



Toronto Optimists History-Newsletter

This publication honours and continues the tradition started by Don Daber in 1960. Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter is published quarterly.

The Toronto Optimists History website celebrates:

The Toronto Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps 1958 - 1975 | The Seneca Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps 1976 - 1978

Published by Bob Carell. Please direct inquiries to: Toronto_Optimist@rogers.com
A PDF version is available on the website: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

T HIS IS THE THIRD ISSUE of the new Toronto Optimists History Newsletter. Your response to these newsletters has been very positive and we hope you will enjoy this one.

The Optimists had won the Nationals in their first year in competition. Everyone, corps members and fans, were wondering whether the Optimists could hold on to first place. Perhaps Scout House would regain the title? Since all of this is in the past, I'm sure you already know the answer; however, you might be interested in hearing how the year unfolded.

This issue includes Chapter 5 and 6 of Colin's History of the Optimists. These chapters focus on the development of the corps, its management and its second year in competition, including the corps' first trip to Jersey City




Toronto Optimists. (Preview of Champions, Jersey City, 1959)

for the Preview of Champions. We have also included an article by Lorne Ferrazzutti about the beginnings of the Optimists. In addition, you will find an article about Doug MacKenzie who was recently inducted into the Buglers Hall of Fame.

The focus of this publication is the history of the Optimists; however, we hope to include information about other corps. In this issue we have included a special feature, an article about the Jolly Jesters. The Jolly Jesters were, not only, an important part of Canadian drum corps history, they were also a corps ahead of its time. We hope you will find the article to be both interesting and informative.

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PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

Contribute to your newsletter

Send your suggestions, stories or articles to Bob: toronto_optimist@rogers.com or David: openrd2002@yahoo.ca

Remember “Sadie Mau Mau”? Here is an opportunity for you to start a by-line article in the newsletter.

We plan on publishing four issues each year: January, April, July and October.

IMPORTANT: The Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter is only available in Acrobat (PDF) format.

We got around...

Check out page 47. EACH YEAR the corps traveled in Ontario, Quebec and the United States. Each issue of the Newsletter will have this map showing all the destinations (red dots) for a given year; however, two locations will not be named below the map.

If you are the first to correctly name the two missing locations and the month the corps was there, you will receive an 11x14 Commemorative Corps Poster celebrating the Corps and the NEW Toronto Optimists History-Newsletter.

E-mail you answers to Bob at: toronto_optimist@rogers.com



Website trivia: July - Issue 3

The answers will be found on the Toronto Optimists History website:
TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

1. Name the drum majors for the Toronto Optimists in 1960?

HINT: There was more than one.

2. In what year were the Toronto Optimists presented with the City of Toronto flag?

E-mail your answers to Bob:

toronto_optimist@rogers.com



RECOLLECTIONS

Submit your recollection to: toronto_optimist@rogers.com

Submitted by *Ivor Bramley*

IN 1958, a fellow office worker, Don Chisholm, at every coffee break, enthused about a new drum corps (what was a drum corps?), The Optimists. Don browbeat me into going to the first competition at the University Avenue Armouries, I remember it well, May 3rd. 1958. I simply loved it, Don's enthusiasm was justified, so much to me, that on Monday May 5th I showed up at the rehearsal at Jarvis Street and asked to join. I was hooked. The corps, or something, was needed by me, it gave me a sense of belonging: The members, instructors and management thankfully showed great tolerance of my sometimes 'out of order' behaviour and to this day I am grateful for that.

I don't now think of Corps, every day as I used to, but occasionally I rekindle: Just the other day, I was moved to listening, again to 1956 Skyliners New York, 1959 St. Vincent's Cadets, Bayonne, New Jersey, and finished with Hawthorne Caballeros Alumni of a recent year. Better music, I've heard all my life, but there is a special place for the sound of drum corps in my emotions.



Ivor played Bass Drum in 1961.



Website UPDATE: What's happening with TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

ADDITIONS TO BOTH the main website and the Photo Gallery continue to be made. We add new photos to the gallery about once a week. The biggest addition to the main website does not actually reside on the website. It's a slideshow featuring images of the 1963 Toronto Optimists. I have posted the video on YouTube but the website contains links to the video. This project actually resulted in two slightly different slide shows.

Keeping The Memories Alive!

July Newsletter has been posted!!

This issue includes **Chapters 5 and 6** of Colin's book, "From Toronto...The Optimists!". It also includes two feature articles: "**How the Toronto Optimists Drum Corps got started**" by Lorne Ferrazzutti and an article about **the Jolly Jesters**. This issue also includes a **tribute to Doug MacKenzie** who was recently inducted into the Buglers Hall of Fame as well as a **remembrance page for Bill Thorne**.



To see a complete list of changes to this website please visit our [Changes page](#)

Recent additions to this website

- [Our July newsletter has been published](#) (added July 15, 2021)
- [Slideshow featuring the 1963 Toronto Optimists](#) has been posted on YouTube
- [The 1978 Seneca Optimists posted on YouTube](#) (added on April 19, 2021)
- [The 1978 Seneca Optimists posted on YouTube](#) (added on April 19, 2021)
- [Photos from 1962](#) posted on YouTube (added on January 27, 2021)
- [The Toronto Optimists](#) (added Nov 20, 2020)
- [The Seneca Optimists](#) (added Nov 12, 2020)



Slideshow of the 1963 Toronto Optimists

1963 Slideshow

Slideshow of the 1963 Toronto Optimists

The audio track was recorded on June 30, 1963 in Mundelein, IL. The photos were taken during the 1963 season and include images of the complete corps as well as the mini-corps that performed during the spring of 1963.

Look for this link for the new video celebrating 1963 Optimists.

Over the years, I have created several slide shows. Some of these featured the alumni corps, some focused on the Seneca Optimists and others on the Toronto Optimists. The program that I had been using would only create videos formatted like the old TVs so each of these slide shows is in 4x3 format. The first version of the 1963 slide show was also in 4:3 format.

These days TVs, computers and mobile phones all use a widescreen format so I decided it was time to switch programs and create wide screen slide shows. I purchased new software, learned how to use the new program, then created a new version of the 1963 slide show. Both versions of the slide show are available on YouTube. I would be interested in knowing whether people prefer the old format or the new. If website visitors prefer the widescreen format I might recreate the Toronto Optimists and Seneca Optimists videos in wide screen.

Optimists Drum Corps

The rich histories of the Toronto Optimists Drum and its first performance in 1958 and competed for 1958, the corps' first year of competition, the National Championships. The Optimists then by winning the Canadian Nationals title for 11 years every year from 1958 through 1968! No other such a successful winning streak.



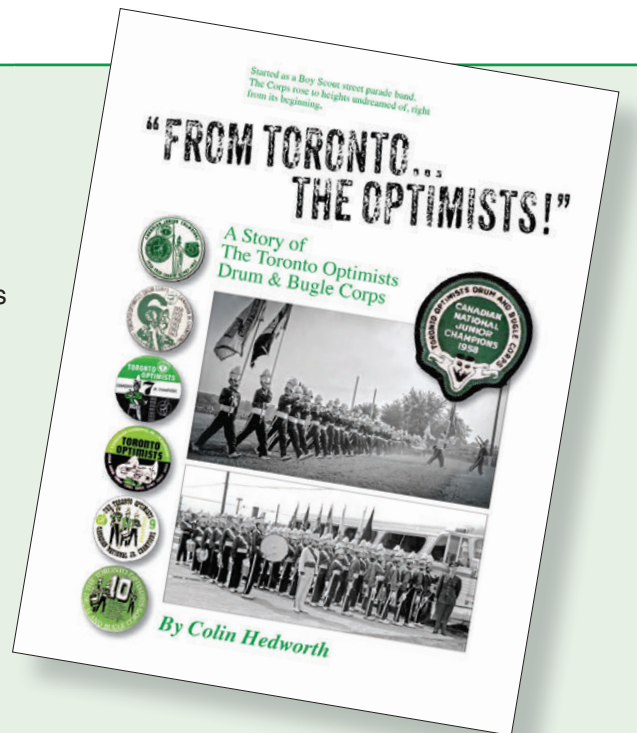
Home page of the new Toronto Optimists History website. (July 2021)

In our next newsletter: Chapters 7 and 8 (Winter 1959/60, 1960)

The next issue of the Newsletter (October) will include Chapters 7 and 8 from Colin Hedworth's book "From Toronto... The Optimists!".

CHAPTER 7 focuses on the winter of 1959/60 while the focus of Chapter 8 is on the summer of 1960. American corps set the trends and, if The Optimists hoped to do better in the U.S.A., changes would be necessary.

For example, trying to stick with a theme of "Happy Music" limited the corps selection of music. As well, many of the corps' arrangements were simple and used block chording. This would have to change. These chapters discuss those issues and much more



Toronto Optimists trooping the stands (Preview of Champions, 1960)

The book "From Toronto... The Optimists!" is out of print.

The Jolly Jesters: A corps Ahead of Its Time

By Bob Carell

Gathering information and photos for an article about a drum corps that ceased to exist 60 years ago has proven to be a challenge. For example, I have received identical photos that show different years. I have also discovered that memories of the same event often differ. After 60 years, none of this is surprising; however, it makes it difficult to ensure that the details are accurate. I have done my best to ensure that the information is correct and I hope you will enjoy reading this article about an important part of Canadian Drum Corps history.

THE JOLLY JESTERS were from Toronto, Ontario. Like many of the early drum and bugle corps, they began as a military band. A group of men in the Army Reserve created a band which became the trumpet and marching unit for the 5th Column, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (RCASC).



5th Column, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps. (Waterloo, 1956)

The band's uniform was army dress blues worn with white pith helmets or flat-top hats. They disbanded during the Second World War because band members were on active duty; however, they reformed the band in about 1947 or 1948. The band performed as a parade corps until entering and winning the Canadian Drum Corps Championships (Senior Novice Class) in 1952.

In 1955 the army, responding to a protest by the musicians' union, forbade the band from performing at a civilian function in Toronto. In response, the band rented clown costumes and performed as a civilian unit. They called themselves "The Jolly Jesters Drum and Bugle Corps." How did this come about?

The transition began around 1954 after Ted Reilly, the band's director, attended a contest in Batavia, NY. Ted recognized the potential of a drum corps and began putting his efforts into creating the corps' first full M&M show.

Around 1955 or 1956, band members used their own money to purchase a second uniform. They replaced the dark blue military jacket with a sky-blue satin blouse having royal blue cuffs and a royal blue cummerbund. Flat top military hats replaced the pith helmets.



