty of memories of ball games at McCoy Stadium with their children.

Fourth of July was always a big celebration.

And there was the time about a decade ago when many in the family bought raffle tickets when her grandson, Barry McCoy, eagerly wanted to win the prize in his school's fundraiser — throwing out the first pitch at a PawSox game. Much to his delight, 6-year-old Barry won. As the PawSox fell behind by five runs in the first inning, Ruth recalls a rallying cry from one in the audience — "Bring in McCoy!"

"That was a very sweet night," she said.

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