



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



ISSUE 7 JULY 2022

In this issue

- 2 Introduction
- 2 Be a contributor
- 3 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website



- 5 **FEATURE ARTICLE**
St. John's
- 17 "*From Toronto...
The Optimists!*"
Chapters 13 and 14
- 36 **Spotlight**
The Aurora/Newmarket
Ambassadors
Drum & Bugle Corps
- 38 **Recollections**
From Mike Thys
- 41 **Buglers Hall of Fame**
by Doug MacKenzie
- 43 **The Last Time**
by Doug McPhail
- 45 **WE REMEMBER**
Randy Cochrane
Jan Burgess
Marilyn Sturino
- 49 **The Last Page**

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.

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

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

WELCOME TO THE INAUGURAL ISSUE of the new Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter. Don Daber launched the first issue of GCCC in December 1960 and, since then there was a way of keeping Optimists connected. David Jones and I decided to continue that tradition by creating The Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter for the Toronto Optimists History website.

ISSUE 1 JANUARY 2021

In this issue

- 1 Welcome
- 2 The answers are...
- 3 Recollections
- 4 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website
- 5 FEATURE ARTICLE Who keeps us connected?
- 6 From Toronto... The Optimists! Chapters 1 and 2
- 7 Why? Royce
- 8 We Remember
- 9 The Last Page

LOOK FOR A PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

Issue 1

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

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

WELCOME TO THE SECOND ISSUE of the new Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter. Our first issue was very well received and we hope that all of you will continue to enjoy learning the history of the Toronto Optimists. In this edition we are publishing Chapters three and four of Colin's book. Chapter three focuses on the coming together of members of Opta-Corps and the Daerforth Crusaders to create a new corps, The Toronto Optimists. The focus of Chapter four is on the Optimists from 1957 and 1958 that were submitted by Phil Hastings. As an added feature we are reprinting an article by Colin Daerforth about the Optimists' drum line. The article, which covers the years 1957 through 1962, was originally published in a 1962 issue of GCCC (Volume 2, #4).

ISSUE 2 APRIL 2021

In this issue

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Website trivia
- 3 Recollections From Jerry Day
- 4 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website
- 5 FEATURE ARTICLE Optimists' Drumline from 1957 to 1962
- 6 From Toronto... The Optimists! Chapters 3 and 4
- 7 Memories: Phil Hastings
- 8 Don Daber: Drummer
- 9 We Remember
- 10 Let Us Around
- 11 The Last Page

LOOK FOR A PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

Issue 2

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

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

WELCOME TO THE THIRD ISSUE of the new Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter. Our first issue was very well received and we hope that all of you will continue to enjoy learning the history of the Toronto Optimists. In this edition we are publishing Chapters five and six of Colin's book. Chapter five focuses on the beginning of the Optimists. In addition, you will find an article about Doug Mackenzie who was recently inducted into the Buglers Hall of Fame.

ISSUE 3 JULY 2021

In this issue

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Website trivia
- 3 Recollections From Jerry Day
- 4 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website
- 5 FEATURE ARTICLE Optimists' Drumline from 1957 to 1962
- 6 From Toronto... The Optimists! Chapters 5 and 6
- 7 Memories: Gene Ferraruzzi
- 8 Recollections Gene Dyer
- 9 Some 1959 Scores: Phil Hastings
- 10 WE REMEMBER Bill Thorne
- 11 WINNERS 1962 & We Got Around
- 12 The Last Page

LOOK FOR A PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

Issue 3

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

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

HEY! THIS IS THE LAST ISSUE FOR 2021 of the Toronto Optimists History Newsletter. Your feedback has been very positive and we hope to make these newsletters even better in 2022. The summer of life is changing and that applies to drum corps. If a corps fails to change they become stagnant. The Toronto Optimists were not about to let that happen. As the Optimists prepared for the 1960 season they had two main goals: their third consecutive Nationals and improve the corps standing in the USA.