Jolly Jesters original jacket patch



5th Column Royal Canadian Army Service Corps. (1955 or 1956)

RCASC and the band got along well with RCASC rarely interfering with the band. The photo shows the band in their new silk tops. They are wearing pith helmets because their new hats were not ready. Ted Reilly, the conductor, is wearing a dark blue top and a sample of the new hat.

RCASC treated the band differently from the militia unit. Their expectations of the band were simply to provide a duty bugler, take part in the occasional military parade and march the unit around the armoury floor one night a week.

In 1955, as an experiment, the Toronto Argonauts Football Club replaced three of their usual half-time shows with a drum corps competition. Three corps, each corps performing at a different half-time show, would compete for a first-place prize of \$1,200. The Argos invited the 5th Column, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (RCASC) to take part in the competition. Accepting that invitation created problems with both the American

Federation of Musicians Union (AFM) and the military.

The Toronto Argonauts had already encountered problems with the AFM when, in 1954, they had invited the Second Signals Band (the precursor to the Ambassadors) to perform at two Argo games. The AFM had lodged a protest with Army Command which forbade Second Signals from performing. Another story says that the 48th Highlanders, who had performed at Argonaut half time shows for a long time, complained to the union about the money they were losing.

Either way, the AFM was not happy. The Argo competition re-ignited the battle. A newspaper reporter wrote “Walter Murdoch (of the Musicians Union) accusing the Argonaut football club of being ‘plain cheap’, charged the \$1,200 prize money was only a fraction of what the club would have to pay for professional musicians”.

The AFM responded to the Argo competition by blacklisting all trumpet and bugle bands in Ontario (both Junior and Senior). A newspaper report from 1957 stated that the union and bands had reached a resolution; however, the blacklisting of drum corps was still active in the mid-1960s. In 1965 the organizers of the Easter Seals Telethon, a cross-Canada televised fund-raiser, invited the Toronto Optimists to perform. When the corps agreed, the response from the union was swift and clear. The union said that, if the Optimists performed, they would ban union musicians from performing in the

BAND MUST WEAR CIVVIES TO ARGO FOOTBALL GAME

(This article was published in the Toronto Star, October 28, 1955)

The blue uniforms and white pith helmets of the 45 piece RCASC trumpet band will be exchanged for colourful "surprise civilian costumes" for the band's appearance at the Argo football game tomorrow.

The change was forced by an interpretation of an army rule by the Toronto Musicians' association.

Army Central Command and the Argonaut football executive have been informed by the union that the band "is not authorized to perform as an army unit" because of an army order stating a militia band cannot replace a union band on a job, "insofar as depriving them of their livelihood is concerned," said Lt.-Col. G. W. Carnegie, RCASC commanding officer.

He said the rule also stipulates militia bands cannot participate in competitions for a fee.

Involves Competitions

The Union's ruling came over the Football Invitation Trumpet Band Competition involving two Army bands and the Merritton Trumpet Band in which the three bands were invited to compete for a trophy and about \$1,200.

The Musicians' Union

brought the army ruling to the attention of the army authorities after the Second Signals Regiment Trumpet Band appeared as the first entry in the competition at an Argo game Thanksgiving weekend.

At last week's game, the RCASC band appearance was cancelled at the last minute and the Merritton Band was placed on the program.

Lt.-Col. Carnegie said the Army ruling also states that a unit "may participate in a music festival by paying the prescribed fee and it was under this that we allow the Army bands to enter the competition. Apparently the union interpreted the rules otherwise," he said.

Hire Own Suits

However, he said, "the boys are going to play anyway, and have gone out and hired their own costumes at their own expense. They wouldn't even tell me what kind of costume they were going to wear. They told me to come out to the game and I would see them," Lt.-Col. Carnegie said. They have a wonderful "esprit de corps," he added.

An Argo official said the band would not be excluded from the competition. "It doesn't matter to us whether they are in uniform or not," he said.

telethon. The Optimist chose the only reasonable option and withdrew from performing during the telethon.

The union was not the only problem facing the band. Army regulations prohibited active service and militia bands from replacing union bands or taking part in competitions for fees. The RCASC said that Army Central Command had issued an order prohibiting the band from participating in the Argos competition as an army unit; however, the band members very much wanted to compete. The clause "as an army unit" was their loophole. Band members rented circus clown costumes then competed under the name "The Jolly Jesters".

DRESSED AS JESTERS, ARMY MEN TAKE THE TITLE

(This article was published in the Toronto Globe and Mail on October 31, 1955)

The RCASC band pulled a new name and multicolored clown costumes out of its bag of tricks Saturday in answer to a ban by Toronto's Musicians Association on the appearance of the band as an army unit at the Argo football game.

The band placed first in the Football Invitation Trumpet Band competition.

Officially the 45-piece band was known as the Jolly Jesters but there was no mistaking the fact that the faces hidden under the clown costumes and the performances were those of the RCASC.

RCASC officials refused to comment on the move. Musicians said the band and its men were afraid to say anything. They said the unit's Colonel would get into trouble if any statement was made.

A four-man judging team gave it five more points than its closest competitor. The Second Signals Regiment Trumpet Band placed second and the Merritton Grenadiers were rated third. The three bands competed for a trophy and

about \$1,200.

The RCASC band was originally scheduled to appear at the October 22 Argo home game. The appearance was cancelled and the Merritton Grenadiers, a community-sponsored band, substituted on the program. The RCASC said it was ordered not to appear by Army Central Command.

Lt. Col. G. W. Carnegie, RCASC commanding officer, said the Toronto Musicians' Association objected to the appearance as being contrary to an army order stating that the militia band cannot replace a union band on a job and cannot participate in competitions for a fee.

Central Command said the union brought the ruling to its attention after the Second Signals Regiment Trumpet Band appeared as the first entry in the competition at the Argo game on Thanksgiving weekend.

Colonel Carnegie claimed that the band had entered the contest under the provisions of the ruling that permits participation in a music festival by paying the prescribed fee. He said the union did not agree with the band's interpretation.



The Jolly Jesters wearing rented clown costumes in their first competition. (Argo Contest, Varsity Stadium, October 29, 1955)

You might wonder why they chose clown costumes. The corps needed to rent 45 similar costumes and the only suitable option that was available at Malabar, Toronto's costume emporium, was clown costumes. On the surface they were an unknown band; however, the bodies under those clown costumes were the members of the RCASC band. So, how did they do?

In third place was the Merritton Grenadiers, preceded by the Second Signals while the Jolly Jesters won. They marched home with the top prize money in their very first competition! Their performance was a big hit with both spectators and band members.

The next year, in 1956, the corps received its first invitation to a major American contest. Dave

Wood remembers: "While everyone agreed with the clown costume at the Argo game to do it for an American audience at a regular Drum Corps show took a hard sell by Ted". With all members on board the corps, for the second and final time, rented clown costumes. In August 1956 the Jolly Jesters performed at the Mardi Gras of Champions in Albany, NY and drew tremendous applause.

THE OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE response to the clown costumes made it easy to keep the Jester theme so band members opted to continue competing under the name "The Jolly Jesters". The drum corps world had gained a new competitor!

For those with more of a military persuasion, corps members were still in the army and had army dress



The Jolly Jesters in their rented clown costumes at their first performance in the USA. (Albany, NY, 1956).

blues. Over the winter Ted designed new uniforms, chose new theme music and created a new show. In 1957 the corps performed in matching Red and White clown costumes designed by Ted and made for them by Malabar. The left side of these new costumes was red and the right side was white. With the new uniforms, the corps would flash red and white in sequence as they marched and turned.

On the field Ted Reilly, the corps director, wore a tramp costume complete with tails, patches and a top



Jolly Jesters performing at Honest Ed's. (Toronto, circa 1957)

hat. The corps' drum major, Ted Higgins, dressed as a Court Jester. In later years Ted Reilly wore the Court Jester costume.

Dave Wood remembers the corps on the starting line playing a fanfare, "I'm forever blowing bubbles, pretty bubbles in the air", before releasing coloured helium-filled balloons then stepping off to "Be A Clown." The crowd thought it was a great way to open their show!



Jolly Jesters performing in their red and white clown costumes. Ted Higgins, in his Court Jester costume, is conducting while Ted Reilly, the corps director, is on the right wearing a top hat and tails. (probably 1957)



Ted Reilly, Jolly Jesters Drum Major. (1959)

Tom Mellors wrote this: “I tell people that the clown outfits were ideal for coping with weather. For performances in the hot summer, we only needed underpants under the clown suits. In cold weather, heavy coats and long johns ruled the day. We all looked the same in the clown suits and no-one ever noticed any difference. In looking at today’s modern

drum corps, I think the Jolly Jesters, with their show and ‘costumes’, were ahead of their time.”

Dave Shano recollects his part in the show: “I wasn’t good enough to play. My only appearance was to wave my hand anxiously at Ted Reilly - I had to go to the bathroom BAD. He waved me off the field; and the Corps started the show. After an appropriate time, I came back on and squatted on the field until Ted chased me to two or three different spots so that I didn’t impede the show. That was my claim to fame. Of course the kids got a laugh.”

In terms of repertoire the Jolly Jesters selection of music was eclectic, ranging from circus-related songs such as “Pagliacci”, “Man On The Flying Trapeze”, “Be A Clown” and “Another Opening, Another Show” to marches like “Semper Fidelis” all the way to jazz numbers which included “Sophisticated Lady” and “Take the ‘A’ Train”. The DCX Museum website (dcxmuseum.org) contains the Jolly Jesters’ complete repertoire from 1957 through 1960.

Dave Shano remembers a Judge saying “you’ll never win as clowns”. Other people had made



Jolly Jesters on the starting line at Roosevelt Stadium for the Preview of Champions. (Jersey City, NJ, 1957 or 1958)



The Jolly Jesters in their rented clown costumes at their first performance in the USA. (Albany, NY, 1956)



The Jolly Jesters. (Port Dalhousie, ON, 1957)

FEATURE ARTICLE: The Jolly Jesters (continued)

similar comments. Corps members began wondering whether they would get higher scores in competition if they looked more like a “traditional” drum corps. Many corps members felt that a change in both their uniform and style was the path to take.

During 1960, the corps usually performed in their clown costumes but they sometimes wore the light blue silk tops that they had purchased years earlier. The Jolly Jesters disbanded at the end of the 1960 season.

OVER THE COURSE of its existence the Jolly Jesters performed in 24 contests, 17 of them in the United States. When the corps disbanded, many members followed Ted Riley to the Ambassadors, a few went to the Guelph Royalaires while some left the drum



*Jolly Jester, Gord Irvine, on cymbals.
(New York - Canadian Championships, Rochester, August, 1960)*



Jolly Jesters releasing balloons on the starting line. (New York - Canadian Championships, Rochester, 1960)



Jolly Jesters with wraps around their drums. (1955)

corps activity altogether. The remaining members created a new corps called “The Jesters”. Band members had accumulated their “Army Pay” and used that money to purchase uniforms and instruments. The Jesters inherited this equipment since the Jolly Jesters, not the military, had purchased it. Dave Wood said “with the blue shirts we wore the dark blue army pants with the double white stripe. Never gave them back.”