ISSUE 4 OCTOBER 2021

In this issue

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Be a contributor
- 3 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website
- 4 FEATURE ARTICLE Praireau Score House Chapters 7 and 8
- 5 Some 1960 Scores
- 6 Recollections From Frank Lema
- 7 From Toronto... The Optimists! Chapters 7 and 8
- 8 Memories: Phil Hastings and Terry Downey
- 9 WE REMEMBER John Cull
- 10 Chris Taylor
- 11 The Last Page

LOOK FOR A PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

Issue 4

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

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

THIS IS OUR FIRST ISSUE FOR 2022 and, even though the New Year has already begun, we send our Best Wishes to all of our readers for a Happy and Healthy 2022! In this issue, we include Chapters 9 and 10 of Colin's history of the Optimists. The focus of these chapters is on 1961, which was a very challenging year for the corps. Members of Junior drum corps have to leave when they reach twenty-one and the loss of experienced members can create a major challenge for the corps. The Optimists had to deal with this situation when they lost almost half of their corps after the 1960 season. Lots of experienced players, many of whom had been with the corps since its inception, aged out and new members of the corps had a lot of learning and growing - to do.

ISSUE 5 JANUARY 2022

In this issue

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Be a contributor
- 3 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website
- 4 FEATURE ARTICLE De La Salle Oakland's 1961 Competition
- 5 Some 1961 Scores
- 6 The Golden-Graze Compass Award
- 7 Optimists Corps Song
- 8 From Toronto... The Optimists! Chapters 9 and 10
- 9 Some 1962 Scores
- 10 The St. Lawrence Battery "Dart of Toronto Flag"
- 11 Rick Kuba and his "New Green Sash" Blouse
- 12 The City of Toronto Pl
- 13 David Jones Remembers
- 14 WE REMEMBER John Thorne
- 15 The Last Page

LOOK FOR A PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

Issue 5

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

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

SPRING HAS SPRUNG! During the 1960s we would have been outside by the Shell Tower at the CNE, leaning back and, perhaps, munching through the snow while freezing our butts. Ah, the sweet memories of youth!

ISSUE 6 APRIL 2022

In this issue

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Be a contributor
- 3 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website
- 4 FEATURE ARTICLE Cecilia LaSalle
- 5 From Toronto... The Optimists! Chapters 11 and 12
- 6 Some 1962 Scores
- 7 SPOTLIGHT: Jimmie Gordon-Lions
- 8 Reprints from old GCCCs
- 9 Optimists Computer Game: Fama, NY from DCB 1962 Drumline
- 10 Recollections from: Mike Wood
- 11 WE REMEMBER Bill Thorne
- 12 John Burgess
- 13 Marilyn Sturino
- 14 The Last Page

LOOK FOR A PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

Issue 6

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

JULY HAS ARRIVED AND IT IS TIME FOR ANOTHER ISSUE of our quarterly newsletter. Back in the 1960s, July would typically be the start of our season. I guess that late June would be more accurate because our first contest was usually near the end of June at the Rose Festival in Welland. This was very different from the US corps who usually began their competition season in early May. Unfortunately, this "late" start to the season did create a challenge when Canadian corps competed against those from the US early in the season. It was one of those harsh realities of life.

This issue includes Chapter 13 and 14 of Colin's History of the Optimists. In these chapters Colin, instead of writing about a specific year, focuses on what's happening behind the scenes. Topics covered include the Optimist Club, the corps' Executive and Instructors, its identity, traditions and the connections that develop, especially during bus trips.

Our feature article is about St. John's Drum Corps from Bramford. During their existence, St. John's went through a variety of changes - in name and in composition. The "Spotlight" article in this issue shines on the Aurora / Newmarket Ambassadors.

ISSUE 7 JULY 2022

In this issue

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Be a contributor
- 3 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website



- 5 FEATURE ARTICLE St. John's
- 6 From Toronto... The Optimists! Chapters 13 and 14
- 7 Spotlight The Aurora/Newmarket Ambassadors Drum & Bugle Corps
- 8 Recollections From Mike Thys
- 9 Buglers Hall of Fame by Doug Mackenzie
- 10 The Last Time by Doug McPhail
- 11 WE REMEMBER Randy Cochrane Jan Burgess Marilyn Sturino
- 12 The Last Page



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 who, like us, 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.

- 17 From Toronto... The Optimists! Chapters 5 and 6
- 18 Memories: Gene Ferraruzzi
- 19 Recollections Gene Dyer
- 20 Some 1959 Scores: Phil Hastings
- 21 WE REMEMBER Bill Thorne
- 22 WINNERS 1962 & We Got Around
- 23 The Last Page

Issue 7



WEBSITE ADDITIONS

Additions to both the Main website and the Photo Gallery continue to be made. New photos are added to the Photo Gallery about twice each week.



Cardinal Cadets (1978)

WEBSITE UPDATE: What's new on TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

We continue to add photos from the competitive years to our Photo Gallery, usually a couple of times each week. In addition to photos of the Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Optimists, I am continuing to include photos of some of the other corps, mostly from Ontario, that competed in the old days. To give you an idea, this page contains two photos that have recently been added to the Photo Gallery.

There's already a wealth of information on the main website so it's difficult to know what to add. As I obtain old issues of GCC I will scan them and post them on the website. And, of course, "We Remember" pages will be posted as folks pass away. Sadly, three people have passed since our April issue. They are Randy Cochrane, who marched in the competitive corps, as well as Jan Burgess and Marilyn Sturino who were both members of the Optimists Alumni Corps.

If anyone has suggestions for new material that will improve the website, please let us know.



March Past: Seneca Optimists, St Ignatius Girls, Chatelaines, Northstar and Oakland Crusaders (Simcoe, 1978)

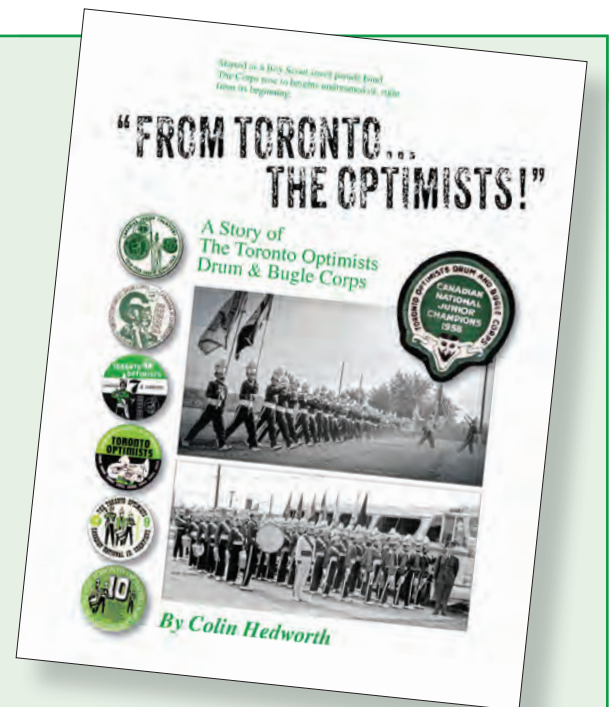
In our next newsletter: Chapters 15 and 16 ("A Good Corps, Again" and "The Middle Years")

The next issue of the Newsletter (October) will include Chapters 15 and 16 from Colin Hedworth's book "From Toronto... The Optimists!".

IN THESE CHAPTERS Colin writes about the years 1963 through 1965. Some very significant changes occurred during this period. For example, Optimists Corps Director, Mr Baggs, whose involvement began during the Boy Scout era, retired as corps director. He was replaced by Don Daber.

Another big change is that The Optimists started travelling to the US mid-west where judging rules focussed almost exclusively on execution with very few points allocated to General Effect (GE). Midwest judging, especially M&M, was probably the most strict of any jurisdiction. As a result, our scores in the Midwest were low. It was a humbling experience.

On a positive note, these competitions were a wonderful opportunity to discover weak points in our show and use that information to improve the quality of our performances. There was another small, but notable, change — at the end of 1963 the last of the original Toronto Optimists aged out. (see *The Last Time* on page 43)



Toronto Optimists (1964)

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

St. John's

The corps history and many of the photos used in this article have come from the St John's Alumni website (www.stjohnsdrumcorpsalumni.com). This material has been used with the permission of the St. John's Alumni Association.

ON OCTOBER 16, 1953 a meeting occurred at the Brantford Catholic High School for girls who were interested in joining a newly formed band, known as the B.C.H. Girls' Trumpet Band. The first Director of the Corps was Father Frank A. Dentinger, Principal of the Brantford Catholic High School, later Father H. J. Hayes took charge. The first instructors were Bob Shewchuck on drums, Fred Nicholas on bugles, George Mellor for drill and drums, and later Gord Easto on drill. The first Drum Major, known then as a "Drum Majorette" was Linda Glendinning.