By the time the Jolly Jesters disbanded, the mystique surrounding them had entered drum corps history. With their colourful costumes and crowd pleasing performances, the Jolly Jesters, by preceding a similar non-military trend of today’s drum corps, were ahead of their time.

When competing during 1961, the Jesters wore the sky-blue silk tops that the Jolly Jesters had purchased. In 1962 the Jesters purchased new, dark blue uniforms. At the end of the 1963 season the Jesters merged with the Hamilton Viscounts to create a new drum corps, the Commanders.

Thanks go to Dave Shano, Dave Wood, Jim Patten, Ann White, Lorne Ferrazzutti and Tom Mellors, together with Steve Vickers and Drum Corps World, who supplied photos and information for this article. *(continued next page)*



Jolly Jesters red jacket patch



Joe “Radar” Watson wearing his Jolly Jesters costume at a G.A.S. convention

FEATURE ARTICLE: The Jolly Jesters (continued)



Jesters wore the Jolly Jesters light blue uniforms in their first year. (Rochester, 1961)



Jesters in their new, dark blue uniforms (Canadian Nationals, Waterloo, 1962)



Commanders. (Hamilton, 1964)

Doug MacKenzie inducted into the Buglers Hall of Fame

Doug MacKenzie has been inducted into the Buglers Hall of Fame in recognition of his performances with the Toronto Optimists.

D OUG BEGAN his drum corps career in 1956 with the Leaside Lions peanut corps, moving to the Leaside Lions Jungle Kings in 1958. He joined the Toronto Optimists in the fall of 1959 and aged out in 1967. During that time, he contributed significantly to winning eight consecutive Provincial and National Championships, six years as a featured soloist.

Doug played in Canada's Marching Ambassadors for two years and then for The Commanders winning two more National Championships, one with each corps. From 1972 to 1975 he was a director on the board of the York-Toronto Optimist Club, the sponsors of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps.

Doug became the Director of the Toronto Optimists Drum And Bugle Corps for the 1975 season. The Optimists placed sixteenth at DCI moving eighteen positions from 1974 when they placed thirty-fourth. That is a record for improvement at the DCI level that still stands.

Later, he played with the Optimist Alumni Corps, became a member of the Optimists Hall of Fame in 2003 and served on their Board of Directors. He also played with Simcoe United Alumni and DOCA – the De La Salle, Oakland Crusaders Alumni. Doug could play with range but was most noted for his tone, sweet and mellow.



Doug playing a solo in the 2nd Shriners International Drum Corps Competition in Toronto. Vern Johansson Drum Major. (1966)

Chapter 5: 1959 – Composition, Characters, Continuation

After the excitement of our victory at Galt had subsided, it took quite some time before it truly sunk in that we were the Canadian Junior Champions. A championship crest, to be worn on the Corps



jacket was issued to all. It embodied the symbol of the Optimists Drum Corps and had been suggested by one Don Chisholm. As the years passed, the design and size of succeeding crests would be altered to accommodate the growing number of years to be displayed.

After the 1958 season ended, the Corps was accorded a civic reception by the City of Toronto. We paraded up the concrete canyon of Bay Street to Old City Hall. There, the incumbent mayor, Nathan Phillips, presented us with a City of Toronto flag in recognition of the honour that had been brought to Toronto. This flag was the first of a collection that would grow, each one having its own significance.



Phil Hennings receives the City of Toronto Flag from Toronto's Mayor, Nathan Phillips (1958)

Rehearsals continued more or less as before, in order to ensure continuity. If things had been allowed to go on too long without activity, momentum, and even interest could have waned. This can happen and the unit becomes a one shot wonder.

Bernie Beer

Now that the Corps was more or less established, the dividends of success began to make an appearance. New people came down to join. Not only playing members, but also those willing to help out in subsidiary but essential ways; drivers, supervisors, equipment, etc. Some of these people had youngsters in the Corps, and some did not but were just interested.

One of these was to remain with the Corps for a long time. In conjunction with others, he made a definite impact. After his association with the Optimists, he would take his knowledge and experience elsewhere; namely, the Canadian Commanders and De La Salle. This was Mr. Bernie Beer.

Mr. Beer, or Bernie, had joined the Optimist Club in 1958, purely through a desire to assist in boys' work. He immediately became active on the "boys' work committee", but first saw the Corps at the 1958 Championships in Galt. This show confirmed that if he was going to be involved in boys' work, this was the side of it that he wanted to be in.



Bernie Beer (1960)

Bernie, who was born in England and came to Canada as a young boy, had played for sixteen years as a cornet soloist with “Dovercourt Senior Band”. Most likely, a school, or service club organization.

His interest in the Corps was such that he travelled with us throughout 1959, becoming familiar with that world. He was also, at this time, Vice-President and Chairman of the “boys’ work committee” for the club. At the beginning of the following year, 1960, he was appointed Assistant Director of the Corps and relinquished his position with the boys’ work committee. Almost at once his influence was felt when he obtained a Sunday, indoor rehearsal spot for us at A.E. Long Co., in East York, his place of business.



Toronto Optimists in a parade (Guelph, 1959)

There was also a Dr. Schilling. He was a member of the Optimist Club, and his assignment was to report to the sponsor on the activities and progress of the Corps. He had been around since the beginning but so quiet that most of us were unaware of his presence. Around this time a Mr. Keith Morgan and Mr. Bruce Brodie made their appearance. Where they came from, we did not know, but they came, providing assistance in controlling and directing the group. We were sometimes less than gentlemen.

The full size of a Junior Drum Corps during this era seldom exceeded fifty marching members. Usually one bus was all that was needed to transport the Corps and most of its equipment. This is in stark contrast to the four large busses I saw in use by a modern Junior Corps at a recent D.C.I. contest.

It was during the 1959 season that we acquired neat, green uniform bags, to replace the motley collection of individual bags that has previously been used. These bags fitted neatly onto numbered chrome racks that were stowed securely in the bus’s luggage compartments. Also, just about every other piece of equipment fitted into these compartments, leaving only personal items to be taken onto the bus itself. As most of our trips were of less than a full day’s duration, not much in the way of personal luggage was necessary.

A bit of background on our staff

Often, for a variety of reasons, not all of the executive or instructors would attend the weekend trips. In explaining this, it is also a good opportunity to delve a little further into the background of these individuals. We had gotten to know each other quite a bit better since the beginning of the Corps, and things had settled into a more or less acceptable pattern.

Mr. Baggs was an employee of the Toronto newspaper, The Globe and Mail. His position as a trouble-shooter for them often meant his absence from Corps trips. He would, however, always make himself available for very long, extended ones, or for very important ones (i.e. The Championships). Whether this was to the detriment of his profession, we never knew, but he would always be there when it mattered. His presence always mattered.

The man in charge of the Corps for most of the trips was Barry Bell. This displayed another facet of his

character, as things seldom got out of hand, or went wrong. If they did, it was only due to unforeseen circumstances. Barry was a draftsman by trade, who liked Drum Corps, fast cars, and Drum Corps. He also liked Drum Corps. He was able to attend almost all of the trips and would take the responsibility for discipline and organization before, during, and immediately after bus trips. There were seldom any reasons for severe measures, as the Corps was composed of a generally cooperative, amenable if diverse bunch of kids. Any situations that got out of hand would usually be the result of over excitement and could be suppressed by a sharp, well-placed rebuke from Barry. This was rarely necessary, but one occasion deserves mention.



Lorne Ferrazzutti, Eric Burton and Mr. Baggs

It was a habit among a certain element in the Corps to make insulting remarks, from the safety of the bus, to people on the sidewalks of towns through which we passed. Barry said that he would stop the bus and have us get out to face these people if this practice persisted. It soon ceased. As a consequence of measures like this, The Optimists were seldom, if ever, barred from or unwelcome at any location or event. To have been would have put the name and reputation of our sponsor in a bad light. Almost any behaviour was tolerated on the bus, as long as it was confined to the bus. Thus did Barry exert another form of influence.

The most noticeably absent, of any of the instructors, from trips was Lorne Ferrazzutti. His job required that he work every Saturday. He worked in the produce department of a Loblaws Store and could only attend shows that were local in nature. Nearly all of his drum line work was done from score sheets.

Mr. Eric Burton, the Guard Instructor, was able to come on some of the trips and always fielded a capable section. In fact, the guard won more honours and was remarked upon more often than most of us were aware. Eric, a locksmith by trade, was often the host of Corps parties at his home on Ontario Street, from which would emanate gossip, rumours, facts, and speculation, all part of the Corps scene.

This short summary of the backgrounds of the primary staff members reveals the fact that not one of them was remotely connected to music. Other than their interest and activity in Drum Corps, they were not involved in the field of entertainment in any form. Hence, they were true amateurs. The fact that, when hired as instructors, these people were promised remuneration does not really detract from the meaning of amateur. The money was not always forthcoming. Even when it was, it would never be a substitute for a regular job as a livelihood. This situation never deterred them from performing their tasks, which indicates that interest, not money, was the prime motivation.

Of course, the dedication of the staff would not have been evident without someone to instruct, which brings us to the members of the Corps itself.

Our Corps members

The Corps as a whole was a genuine cross-section of society, in miniature. People came from all over the City of Toronto and even from out of town to belong to it. Other Corps, especially if affiliated with a school or church, might have been restricted to people who attended certain institutions. We had no such limitations. If this was an advantage, its reverse side was that we never had a permanent base of operation. Everybody always took their entire equipment home and even the practice school, Jarvis Vocational, was subject to change. This occurred in later years. Thanks to the influence of people connected with the Corps, we never, for long, lacked an indoor rehearsal spot.

Some of the outdoor ones, though, were unusual, almost bizarre. Any place of proper size, location, and accessibility would do, if it was in a non-residential area. When it rained, we would move under the Gardiner Expressway, or to the porch of a building, usually in the Canadian National Exhibition grounds. The best was four floors down, under the ground in the main City Hall parking lot. The empty, cavernous space provided shelter from the elements and caused the music to float eerily through all levels. It was akin to a huge echo chamber, and the Corps never sounded better

These minor inconveniences never dampened enthusiasm. If anything, they enhanced it by fostering a spirit of cohesiveness and persistence. This spirit strengthened as the years passed and had a great deal to do with the continuity of a group composed of such diverse elements.