B.C.H. Girls' Trumpet Band (1955)

Originally there were sixteen members, and their first uniforms were ankle-length grey skirts and white blouses. In the fall of 1954 new uniforms were issued in green and white – these were the Corps colours until 1976. Membership increased each year and in 1956 majorettes became part of the Corps. In 1958 a ten-member colour party was added, and by 1959 the Corps had fifty-three members.

In 1960 the Brantford Catholic High School changed its name to St. John's College; the Corps then became known as St. John's College Drum and Bugle Corps. In 1964, St. John's College became an all-boys school and therefore the all-girls Drum Corps was no longer a part of the school. The Knights of Columbus then took over sponsorship of the Corps and the Corps became known as the Knights of Columbus–St. John's



Karen Batson and Barb Moroz (1957)

FEATURE ARTICLE: St. John's Drum Corps (continued)

Girls' Drum Corps, or the K. of C. St. John's Girls' Drum Corps.

In 1970 the Knights of Columbus discontinued their sponsorship of the Corps and St. John's Girls Drum & Bugle Corps became a self-sponsored organization. The Board of Directors (led by the Executive Corps Director George Mellor) and the Parents' Committee strongly supported the Corps, as did the City of Brantford and its citizens, industries, and businesses.

They also won the International All-Girl Open Championships in 1972 and 1973. Another special honour bestowed upon the Corps was receiving the Holiday Inn Peace Flag in 1975. This marked the first time that the flag, designated by Holiday Inns to promote world peace through tourism, would "have a recipient other than a world government leader." In 1976 they proudly carried the United States Bi-Centennial Flag alongside the Canadian flag – they were the only Canadian Drum Corps to have been honoured by the U.S. Open Drum and Bugle Corps Championship Commission of Marion, Ohio.

The Corps began competing in 1956 and started a long history of winning parades and competitions within Canada and the United States. The Corps won their first Canadian National and Provincial Championships in 1962 and they remained Provincial Champions from 1962–1977. Their reign as Canadian National Champions



continued from 1963–1967, recaptured in 1971–1974, and then again in 1977. The Corps gained true international stature in 1972 by winning the All-Girls U.S. Open Championships, making them the first Canadian All-Girls Drum Corps to achieve this.

Winning these Championship titles created their popularity within the City of Brantford, and as result their membership increased to 110 in 1973. They were also known as the "youngest" Corps, because the average age of their members was only 14 years old. This prompted the Board of Directors to create a Junior Drum and Bugle Corps, to be known as the



Belles of St. John's (1977)

Belles of St. John's. The Belles were active until 1979 when they merged with their Senior Corps.



St John's Girls (Nationals, Waterloo, 1962)

The year 1981 marked another notable event in the Corps' history with a name change from St. John's Girls Drum and Bugle Corps to Brantford Girls Drum and Bugle Corps. Having benefited from years of valued community support and involvement, the Board of Directors voted strongly in

FEATURE ARTICLE: St. John's Drum Corps (continued)

favour of paying homage to their community and identifying the Corps with their hometown.

The Corps remained fiercely competitive in the All-Girl Class within the Ontario Drum Corps Association (ODCA) and Drum Corps International (DCI) circuits throughout 1981-1983. In 1983 they became the All-Girl Champions at the American International Open competition in Butler, Pennsylvania, for which they received a banner flag and a 4-foot-high trophy. Also, in 1983 they received the Most Improved Drum Corps Award by the Canadian Judges Association (CJA).

In August 1984 members of the Corps became “movie stars” when they were invited to appear in the movie “Sesame Street Presents: Follow That Bird”. They spent two days in the town of Georgetown, Ontario filming a brief parade segment and had the honour of meeting the late Jim Henson



St John's in "Follow That Bird" (1984)

and the famed cast and crew of Sesame Street. The movie was released in August 1985 and the Corps performed an exhibition show outside the Capitol Theatre when the movie premiered in Brantford.

In October 1984, the Corps enjoyed “15 minutes of fame” when they played for Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip at the Mohawk Chapel in Brantford.

The 1985-1986 season marked the most momentous change in the Corps' history when they decided to go co-ed. Up until that point, they were the oldest All-Girl Drum and Bugle Corps in North America, but declining membership and increased operational costs forced the Corps to break tradition and open their membership up to males. The Corps also went back to using the name St. John's Drum and Bugle Corps, and the Corps colours converted from pink and black to burgundy and black to signify the introduction of males in the Corps.

Going co-ed and re-inventing St. John's Drum & Bugle Corps proved successful during the final years of the of the 1980's decade because membership gradually increased, the Corps captured the Provincial and National B-Class championship title several times, and they returned to compete in the DCI Championships – the first time since 1982.

St. John's continued their winning ways well into the 1990's. In 1991 the Corps advanced from B-Class to A-60 Class and they had a full summer of competitions and tours to Massachusetts, Illinois, New York, Quebec, Northern Ontario. They were the Provincial and Canadian National champions that year and had the glory of winning all three caption awards in their class at Nationals.

They were Provincial and Canadian National Champions again in 1992 and became DCI Finalists for the first time in 10 years. Another notable achievement for the Corps' history books occurred when they were named “Drum Corps of the Year” in 1992 by the Ontario Drum Corps Association (ODCA) for their “dedication, tenacity and excellence”.

FEATURE ARTICLE: St. John's Drum Corps (continued)

The Corps celebrated their 40th Anniversary in October 1993 with a three-day event that attracted alumni from all over the world. This successful event would be the beginning of other reunions and alumni events to honour milestone anniversaries and to keep their alumni in touch and involved with St. John's as their legacy continues in the years ahead.

The Corps continuously appeared in the DCI Championship Finals in Division III between 1992-1998, and in 1995 they became the Canadian National A-60 Champions for the fifth consecutive year. St. John's Winter Guard were equally successful in the 1990's. Competing in the Winter Guard International (WGI) Championships several times, they won Bronze in A-Class in 1995 and they were moved up to compete in Open Class in 1996.

A decline in membership prevented the Corps from competing in 1999 and 2000, but they

continued to rebuild and returned in 2001 as a Parade Corps. They returned to competition in 2002 and between 2002–2006 they remained competitive in the Division III, appearing in competitions throughout North America, including DCI World Championships. In 2003, they celebrated their 50th Anniversary and became one of the oldest junior Drum Corps in Canada.

There was little activity between 2006–2009, however in 2009 the St. John's Winter Guard was reborn; this time with a plan of returning to compete in the WGI Championships within five years. Although there was little year-round Drum Corps activity left in Ontario at that point, there were various Winter Guards from Ontario who competed in the Northeast Colour Guard Circuit (NECGC) that was based in New York.

Because St. John's Drum & Bugle Corps was existing in name only, but not as an active and competitive Drum & Bugle Corps, the Board of



St John's (DCI, 1987)

FEATURE ARTICLE: St. John's Drum Corps (continued)

Directors decided to change the organization's name to Brantford Entertainment Arts Team (B.E.A.T) in 2010. B.E.A.T. was to serve as an umbrella organization that performing arts groups would operate under, with the hopeful intention of revitalizing Drum & Bugle Corps activity in Ontario through the formation of Junior and Senior Winter Guards, All-Ages Drum Corps, Cadet (Junior) Corps, and Marching Percussion Lines.

For the 2009-2010 season, the Winter Guard had nine members and competed in the Cadet Class of the NECGC and in the 2010-2011 season, membership grew, and the Guard advanced to the A-1 Class.

In 2012, the current Alumni Committee was formed to plan a 60th Anniversary Reunion weekend that would take place in September 2013. This was a three-day event that consisted of a Pub Night, Banquet, and a Drum Corps show that featured the talents of various local Alumni corps, a percussion group, a Cadet corps, and the St. John's Winter

Guard. This event was another tremendous success and was again attended by alumni members from around the world who were brought together to remember their good old days, connect with old friends, and support the remaining Drum Corps and Winter Guard activity in Ontario.

The Winter Guard continued to flourish over the next couple of years, enough to have both a junior and a senior Guard that actively competed in the NECGC circuit. In 2013 the senior Guard had the unique experience of having a member from South Korea, and in 2014 the senior Guard moved up to the Independent A Class and once again competed in the WGI World Championships.