From George’s Spaghetti House and the Zanzibar Tavern to Mama’s Pizzeria on Eglinton Avenue and beyond, from the sprawling suburbs of Scarborough and West Hill to the polyglot regions of the West End, the guys gathered, of one mind, to form the Optimists. It was fun and, for many of us, the focus of our lives. Also, the diversity was evident in the fact that there were high school and university students, motorcycle gang members, ex-reservists, working people, and others who combined to form the Corps.

Some, as previously mentioned, left their hometowns to take up residence in Toronto for the sole purpose of belonging to the Corps. These would mostly be people with full-time jobs, of which we had a fairly high proportion. Often they were objects of curiosity to those of us who were local, the majority. Why come all this way just to play in a band. It was a measure of the appeal that this Corps exerted on some people. Today, this sort of thing would not be considered at all unusual.

Considering this was a Junior Corps, the number of those who held full-time jobs was quite high. The age limit was twenty-one. This, whether good or bad, was good for the Corps. Those in school would understandably miss rehearsals, especially during exam time. Sometimes winter practices would consist of anywhere from eight to fifteen people, or less. Those who were at work would almost always be in attendance, plus some that were still in school. Also during



Some members of Scout House and Optimists (1958)

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 5. (continued)

winter, interest would wane, and it was the small nucleus that helped keep it going. Those who turned out consistently provided something to be built on when interest again picked up.

During the coming season, it was apparent, when we learned the schedule, that we would be busier than previously. There were two main reasons for this. One was that, being the Champions, we were now a bigger draw at shows and, thus, were invited to more contests and exhibitions. The other reason was that the Drum Corps movement in Canada was growing and activity was increasing along with it.

The Niagara Peninsula in particular was becoming a very popular area for shows. Many of these were combined senior and junior contests, where divisions would compete against each other. This type of activity also extended into New York State and Pennsylvania. It was a format that did not find favour with all and was to mostly cease not too far in the future. The primary reason for it was a lack of contests, especially in the junior division.

As far as new playing members joining the Corps, we did not recruit all of those who had an inclination to come. Some came because they liked the Corps and some came because they wanted to be in a Championship Corps. This, of course, is never guaranteed from one year to the next.

Then there were those who would have liked to come but were deterred by the fact that we were the current champions. They thought that they would not make it. In this fashion, some people, who would have been valuable assets, were lost. This attitude

was negative. Most of us were very ordinary individuals with ordinary capabilities. Those who stood out, in one way or another, were few and far between and were just a part of the whole.

To return to the actual operations of the Corps itself, 1959 was to be almost a repeat of the previous year. We acquired some new horn players and, more noticeably, drummers. Also, new members for the Colour Guard, all of whom were male. Drum Corps in those long ago days were usually all male, or all female. Those that were mixed were few, and then usually only a male Corps with a girl Colour Guard or Drum Major. Today, however, there are few that maintain this status quo, it is no longer prevalent. The modern mixed gender of Corps is a sign of how Drum Corps have changed parallel to the society in which it exists.

The horn line was full in all sections, with spares ready to jump in if necessary. With one year of experience under their belt and not too many new faces, they could be expected to perform at least as well as before, if not better. This expectation was bolstered by the fact that very little new music, or drill, was to be incorporated into the original show.

A drawback to this was that, if repeated too often, the show could become boring to those who watched it. Repetition induced boredom, leading to lack of positive crowd reactions, and could be reflected in general effect



Toronto Optimists in a parade (Guelph, 1959)

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 5. (continued)

scores. There have been units that died due to failure to change their style or material as trends dictated. The Optimists would later encounter this hurdle. This year, as most other Corps in Canada were in the habit of doing the same thing, any negative effects were evenly spread.

Of the new faces in the line, most were already experienced players from various sources. Not all came from other Drum Corps. Some were from High School Bands, Salvation Army Bands, and who knows where else. Most of these people would immediately become playing members, while others, not being able to play, would be accepted and taught. The basic purpose of the Corps was to give young people something to occupy their time in a worthwhile manner, not to create an elite of only those with certain abilities.

Those who had to wait for a spot either did so or drifted on to other things. One fellow, Frank McKittrick, who could not seem to master anything, even with extra help, was willing to stay and become a water boy. So much did he want to be a member, and he is fondly remembered to this day.



Merritton Grenadiers (Waterloo)

As the winter rolled into spring, with the lightly attended drill and music being put together as weather permitted, we began to look forward to the competition season again.

Actually, we held our first outdoor drill rehearsal on January 11. In Canada, this is synonymous with biting cold and fierce winds. Such was the spirit that a full turn out was evident, replete with hats, gloves, scarves, and overcoats. One thing never in short supply was “esprit de corps”.

The Colour Guard had acquired some new members, some of whom would achieve distinction within, and without, the Optimists. Two of these were Len Perrin and Ivor Bramley.



Ivor Bramley and Len Perrin (1961)

Also, a second Drum Major was added. This was Don Chisholm, previously mentioned in connection with the crest. In contrast to the very military Phil Hennings, Don’s style was more flamboyant, different in manner and dress, when most of us were dully conformist. Don had been a soprano horn player during his first year in the corps. His natural flair for the unconventional, added to a real talent, made him an effective, if controversial, addition to the straight-laced Optimists. Possessed of a rapier wit, that occasionally caused hostility, this, combined with his style, caused him to always be more than just a presence. As an aside, he was the only person I ever saw who could cause Mr. Baggs to lose his temper in public. No mean feat!

Apart from Don's talents, or otherwise, depending on one outlook, one of his major contributions was the introduction to the Corps of a young man named Ivor Bramley. They both worked in the office of the weekend Telegram Magazine, the predecessor of today's Toronto Sun. Don brought Ivor to a rehearsal, but he was not too excited until he saw his first show. That was the armouries show of the previous year. Possibly seeing Scout House had something to do with it. Few who first saw them in their prime could fail to get excited. Ivor joined us and took to the Corps like a duck to water. Things would never be quite the same again.

Possessed of a volatile personality that matched his red hair, he soon became a well-known figure. Having no experience of horn or drum, he joined the guard and before long was assisting with instruction as well as marching as a rifleman. This was to lead, in years later, to instructing on a larger scale, beginning with other guards and graduating to Drum Corps proper. Before his Corps career was finished, he was a well-known figure throughout Canadian Drum Corps, as well as certain parts of the United States.



Don Chisolm

The Corps continued preparations for the coming season, hoping to repeat the successes of the firsts year.

The 1959 Season

Our first show was, again, the Ice Follies at Maple Leaf Gardens. This became an annual affair and usually the first public appearance of the Corps. This was followed by standstill contests, exhibitions, and parades and, on May 22, an appearance at the Scout House Spring Show. This was an annual event that was very popular, and people came from miles around to see it. It featured Preston Scout House, performing variations on their show, and always one guest Corps. This year, in a magnanimous gesture, Scout House had invited us. The affair, always held in Kitchener Memorial Auditorium, was well attended, well received, and conducted in total harmony. It was a tribute to the name of Scout House.



Preston Scout House

The next show was one that we had known about for some time, and, to-date, was the biggest show in which we were to appear. This was the Preview of Champions Contest, to be held on May 31, in Roosevelt Stadium, Jersey City, New Jersey. It was against some of the top name Corps in the United States, and us in only our second year of full-fledged operation. We had been invited, no doubt, because we were now Canadian Champions. We would bring a different style to the occasion. To us, it was like an aspiring artist being asked to perform at the Hummingbird Centre for the first time.

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 5. (continued)



Audubon Bon Bons

snare drummer, Brian Williams, we could go to Jersey with a full drum line.

Our participation in this show would be the first time that a Canadian Junior Corps had ever competed at such a big show. It would serve to reveal our shortcomings; however, the knowledge acquired would be useful later on, not only in the USA but in Canada as well.

At this early stage in our existence, to achieve success in the United States had never been seriously considered, or presented to us as something to be aimed at. Being good in Canada had been tough enough, especially as we had fared better than had been expected. However, nothing ventured, nothing gained, and Mr. Baggs was never hesitant about taking his Corps into the lion's den. In later years, as we visited the USA more often, it became apparent as we began to score some success, if minor, that eventual major inroads were possible.

Exposure to different judges and standards would gradually point the way to limited success. This was years in the future. For now, we were just beginning on this great adventure.

Follow the Yellow Brick Road.



Toronto Optimists at the Preview of Champions (Roosevelt Stadium, Jersey City, 1959)

Chapter 6: 1959 – To Jersey and Back

This trip was our biggest yet. Not only would we be up against some of the best Corps in the USA, it was also further than most of us had ever been from home, five hundred miles, no less, to the fabled heart of Drum Corpsdom. We were all very excited and nobody missed this one without a good reason¹. As a friendly gesture, we took along Brother Eugene, Director of De La Salle. He was likely interested in becoming acquainted with big time competition, its demands and necessity. No doubt, he had visions of his own Corps one day being in the same position. It would be, but in another time. Also, this would be our first all weekend tour, leaving early Saturday morning and not returning until the wee hours of Monday morning. Those of us who had jobs would have to get off the bus when it returned and go straight to work, equipment and all. So what! This was what it was all about.

We climbed aboard the bus at Jarvis Vocational School and away we went. Crossing the border at Fort Erie/ Buffalo, we were soon rolling down the New York Thruway. Mile after mile of green, pleasant countryside rolled by, punctuated with restaurant/gas station combinations, farmhouses, and occasional stands of trees. It was hard to believe that this, at one time, was all part of the Great Eastern Forest that stretched from the Mississippi to the East Coast. After about ten hours, we began to suffer from aching bum syndrome and leg cramps, familiar to all Corps people who endured over long bus trips. Finally, into view loomed the unmistakable skyline of New York City. Passing through a part of this inimitable concrete labyrinth, we finally arrived at St. Patrick’s parish church in Jersey City, our home for the night, under the friendly supervision of Father Gaffney, our host, and moderator of the St. the Patrick’s Drum Corps. We were assigned to our sleeping quarters in the church hall, told when curfew was, and given some free time. Jersey City area was not Toronto and we were somewhat taken aback by local customs. For example, bars would be open until 3 a.m., or later. Not that we were into that, but there are always one or two in any crowd that feel they have to do their own thing.

In general, discipline and cooperation prevailed, so that most of us were in bed at the proper time, in order to be in good condition for tomorrow’s contest. Somehow, the staff found time for us to make an excursion into New York City proper. Entering through the Port Authority bus terminal, we travelled up Broadway, marvelling at the number of movie theatres, saw the clutter of Times Square and ended up at the Empire State Building. That alone was worth the trip.