In 2016, St. John's Winter Guard became part of the Northstar Youth Organization in Kitchener for the 2016-2017 Winter Guard Season. This marked the official end of Drum Corps and Winter Guard activity for the St. John's Drum and Bugle Corps organization, however the Alumni Committee has continued to keep the rich history of the



1977 Corps Banquet George Mellor, Goldie Mellor, Kelly Pratt, Sue Monarch (Hinsely)

FEATURE ARTICLE: St. John's Drum Corps (continued)

organization alive. Using social media and holding fundraising events to keep their alumni members connected and involved, the Committee's focus is to continue to support local youths in their pursuit of the Drum Corps experience that each of us once shared and will forever treasure.



Former members of St John's who march in various alumni corps (St John's Reunion, 2013)



Belles of St John's (1977)

Photos of St John's from different eras

During the course of its existence, St John's has gone through a number of number of name changes. In addition, it has been both an all-girl corps as well as a co-ed corps. The photos that follow show the corps in various of its incarnations.

Brantford Catholic High School Trumpet Band (1953 - 1959)



First public appearance (1954)
The corps paraded in ankle length skirts and white blouses.



Anne Campbell, Mary Kavanagh and Rosemary Barnett



Karen Batson, left, of the St. John's Girls Drum Corps makes a little music with Jim Reynolds and Wendy Divine, members of other local junior trumpet and drum corps in October, 1958

Text and Photo from the Brantford Expositor.

Note: Jim Reynolds was a drummer in the Toronto Optimists.



1959 - Drum Majors - Sue (Kennally) Kislosky and Mary Ellen Naphin
Colour Guard: L-R Karen Batson, Barb Moroz, Linda Casey

St. John's Drum and Bugle Corps (1960 - 1963)



St. John's Drum Corps (Nationals, Waterloo, 1962)



St John's (Nationals, Waterloo, 1962)

Knights of Columbus - St John's Drum and Bugle Corps (1964 - 1970)



St John's (Nationals, Kingston, 1968)



St John's (Nationals, Kingston, 1968)

St John's Drum and Bugle Corps (1971 - 1980)



St John's (July 1, 1974)



St. John's in their new red and black uniforms (1977)



St. John's in their new red and black uniforms (1977)

Brantford Girls Drum and Bugle Corps (1980s)



Brantford Girls (DCI, Montreal, 1982)



Brantford Girls (Waterloo, 1983)

St John's Drum and Bugle Corps (1990s)



St John's in New Uniforms(1990)



Drum Majors Tyson Anderson and Janice Robinson (1990)



St John's Guard (1994)



St John's French Horns (1995)

St John's Winter Guard (2012)



St John's Winter Guard (2012)



St John's Winter Guard (2012)

Chapter 13: Inside the Corps

What was the Corps like behind the uniforms and public image as seen on the field? Probably not much different from any other Drum Corps, as most of them were after the same things. In order to pursue these ends, they did the same things, different only in degree and method. Let’s see if we can discover what, if anything, made the Optimists distinctive, and tick for so long, so successfully. In attempting to do this, it is probably a good idea to begin at the top, if only for want of a starting point.

Downtown Toronto Optimists Club

To begin with, there was the Downtown Toronto Optimist Club itself. Without them, there would have been no Corps, at least, not one of the magnitude of this one. The club, one of many in their field, was a remote organization to the general membership of the Corps. We knew them in name only. Nobody knew when or where they convened, or how large a part the Corps played in their overall programs. Their representative closest to us was, of course, Al Baggs, whose concern was us. From him we heard of club decisions or activities, but only if they involved the Corps and its affairs. Most, if not all of us, were only interested in things that applied to the Corps.

From time to time, a club member would come around to see what was going on, and often we would be unaware of his presence. Even if he was noticed, no one would know who he was, as they were seldom introduced.

The most common reaction, if a stranger appeared was, “Who’s that guy?”. Usually he would be taken for an interested father or uncle, perhaps even an outsider who would not know anything about Drum Corps. Thus he was not to be bothered with. All of us would have been surprised to find out just how much these “strangers” did know, as well as what an influence they and their colleagues had on the make-up and operation of that which we all loved, The Corps.