Cambridge Caballeros (1959)

¹ Bob Owens wrote: The trip to New Jersey may have resulted in holes in the line if Mr. Baggs had not stepped in and helped myself and two other members. I had just graduated from Danforth and had my first job. My boss would not grant me permission to take the Friday off so I could be in New Jersey. Mr. Baggs organized tickets to fly to New York La Guardia airport and then be transported by helicopter to Newark. He picked us up and took us to St. Patrick’s. That was my first experience flying and was an unforgettable experience.

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 6. (continued)

It is debatable if, today, a Drum Corps in a top contest would take the time to do this sort of thing, such is the pressure of modern competition. However, in those earlier days, things were more relaxed and fun was had by all.

Of course, we did rehearse and at last boarded the bus to take us to the field of competition. This was Roosevelt Stadium, in Jersey City, and it appeared gigantic. We were not used to such large stadiums, and that along with the Corps we were up against made the whole thing a little intimidating.

In competition were²:

- Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights
- Garfield Cadets
- Audubon Girls
- Paterson Cadets
- St Vincents Cadets

Not a weak one among them.

Three of these Corps we had met the year before; St. Vincent’s, Audubon, and Garfield (Holy Name). Blessed Sacrament most of us had only seen on the back cover of Drum Corps World, advertising Getzen bugles or Leedy drums. Paterson we had only heard on records.

Although it no longer exists, Roosevelt Stadium in those days was a mecca for Drum Corps shows. They included the annual Dream Contest, always held later in the year. It featured top junior and senior Corps, as did the show that we were about to enter.

Before we were due to go on, Barry spoke to the Corps. He said that we knew where we were and what the competition was. All we could do was go out there and give it our best shot. One cannot swim without first getting ones feet wet.



Garfield Cadets

Finally, dressed, polished, and ready, off we trooped to do our thing. We were on during the early part of the show, and although there were some gaps in the line, the show started well. If anyone was nervous, it was not apparent, and confidence grew as the performance progressed. Applause from the crowd and an absence of major blunders helped smooth the way for us greenhorns (no pun intended). Crossing the finish line and turning to play the closing fanfare, the feeling

² In his book Colin includes Garfield Cadets in the lineup for the Preview; however, the scores that I found show Cambridge Caballeros and not Garfield. In 1959 Holy Name Cadets lost the sponsorship of their church and became Garfield Cadets. I suspect that Holy Name might have been scheduled then withdrew.

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 6. (continued)

was that we had done the best of which we were capable. Marching off the field, the crowd reaction, a standing ovation, made us feel very good about the whole thing. The crowd seemed enormous and it was. We were used to a few hundred, or a few thousand at most. This one was many thousands and a sophisticated, knowledgeable crowd at that. Shows of this calibre were often a weekly event to many of these people, living as they did, in the heart of Drum Corps land.

So it was with great pleasure that we accepted the ovation. Being from a different region, our style was very different from that of the local Corps. This fact helped us gain approval from the crowd. It would not help us with the judges, whose job was not to be generous but to be fair and accurate.

We retired to the stands to watch the other Corps and to see how it was done. They were all good, of course, and we knew that to even place would be an accomplishment.

At the time and place of this writing, accurate records are unavailable and memory is a poor servant. Suffice to say that we were nine and one-half points out of first place, occupied by St. Vincent's or Blessed Sacrament³. This, for us, was hardly an improvement over our first, less sophisticated attempt the year before in Batavia. We had much to learn and do to climb this hurdle.



Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights (1959)

Our pre-show conditioning had prepared us for such a result, so we were not too disappointed. The contest chief judge, Charlie Nabors, had commented on the score sheets how nice it was to see the old straight arm swing and slower cadence. Such things and others had long since disappeared from the routines of the local Corps and pointed up the differences between us.

Everything now over, we packed up and headed back to Toronto, full of stories about our first taste of big time competition for the folks back home. We would be back.

After our return to Canada, the score sheets from Jersey were scrutinized closely and the lessons thoroughly digested. We discovered many things about our performance that would lead to changes, not only in our show but also in our whole concept of this activity. The detailed scrutiny that we had endured served to reveal many flaws in execution. For example, I myself lost 8/10 of a point for a carelessly protruding little finger on a drumstick. This and others were technical flaws that could be eliminated. A general change of style or material would have to wait for a while, as the show for this year was already set.

We now got back to rehearsals, as approximately one month from now we faced our first full field show in Canada. This would be against our local rivals; namely, Preston Scout House, De La Salle, and Grantham. All of these Corps were good in Canada, and we could not stay idle if we wished to maintain our position. As yet, we did not practice to a much greater extent than usual. We had for the Jersey show and did for our upcoming one, but the time spent would still not compare with the activities of today's Corps.

³ SAC and Vinnies tied at 88.2 and Optimists were third with 79.05 followed by the Paterson Cadets with 77.2 then Cambridge Caballeros with 75.65.

The season begins in Canada

The date for the first show was July 1st, and the location was the pleasant town of Woodstock, Ontario. The occasion was the Western Ontario Championships. As far as the other Canadian Corps involved, we had no idea of what to expect, not having been in contact with any of them.

As a further reference to the more relaxed ways of those days, the girlfriend of one of the instructors has prepared a picnic. Some of us, the time being available, enjoyed this interlude in the fine sunny weather of that day. Drum Corps was truly still a hobby in Canada in 1959.

Before a local crowd of a few hundred, the competing units performed their shows. When the smoke had cleared, we stood in first, a full six points ahead of Preston Scout House, with De La Salle a close third and Grantham fourth.

For the other Corps, this was their first competition, while we had already been at it a month. While this did not detract from our success, it did partially explain it. High score in all captions was ours, with the biggest spread on drums and general effect. To “out general effect” Scout House was no mean feat in those days. It possibly happened because they finally had new material that, as yet, was imperfectly executed. The six-point spread, between us and the rest, would not be allowed to delude us into thinking that the remainder of the season would be a pushover. The Canadian Nationals were still over two months away and both of our closest rivals would improve a great deal between now and then.

This show was the first full field show of the Canadian junior season. Although we would be pretty busy for the rest of the season, it was a very late start for Drum Corps activity compared to the Jersey area. If we had not been a participant in the May 31st Preview of Champions, this would have been our first field show. It highlights one of the differences between Canada and the USA, at that time, at least the New Jersey area. They had already been at it hot and heavy for over a month. This contrast, although to diminish somewhat in later years, would never entirely disappear and is a partial explanation of the regional disparity of the different areas, Corps-wise. Much longer rehearsal hours would help alleviate this disadvantage in years to come. Other factors that would contribute to greater competitiveness by Canadian Corps would be more sophisticated shows, with better arrangements, as technical ability improved. Also, exposure to different, mostly stricter, standards of judging would help to close the gap.

Surprisingly, we were, later this year, to score a major success, from our viewpoint, although with a qualifying factor involved. But that would be further on in the season. Right now, we plunged into a weekly round of competitions that kept us on our toes and helped prepare us for this upset to come.



Bob Cook of the Toronto Optimists receives the St Lawrence Seaway Flag (Don Mills, 1959)

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 6. (continued)

Throughout the month of July, every weekend saw us in competition against Senior Corps, both Canadian and American, and once with one other Junior Corps. Because of this schedule, we were the only Canadian Junior Corps to be active competitively for the entire month. This gave us a definite advantage over our rivals in the junior division. No matter how much one rehearses, competition is what hones a performance to the fine edge necessary for success. Preferably, competitions against Corps better than one's own. Such was our position in this month, when we competed every weekend, mostly against good Senior Corps. Only once, on the 25th, in Welland, Ontario, was another Junior Corps involved, which was De La Salle. Why such a situation? Possibly other Corps had declined to compete, feeling themselves not ready. Not very likely! They probably had not been invited. As for us, being the current champions, we were a good crowd draw and, therefore, a worthy addition to flesh out small senior contests. Had the shows been distributed on a more equitable basis, results at the end of the season could have shown a marked difference in scores, or even placings. All the world loves a winner, and we were not about to refuse entering contests for philosophical reasons. Such inequities, if that is what they were, have to be overcome by one's rivals.



Don Chisolm, Bob Cook and Phil Hennings of the Toronto Optimists with the St Lawrence Seaway Flag (Don Mills, 1959)

These contests consisted, almost one hundred per cent, of Senior Corps from Southern Ontario, Upper New York State, and Pennsylvania. They were, though not of National Championship calibre, all very good in their own right. We did not win one of them, though according to ourselves it could have occurred on July 18th at Niagara Falls. After three attempts at beginning our show, the affair was called off due to heavy intermittent, and then constant, rain.

These shows did a lot for our season to come, and the placings, one fourth and two seconds, were not disappointing. The Senior Corps that defeated us were good. Jolly Jesters of Toronto, Eric Burton’s former Corps, were consistent contenders for Canadian Senior Champions. Also, the Niagara Militaires whom we did manage to defeat once. A most impressive unit, whom we never did best, although coming very close, was the Hilton Crusaders of Hilton, New Your. This Corps was always neatly, cleanly consistent and clearly marked for better things. After reorganization, they became the Irondequoit Crusaders. Subsequently, joining with the Rochester Grey Knights, no mean Corps themselves, they emerged as the Fabulous Crusaders of Rochester, N.Y. Under this name they achieved national prominence, competing on a par with the top senior units in the United States.

Through all of this they had Mr. Vince Bruni, who is today active with the D.C.A. senior circuit, as part of their staff. He is now, as then, recognized as a leader in his field, marching and maneuvering. (Vince passed away on August 29, 2003)

The intense activity of July, continuing into August, had prepared us for our first victory in the United States.

Rome, NY

On August 15th, after a parade and exhibition the previous weekend in Sarnia, Ontario, we packed our bags and made the long bus trip to Rome. A small town in Upper New York State, Rome was later to acquire a special significance for us; today, however, it became noteworthy as the location of our initial victory in the United States and not against unworthy opponents. The St. Catherine’s Queensmen of St. Albans, N.Y., were there, as were the Garfield Cadets. Less than four points separated the top three Corps, with us in number one position. In second place was the St. Catherine’s Queensmen, and bringing up third was Garfield. Garfield! We had never even come close to them before, let alone defeat them, and there was a qualifying factor involved.

Having broken with their sponsor, Garfield (formerly the Holy Name Cadets) had not only lost uniforms and instruments, but, no doubt, some members as well. The remaining members had, with determination, managed to buy and borrow



Toronto Optimists (Grey Cup Parade, 1959)

instruments and had outfitted themselves with an all-white version of a uniform. This uniform was very similar to that of Preston Scout House, with whom they had a close connection. Under this makeshift arrangement, they had fielded a Corps for this year, and though still good, were not of the calibre of previous years. Many Corps would not survive such a blow to their organization, but Garfield, as they now called themselves, were not an ordinary Corps. This year, a setback in their long history would prove a minor obstacle to future success. The ensuing year would bear out this observation, and modern types are all familiar with Garfield and their prominence in D.C.I. Now known as The Cadets of Bergen County, they continue to represent the best in Drum Corps achievement. Yes! That day in 1959, we did beat them. But?

On August 22nd, the Optimist Club sponsored the Ontario Championship at East York Stadium in Toronto. Being the host Corps, we performed only in exhibition. This show was two-dimensional in that it featured the Ontario Junior “A” and Junior “B” championships. Such a format was organized in order that more Corps would have a chance at competing, helping to provide some much needed contests.



Toronto Optimists (Toronto City Hall, 1959)

In the Junior “A” division, Preston Scout House took top honours, with De La Salle placing a close second. Grantham was again third. De La Salle was already displaying the tenacity that was to serve them so well in years to come. They contained, as yet unrealized, the seeds of greatness.

The obvious current potential of Scout House, De La Salle, and Grantham was not lost on us. It was apparent that any relaxation of effort on our part could only have calamitous results. In this respect, being able to observe our rivals first hand helped us as much as they were helped by participation in competitive activity.

This was brought home to us on September 5th when, performing at less than peak, we just barely edged out De La Salle for first place at the annual Canadian National Exhibition contest. Only a week later we soared to a full eight points and fourteen points over second and third places, respectively, of which De La Salle was one. This late in the season such inconsistency is unusual, to say the least, and definitely not healthy. How to explain this? Possibly it was an indication of apprehension regarding the fast approaching Nationals. More likely, it was a sign of a not yet fully developed maturity as a competitive Corps. We were still not yet two years old as a Junior “A” unit, and some cracks were still showing. A combination of these factors and others not doubt had their effect.

1959 Canadian Nationals

Finally, as last loomed, unavoidably, the first defence of our hard won National Title. The Canadian National Drum and Bugle Corps Championships, would be held again in Galt, Ontario, on September 12, 1959. We had been watching our rivals closely, and, although we had defeated them all throughout the year, the scores had

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 6. (continued)

often been within easy to overcome range. The big question mark was Scout House, whom we had seen but not competed against since the first Canadian field contest of the year. They had been improving steadily before our eyes. Only one year out of championship status themselves, still very powerful and popular, they constituted the biggest threat to our position.

A sure indication of the mood surrounding the approaching drama was the short bus trip to Galt. The previous year the trip had been a riot of unrestrained chaos, until curbed by cooler heads. During the entire length of this trip, you could have heard a pin drop. WE were now the defending champs, with nothing to gain but another title, but with everything to lose. In subsequent years, such tensions would almost always be present, varying only in degree, to an extent that sometimes affected the performance.

Off we went, grim, determined, but of course full of optimism. As with the previous year, Championship day dawned bright and sunny, and things were conducted in the usual businesslike manner. Interest was high among observers to see if the Optimists could retain their title. Scout House had been receiving additional instruction from a local Senior Corps and were as primed for this as they could possibly be. As an aside, such partisan activity was not uncommon. The Optimists themselves would develop ties with a Senior Corps in later years, though in a different capacity.

Again, the contest was held in the afternoon, enabling the victorious Junior Corps to perform after the senior contest in the evening. By doing this, the evening crowd was entertained while scores for the senior show were tabulated.

There were many Corps in junior shows and memory does not recall them all. They all put on fine performances, contributing to a good afternoon's entertainment; however, the Scout House, Optimist, De La Salle, Grantham line-up was what was attracting the most interest.

Scout House appeared flawless, new music and routines having been perfected, and they bowled over the crowd. Everybody in the Optimists was aware that anything less than our best would lose the day.



Toronto Optimists leave the field (Nationals, Galt, 1959)

With the opening fanfare echoing around the park, all tension disappeared and we stepped off the line, as we had done many times before. The show unfolded smoothly, and, after having trampled a hundred yards of field, we were owners of our second national title.

This time the margin was a full two points over Preston, who were second, with De La Salle third and Grantham fourth, a now familiar pattern. The score difference was a half point wider than the previous year and served to firmly establish our position.

Whereas, the previous year our win at this show had produced a spontaneous outburst of elation, a similar reaction this year was tempered with relief. We were still champions. From now on when this title was on



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Galt, 1959)

the line, relief would always play a part when favourable results were announced. As the years passed and the list of titles lengthened, tension would grow, especially when a capable challenge was evident; most years there was. It was one price of success, not that anyone would have had it any other way. We had won the major contest of the year, again, but our season was not yet over. There were still more shows and contests, facing yet again our junior rivals.

Exactly one week after our victory, we appeared at Varsity Stadium in Toronto, as part of the junior portion of the 4th Annual International Drum and Trumpet Corps Championship.

Leaside Lions and the Canadian Bugle and Trumpet Band Association sponsored this contest. Notice the titles of the contest and the association. They were, considering the state of Canadian Drum Corps at this stage of the game, somewhat anachronistic. This situation would shortly change as Canada, bit by bit, pulled itself into more up-to-date terminology. It had to do with the origin of the species in Canada, which was a little different from that of the United States.

The contest was a junior and senior show. It featured top U.S. and Canadian Corps competing against each other in their respective categories. Last year, Scout House had represented Canada in the junior division.



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Galt, 1959)

Our competition was the Audubon Girls, from Audubon, N. J., who had thoroughly trounced us during the last two years. They had beat us again, now, but the total spread was only 1.17, and we actually swept the three execution captions; drums, bugles, and M & M, by small margins.



Audubon Bon Bons (Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1959)

The season was, even now, not yet ended, as we had to meet Scout House and De La Salle again, for the last time this year, as it turned out. This was on September 26th in Auburn, N.Y., for the New York/Canadian Association title. This association is now non-existent but, then, it was a prestigious title to possess. Preston, now way down because they had failed to regain their Canadian title, put on a sparkling performance. They tied us on two captions and won another handily. We only took first place by the slim margin of 0.55. It was an unpopular decision, and Scout House had the crowd with them all the way. This, however, was a phenomenon that one had to learn to accept when appearing on the same field as Scout House. In their prime, as they still were, they nearly always had the crowd. It was their unique style and quality of performance that contrasted with all others who were basically the same, differing only in degree.

It was also at this show that a group of knowledgeable, non-partisan observers noted that unless they modified their style, there was not a future for them in competitive Drum Corps.

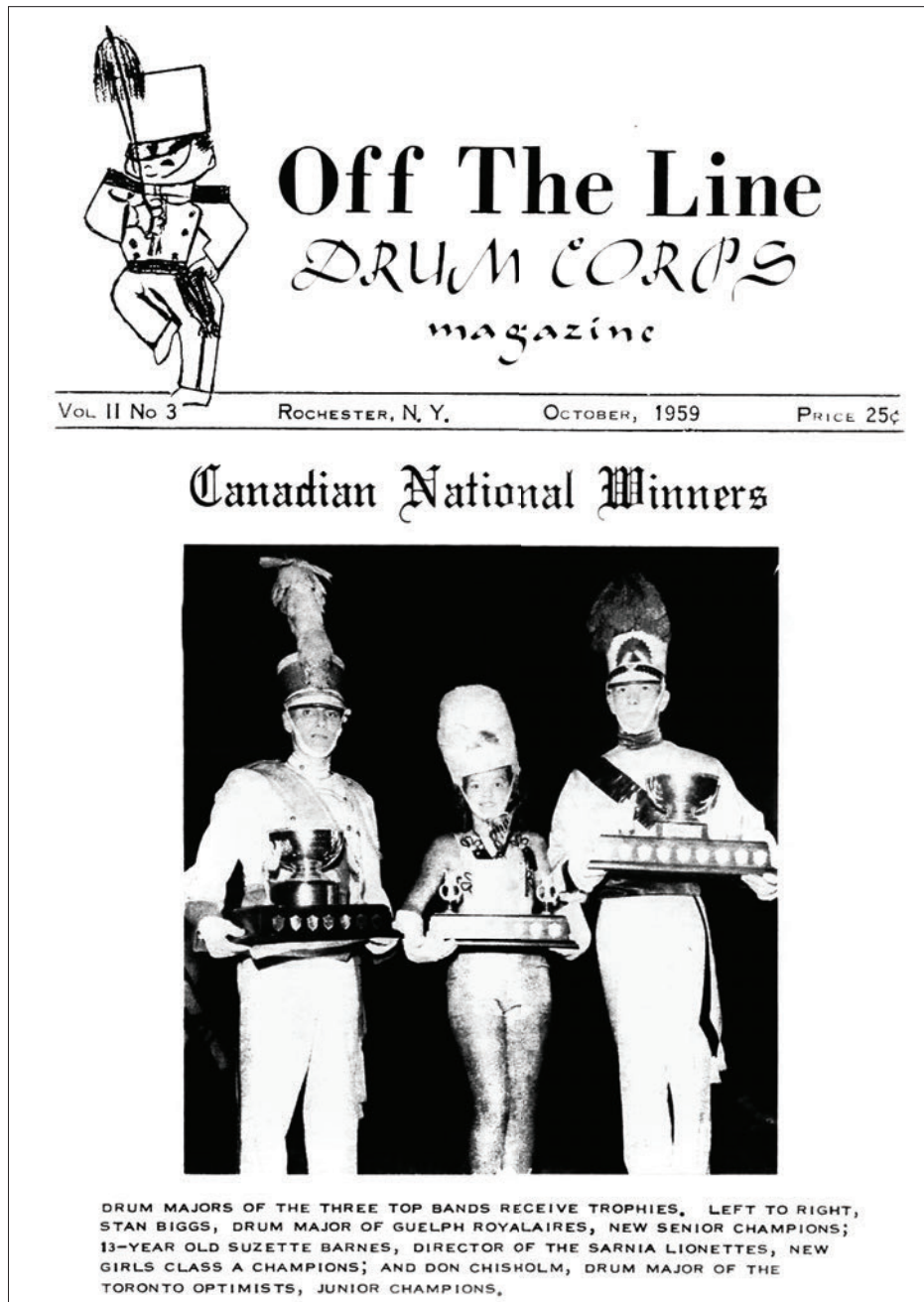
The final contest of the year was held at the Annual St. Catharines Grape Festival, one week later. Thus appeared a first blemish on a hitherto clean record. We pulled out of it. Because both Preston and De La Salle were involved in this show, immediate reaction among some was that we had pulled out to avoid a late season defeat by Preston.