Optimists Club Crest for Toronto

The Executive

Next to the club, on a level more accessible to the membership was the executive and those associated with it. As the Corps itself changed with time, so did the executive, though for different reasons. Age was the one factor affecting all in the Corps itself, along with other things affecting individuals.

In the executive, no constant factor existed, and some of these people would stay for years. Change at their level could have many reasons. The increase of responsibility in other field i.e. family, business, etc., ill health, advancing years or even just being superseded by others more fit or capable of taking up the reins of control. This last sounds a little too efficient, or even ruthless, but it was not that way at all. Anybody was welcome, at any time, for any reason, if they wanted to help out. Provided that the interests of the Corps were not interfered with, nobody was subject to dismissal or arbitrary rulings. There were, as anywhere, power struggles, with winners and losers, and sometimes losers stayed or sometimes they left. Those were personal, and usually hidden, not general policy.

Over the years, many people helped out at the executive level, some of whom remained almost unknown, while others became visible and accepted by the Corps. After, though, being subjected to intense scrutiny and hauled through the shark-toothed field of Corps discussion. Once accepted, they were in for good, becoming part of the whole and wearing the green jacket.

At the beginning, Al Baggs was the only executive member that we knew of, or saw, though he was soon joined by others. Bernie Beer came in, then Don Daber, and many others as the years passed. In this fashion, somewhat haphazard though it was, an effective management was maintained throughout the entire existence of the Corps. During all those years, there were many people involved, some of whom will be mentioned later, others who will not, if only because of a lack of records to draw from.

All who did become involved brought their own particular specialties, there being hardly a skill or trade that we could not take advantage of, if necessary. Such depth was often to prove useful. It goes without saying that all of this was done in a volunteer spirit, for if profit was the incentive for any, they would have to go elsewhere.

The members of the Corps itself were always interested in the people who became involved. Often this would lead to the coining of humorous nicknames that would be used frequently, and in public. The only one who was never addressed familiarly was Mr. Baggs. Long ago, he had been stuck with the name of “Daddy” Baggs, but this



Bernie Beer and Al Baggs (1960)



Don Daber (1963)

term was seldom, if ever, used to his face. “Daddy” Baggs did have a sense of humour, but it never occurred to people to use this nickname openly. It truly was a term of endearment, of respect for the man who had “fathered” a championship corps. This attitude was good in that it maintained a certain formality that helped in the running of the Corps. Even in a Drum corps, there has to be some discipline and hierarchy.

Other members of the executive, or even instructors, would be treated in a more informal fashion, and this never led to problems. In fact it was all part of the fun of being in the Corps.

During the very early years, an attempt to introduce a sterner formality between members and instructors fizzled out. It was asked that instructors be addressed as “Mr.” when members spoke to them. This did not last very long, possibly because at that time there was not much age difference between the two factions. This, plus the fact that after rehearsals everybody, executive, instructors, and members would often hang out together. This did not foster formality.

The Instructors

Now that we are onto the topic of instructors, it must be said that they were as “Drum Corps” as any of the members, in some cases, more so. Everybody was very young and exceedingly enthusiastic. Before the Corps became champions, many times over, all was new and exciting. Nobody was ever blasé or world-weary. Everybody was learning and loving every minute of it. It is hard to capture on paper the feeling that existed and successfully impart it to the reader. Possibly, it was what most of us experience during our youth, when spirit and enthusiasm are at a peak. Whatever field or endeavour one is in, it is a period in life unmatched. For us, it was the Corps.

The instructors of this Corps were more than somebody that you only saw at practice. They were often friends. Anyone of them was only too glad to pass on knowledge to those who desired it. They were true mentors and would bend over backwards to assist anybody in the Corps. In contrast to today, although there was an equipment department, of sorts, there was no Corps equipment truck, unless someone brought their own vehicle to be used. This occasionally happened. In these primitive days, everybody was responsible for their own equipment and was expected to be. People like Lorne Ferrazzutti hardly ever went home without a carload of drums, obligingly relieving people of having to carry them, a facet of his generous nature. It really was a chore if one had to board a crowded streetcar or subway train while carrying a bass or side drum, however, it was done all the time.

Barry Bell was, without a doubt, a true Corps person. He was always available for anything involving the Corps, or even other Corps. He was one of those who could sit for hours discussing Drum Corps and often did, until the wee hours. Then, almost everyone was possessed of this zeal to some degree. If they had not been, this book probably would not have been written, or it would tell a different story.