The official explanation from our side was that it was now October, the official release month, and reorganization was already underway; plus, everybody was very tired after a strenuous season, and there would be many holes in the line. There was some truth in this because not everyone was a total Drum Corps fanatic. After winning two major titles, some were indifferent to another show. Most would have come, but whatever the truth, Grape Festival organizers and local fans were not very happy. We were the number one Corps and the one that everyone wanted to see. The fact that our three major rivals would also be there added further drama to the situation. It would have been a repeat of the championships, but, by pulling out, we converted it into just another contest. Forfeiting a posted bond, the decision stuck and the situation remained unchanged. Strange

are the ways of men, but most of us were glad the season was over. We were tired and had had enough, almost. Toronto’s stalwart mayor had again arranged a civic reception to honour the Corps. Again, we marched up Bay Street to the steps of Old City Hall, waking up those asleep at their desks. The appropriate pleasantries were exchanged, and then it was over. Well, if nothing else, people in New Jersey had at least now heard of Toronto, Ontario.

Next year? Nobody was thinking that far ahead yet, at least not the rank and file; but others were, and their plans and ambitions were to bring about many changes.

On with the show!



1959 Nationals winners with trophies

From Lorne Ferrazzutti

How the Toronto Optimists Drum Corps got started

Instruction

Both Barry Bell and I were members of the Western Tech Trumpet band for four years. Barry was a very talented horn player and had a flair for music. I, too, had musical experience. I played in the orchestra for four years. Someone handed me a clarinet and told me that's what I was going to play. I had also taken accordion lessons at home for five years so I could read music and understood the theory. I had also taken drum lessons where I heard all the different rhythms and cymbal rides (no rudiments).

When we went to Danforth Tech to instruct and teach the trumpet band and their drum corps, Barry did all the brass arrangements while I did the drum charts. Western Tech could not beat Scout House and neither could Danforth. I once heard a judge say, "no one can beat Scout House because they're perfect".

In 1957 Barry left The Danforth Crusaders. He phoned me and said he had a meeting with Mr. Al Baggs and that Mr. Baggs gave him an offer he couldn't refuse.

He told me he really wanted me to be the drum instructor. It was an offer I couldn't refuse. Two days later, we had a meeting with Al Baggs. I didn't know Mr. Baggs but, at that meeting, I was very impressed by him. He told Barry and me he wanted to beat Preston Scout House in three years.

He was a scoutmaster and Corps Director of Opti Corps, the drum corps sponsored by the Optimists Club of Toronto. His experiences with scouts and



Barry and Lorne in their Cadet uniforms at Western (1954)

then the Opti Corps were very successful. Clearly, he knew how to motivate young people.

The members of Opti Corps called him "Daddy Baggs" to show their respect. He then said to me "I heard you're one of the best drum instructors in Canadian drum corps". While driving home I got the message. What he really meant was he wanted the best drum section in Canadian drum corps. Farewell to the Danforth Crusaders.

In front of the members of the Crusaders, Barry explained what he was doing. After thanking them for their dedication. He said we were leaving to start another corps. He didn't recruit any of the members to follow us but said that we would welcome anyone interested in coming with us.

Our first get-together was at the Jarvis Collegiate on a Monday night. We didn't know what to expect but



Barry Bell when he was Drum Major of the Danforth Tech Crusaders

were pleasantly surprised at the turnout. There were approximately 20 people from Danforth Tech, Leaside and St. Mary's with more from other corps. The 25 members of Opti Corps brought the total to about 80 people.

Mr. Baggs made a presentation explaining what he wanted in a great drum corps and also explained the Downtown Optimists Club was our sponsor.

Then he introduced Barry, Mr. Eric Burton who would be our new colour guard instructor, and myself. About two months later we got money from our sponsors for new horns and guard equipment and, eventually, new uniforms. A decision was made to name the corps The Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps.

Barry arranged the music scores and picked all the songs. The music was an optimistic theme with upbeat music. The off-the-line song was "When You're Smiling". I did all the drum charts. We were on our way.

Things were falling onto place. The Canadian Drum Corps Association (CDCA) was having their final meeting of 1957. Barry and I discovered that the age limit for junior corps in the USA was 21 while it was 18 for Canadian corps. Barry couldn't attend the meeting because he was Best Man for a wedding.



Eric Burton, Colour Guard instructor (1958)

Mr. Baggs was out of town. I was elected to go.

At the end of that meeting, new business was to be discussed and voted on. Finally, I put up my hand and brought forward a motion to change the age limit of the Canadian corps from 18 to 21, the same as the junior corps in the United States. I had heard all the pros and cons beforehand and I was expecting a push back from the senior corps. With a show of hands "All for" it seemed every hand went up. "All against", not one hand went up. The Chairman then said the ruling is being changed from 18 to 21. Just like that, the meeting was over. All the Canadian Junior Corps benefited from that discussion.

Extending the age limit to 21 meant that, instead of losing about 12 talented trumpets, drums and guard, we'd have them for another three years.

In the meantime, The Optimists started a feeder corps of about 60 members (good management planning).

The Optimists didn't buy new drums because they already had a set of gold sparkled drums. When I saw them, I said to myself, those drums have to go.



Toronto Optimists Gold Drums (1958)

Memories from Corps Members: From Lorne Ferrazzutti (continued)

I picked up a fifteen-inch snare, put on the sling, and began to play. To my surprise, I had never played a drum with such a bright and crisp sound. The response to the drum made it easier to play.



Lorne with Optimists drumline at De La Salle "Oaklands" (1958)

Harry Clark was a great, talented drummer. He told me the drummers love these drums. I then picked up a tenor drum and again the same response. It sounded like a Tom-tom drum. I tried the bass drums. "Wow", a deep timpani sound.

When I went outside, the sound of the drums cut through with a brilliant, sharp, crisp sound. "Wow".

We kept those drums for the next five and a half

years. Their sound and clarity surely helped with our high drum scores. In 1963 we got new white drums with a black stripe to match the uniforms. We tried everything to get the same sound, but we just couldn't. We lost that sound forever.

When I started writing the drum charts, I gave the snares some challenging and complex rhythms, not too much rudimental drumming, more musical drumming that enhanced the upbeat music we were playing. It was our tenor drummers to whom I gave accented offbeat rhythms and triplets, single beats of seven and a lot of grooves.

They played with hard, felt sticks and later on with wood sticks that Eric and I made. Eric was a machinist. You wouldn't give tenor drummers wooden sticks if they weren't great drummers. Most tenor drum lines used soft felt sticks that you couldn't hear. Not the Optimists' tenor drummers. They were Gord O'Halloran, Colin Hedworth and Carl Clutchey. They had a lot of flash and stick control. They got the judges attention. The snare drummers were Harry Clark, Jim Reynolds and Charlie Jensen. The bass drummers were Hector Roberts and Wayne Moss. The cymbal player was Ron Cook. All solid and experienced players.

In 1958 at the Canadian Drum Corps Association Championships in Galt, the Optimists beat Scout House by 1.5 points. I was late for the show but made it for the retreat. I heard it on the car radio



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Galt, 1958)

Memories from Corps Members: From Lorne Ferrazzutti (continued)

that the Optimists had won. I was standing on the hill during the retreat. The Optimists were filing by with their shakos in their hands and their chests sticking out with big smiles on their faces.

I heard people crying and booing with things thrown at our corps. Two guys about 250 lbs each saying “I hate that ‘Band’ from Toronto”. I understood their feelings. Parents and relatives seeing their “Band” being beaten in their own backyard. Scout House to this day refer to themselves the Scout House Band.

On the way out I saw a good friend, Gord Semore, a great drummer and the drum instructor for Scout House. He said to me “That’s the last time you’ll beat us. Next year we’re coming out with long pants with a red kick pleat a la Hawthorne Caballeros. We’re going to change our music and style”. One month later Wilf Blum fired Semore and Johnson, their horn instructor. Two great instructors.

Blum did the Optimists a great favour (the short pants won out).

The CDCA held their convention at Prudhomme’s, a hotel in St Catharines. The Optimists drum section did a drum clinic along with Mr. Frank Arsenault, a great drummer from the United States who had won many individual snare drum competitions. He also instructed the Skokie Indians Senior Drum Corps and the Chicago Cavaliers.



Frank Arsenault, Rudimental Drumming Champion and spokesperson for Ludwig Drums (in his Skokie Indians uniform)

He was intrigued by our tenor section and the wooden sticks. He asked if he could buy a pair. I graciously gave him a pair. Six months later, Ludwig Drums came out with a beautifully crafted, tapered one-piece hickory Bass and Tenor mallet with a handgrip. That ended our homemade sticks.

Mr. Baggs said he wanted to beat Scout House in three years. Our Corps beat them in one year. All due to the hard work of the corps members, management, Corps supporters and instructors.

The best was still to come.



Preston Scout House Band (Nationals, Galt, 1958)

Recollections of our Drum Corps years

By John Byrne

I wrote the following reflections for my children and grandchildren; to help them get a better understanding of what Drum Corps meant to us. I hope it brings back recollections to your readers.

UNQUESTIONABLY, being in a Drum & Bugle Corps had a major influence over my life. The lessons learned stayed with me all my life.

Each of my brothers and I belonged to a drum corps in our youth and teenage years. Unfortunately, we often don't really appreciate the opportunity we

have. When we are in the moment, we rarely have the insights and perspective provided by time. It's only years later that one understands what one had.

Most of those of us who were in a Drum Corps were passionate about it and remained passionate throughout our lives.

Drum Corps was a somewhat unusual pursuit for a teenager. I attended a pretty large high school when I was growing up yet my brother and I were the only ones involved with drum corps. None of my friends knew what we did but, invariably, we would disappear in the summer months to be involved with the activity. The kids I met in Drum Corps remain friends to this day. In fact, my wife, Nancy, and I met in Drum Corps. Nancy's drum corps



L-R: David and Brian Byrne - Toronto Optimists. Peter and John Byrne - The Chessmen. (1967). Eventually both Peter and John joined the Optimists.



Grantham Police Boys Band (Canadian National Exhibition, 1960)

experience differed somewhat from mine. She attended a Catholic High school that had its own drum corps! So she had lots of classmates and friends who were in the Corps.

Nancy was in the Colour Guard for the Dennis Morris Majestics. When, in 1965, the Majestics and Grantham Police Boys Band amalgamated to form

the Chessmen, Nancy joined the Chessmen's Colour Guard. During the winter months, the Colour Guard competed in the Ontario and New York State Colour Guard circuit. The Chessmen Colour Guard became the top guard on that circuit and won many contests during their years together.

I'm not sure exactly what it was, the sound of



Ron Cooper, Nancy Byrne and Clare Reid. (Guard Show, 1968)

Recollections (continued)

drums, the powerful sound of 30 to 40 brass horns in harmony. The feeling you get when a corps of 60 to 70 young people marching and manoeuvring as one. And it really didn't matter which Drum Corps it was, we just loved drum corps so much it didn't matter. Although we competed against each other, we didn't hate or even resent each other. There was nothing better than being able to watch other Corps practice. We appreciated what they did.

Few of us will forget what it was like starting out in Drum Corps. "Rookie" was the term used for corps members in their first-year. Most of us were just kids off the street with no music training — very raw, as they would say. Someone would hand you a horn, if you were small & skinny it would most likely be a soprano, and the bigger you were you were more likely to end up in the baritone section. Similarly with drums, you might start out with



The Chessmen. (1966)

In our free time, our house became a gathering place for our drum corps friends. We would play drum corps records continuously downstairs in our little rec room. We couldn't seem to get enough of it. We would never forget hearing The Cavaliers perform "Bully" or Garfield or Blessed Sacrament and who could forget The Skyliners and Caballeros? Every month Drum Corps World would bring us news from the wider world of drum corps.

cymbals or a base drum then, gradually, move up to a tenor drum and finally a snare.

For me it was a soprano; and I still remember how hard it was to blow into it to create a sound of any kind. Eventually your lungs got it and your lips started adjusting to alter the sound until you could actually able blow a scale. It was quite remarkable how quickly you could adapt and

Recollections (continued)

learn pieces of music. For sure there would be some embarrassingly bad bloop and blasts but, eventually, you played consistently.

It was a similar process with marching; how well I remember trying to march across a floor. This simple act of walking somehow became awkward and halting as I tried to stay in step and swing my arms. The common scene was to see a rookie marching along and skipping several times to get on the right foot to stay in step with the others or they would march and swing the left arm with the left leg and the right arm with the right leg!! This marching eventually led to the complex steps and manoeuvres of drill.

THERE WAS A huge learning curve for all rookies but if you hung in there, it all eventually came together. I think it was this process that eventually resonated with us and made us see, appreciate and respect Corps that excelled. It drove us to try to match what they were doing. Once it sunk in and you became good at it, you developed a tremendous sense of pride in yourself and your fellow corps members. Much credit must go to the experienced members of the corps, who led by example. They would often take time to rehearse our parts with us and offer words of encouragement. It meant a great deal to us.

Typically, through the Fall and Winter months we would have practices for a few hours on a Tuesday or Wednesday evening, plus an additional practice on a Sunday afternoon. This, however, was not sufficient. Of course, our instructors also expected us to practice several times a week at home. When we began learning our field show, we would have all day practices at a local school football field or parking lot. One of the humorous things about practice was that our mom had to listen to four

horn players, each playing different instruments and playing different songs in the same house at the same time! How she stood it is beyond me. The busy time for drum corps were the Summer months of June, July, & August and somewhat less in September. Our performances included concerts, street parades and competitions throughout Ontario, New York and Pennsylvania.

The Corps would travel to those parades and competitions by bus. Usually it would be just an ordinary school bus but, for longer trips, we might luck out and get air conditioned touring buses. If we had to spend the night, it would usually be in a school gymnasium on a wood floor, with our own sleeping bag, etc.



John Byrne 1966

As we grew or “aged out” of Drum Corps (age limit was 21) we would still follow Drum Corps by traveling to shows around Ontario and New York. Drum Corps has changed over the years and it has become more professional with University trained musicians and dancers. I am not fond of the direction that the activity has taken. At this point the activity no longer interests me.

Drum Corps taught us about hard work, teamwork, self discipline, pushing oneself to succeed, dedication, how to handle disappointment, the value of striving for excellence and how to get along with others. And on the way we learned a bit about music!

As I look at Drum Corps today, It is doubtful that many of the kids (my brothers excepted) would even be in Drum Corps. Today kids have to be music and dance or choreography majors in High School or University! No longer can a kid just off the street join a Corps, and something is lost because of that.

A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of 1959 progressed

Contest ►	Jersey City (May 31)	Rochester NY (July 4)	Falconer NY (July 11)	Welland ON (July 25)	Rome NY (Aug)15	CNE Toronto (Sept 5)	Nationals Galt ON (Sept 12)
Corps Name ▼							
Optimists	79.05	85.21	80.67	79.10	83.32	82.75	88.16
Preston Scout House							86.16
De La Salle				70.85		80.80	83.84
Grantham Boys						79.60	80.33
Don Mills Sky Raiders							58.46
Leaside Lions							75.06
Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights	88.20						
St Vincent's Cadets	88.20						
Garfield Cadets							
Paterson Cadets	77.40						
Cambridge Caballeros	75.65						
Hilton Crusaders (Senior)		86.81	82.44				
Niagara Memorial Militaires (Sr)		85.42	79.30	78.30			
Jolly Jesters (Sr)		86.91		80.40			

To see ALL the competitions and scores, go to the website:
<https://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca/>



Some members, 1959 or 1960

L to R: Al Punkari, Len Perrin, Bob Owen, Jim Fletcher, Henry Beben, Warren Mills, Harry Clark, Hector Roberts, Glen Durish, Joe Gianna, and Ivor Bramley.

Back: *Ronn Prokop and Glenn Copp.*



Bill Thorne

**618 Air Cadet Squadron, Leaside Lions Jungle Kings,
Toronto Optimists 1960 – 1965**

May 30, 1944 – April 23, 2021

Having marched with the band of the 618 Air Cadet Squadron, the Royal Knights and the Leaside Lions Bill was a well-seasoned corpsman when he joined the Optimists after the 1959 season. At that time there was an exodus from Leaside as Terry Sweeney, Mel Dey, Jim Stewart and Ron Cottrell joined the Optimists. Within a week or two Phil Campbell, Dave Nesbitt, Neil Ibbitson, Bill Thorne and Doug MacKenzie had also left Leaside to join Optimists.

Bill started out playing baritone before switching to the newer bass-baritones horn that Optimists had bought. Bill moved to contrabass in 1965 when Optimists got their first contrabasses. The contras were played by Bill, Dave Watt and Paul Thompson. When the corps marched onto the starting line and when we trooped the stands after performing the contras would swing their left arms and hold their contra in the hand of their outstretched right arm. It was a sight to behold! I'm sure that somewhere there is a photo of them doing that but I have never been able to find one.

In a 1963 issue of GCC Gene Chepswick wrote: *“the clearest picture of this boy I can give is of one who drives an M.G., which is red and capable of breaking mach 1. It is the oddest sight to see him barreling down the Gardiner Expressway at 100 some odd in that little red sports car, sporting a little red beanie (to match the colour of the car) and little Jeff Shimo seated on his right while directly behind is a huge horn case skillfully tied to the trunk.”*

The February 1990 issue of the magazine, Parades and Pageantry, published an article about Bill and his kids, all of whom marched in drum corps. Bill's "We Remember" page on our website contains a link to the article.

Here are a few comments from some of those who knew Bill:

“I liked Bill a lot. A fine musician and a fine friend.” (Terry Mckolskey)

“Damn. I loved Bill Thorne.” (Vern Johansson)

“Sad to lose a great guy, he always loved a good joke, it was nice to have known you!” (Frans Rood)

“He was a true Optimist.” (Barry Woods)

“Bill was a great guy and was so happy when his children became involved in Drum Corps.” (Ric Brown)

“It's a long time since I have seen or spoken to Bill but remember him as a very nice guy who had lots of talent. May he rest in peace.” (Doug MacKenzie)

Winner of the Website Trivia - Issue 1

Jim Patten

1. Name five of the people in the attached photo of members of the 18th Scout Troop Band.

I note in the first newsletter you had a Trivia item about the 10 Scouts sitting on a jeep and you asked for names of five. I think that this shot was taken in 1953 at a summer resort in Madoc, Ontario which was owned by the family of the organists of Davenport Presbyterian Church. They permitted the 18th. Scouts to hold a camp in the "back forty" of the property surrounding the resort a couple of times.



I have another shot at breakfast at the same camp with eight of these guys and Bud Parker which is clearer and easier to make out the individual faces but there are some in the listing below that may be out of order. Hard to make out their faces on the Jeep.

First Row: L-R. Barney Sharpe, Al Laytham.

Second Row: L-R. Larry Cheevers, Peter Coward, Paul Stephens,

Third Row: L-R. Ed Nanni, Richard Duffy, Jim Patten, Merv Parker, Ben Woodley

2. Name two members of the Toronto Optimists who were featured in Whaley-Royce ads.

Dave Watt - holding the first Whaley-Royce Contra Bass.

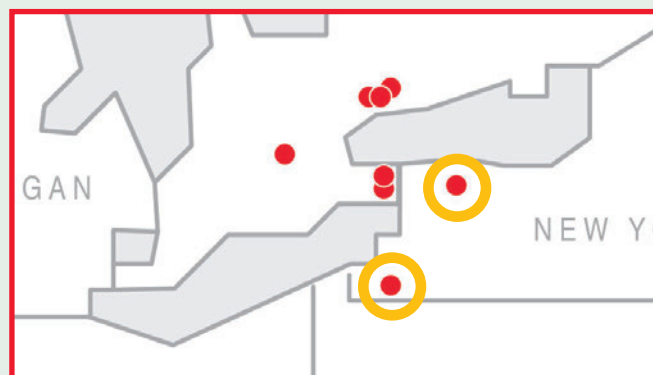
Dwight Angus - holding a new Imperial Concert French Horn.

Winner of We Got Around-1958 - Issue 2

John Parkinson

Of the eight locations, name the two not listed.

Batavia, New York
Falconer, New York



Jim and John will receive a Commemorative Corps Poster celebrating the Corps and the NEW Toronto Optimists History-Newsletter.

We got around - 1959

EACH YEAR the corps traveled in Ontario, Quebec and the United States. Each issue of the Newsletter will have this map showing all the destinations (**red dots**) for a given year. However, two locations will not be named below the map. If you are the first to correctly name the **two** missing locations and the **month** the corps was there, you will receive an 11x14 Commemorative Corps Poster celebrating the Corps and NEW Toronto Optimists History Newsletter.

E-mail you answers to David at: openrd2002@yahoo.ca



In 1959 the corps traveled to:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Don Mills, Ontario - May | Welland, Ontario - July | Galt, Ontario - September |
| Jersey City, New Jersey - May | Rome, New York - August | Toronto, Ontario - September |
| Woodstock, Ontario - July | Toronto, Ontario - September | |
| Rochester, New York - July | Merritton, Ontario - September | |



Toronto Optimists. (Toronto's City Hall, 1960)

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HOW TO REACH US

CORRECTIONS: We tried to get everything right.

If not, please let us know:

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Please submit your material to Bob Carell at:
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E-mail. A Microsoft Word document, saved as
“Rich Text Format” or “text only”.

Or mail: Bob Carell:

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E-Photos should be sent to:

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If your photos were taken using a digital camera,
please save them to your hard drive then email the
unedited photos.

NOTE: The editor may need to modify your stories
for space allowances. Every effort will be made to
retain the spirit and intent of your submission.