All of these people in the instructional staff were possessed of much talent and intelligence. People like Barry, Lorne and Doug McPhail, were assisted by capable individuals from within the Corps itself. They could be anybody, designated or volunteer.

The time that they put into the Corps, with little or no remuneration, could have been used in more lucrative pursuits. This assessment also applies to the executive. Collectively, it demonstrates that they, like the members of the Corps, truly liked what they were doing. This was a major factor in the success of the entire operation.



Most of Optimists' staff (1960): L-R: Doug McPhail, Jim Patten, Barry Bell, Ed Nanni, Al Morrison, Mr Baggs, Phil Hennings, Bernie Beer and Ivor Bramley

The Corps Members

What was the appeal of the Corps, almost magnetic in its attraction to those who were interested?

Many times we would spend long hours debating and discussing what it was about, this activity that held its devotees so strongly. The probable answer lies in a combination of factors that were not always related.

A definite liking for music would bring those who wanted to play rather than just listen, but who could not pursue it professionally or would not. Whether this would be due to lack of time, money, or talent is beside the point. The Corps, any Corps, would provide an outlet for such inclinations.

It did not cost a lot of money to belong. There were no dues in those days, and all that was needed was enough to be able to live on the road for a day or two, everything else was provided free; uniforms, instruments, instruction, and travel expenses, only meals being paid for individually.

Talent! It was not really necessary, or asked for, that one be talented to be in the Corps. Most of us were decidedly not talented, but as a group managed to give the impression of a reasonable facsimile. Talent was usually a matter of individual ambition. A clever horn player could, and did, fake his way through part of the show without being detected. Many Corps, us included, in order to fill a blank, would use a person who could not play a note but go through the motions with his instrument. If this went unnoticed, one's Corps would not suffer, point-wise, on the score sheets. Of course, if too many did this, it would be noticed. Only the drums and guard could not fake their routines.

If the Corps had more than a few above average performers, so much the better, the unit would be better for it. Often, the show would be designed around such people, using their talents to the best advantage, without putting the rest, most of us, in a lesser light. Al Morrison, Joe Gianna, Doug MacKenzie, and Ronn Prokop were people who fitted the category of above average and were showcased to the benefit of all. There would usually be backups for these people, now, and years in the future. Different names held sway then.

About the only thing required of everyone was the time involved. That all should participate to the same degree was almost necessary for the maintenance of uniformity and cohesion. With the Optimists, and likely most other Corps, peer pressure usually ensured that this requirement was fulfilled.

During the early years, the time element was not too demanding, but as the Corps got better it began to increase. In order to keep up with or even surpass better Corps, the time involved gradually grew until eventually it



Ronn Prokop, Jim McConkey and David Johns performing a skit for corps members (it was based on “Officer Krumpke” from West Side Story)

reached extreme levels. This could work to the near exclusion of all else in one’s life. It was a matter of personal opinion if it was worth it or not.

One of the decidedly strong appeals of the Corps was the outdoor, fresh air aspect of the whole activity. Although most music was learned and rehearsed indoors, once the summer arrived, or even before, most activity was conducted in the wide-open spaces. To get a break from stuffy classrooms, well lit but confining offices, or factories, and participate in a healthy physical activity, possessed a broad appeal for many. This, culminating in those weekend bus trips, provided an irresistible lure that was almost addictive in its attraction.

Bus Trips

The bus trips were, without a doubt, a major part of the fun of being in the Corps, at least this one.

They would go something like this. In the wee hours of Saturday morning, all over the city, certain people would arise while others were still sound asleep. Quietly getting themselves ready, they would finally pick up horn or drum and sneak out the door, off for the day with their favourite Drum Corps. Depending on the length of the trip, the bus would be ready to leave at 7:30, 8:00, or 8:30, when finally everybody had shown up. In the Optimists, we seldom had to wait for anyone, or had people missing. It did happen but only occasionally, which was an indication of how the corps was liked by those in it. Some people, who were really dedicated, would arise even earlier than the others, to meet at someone’s house for an hour or two of section practice before meeting the bus. Such enthusiasm!

Once the Corps was assembled, all would board the bus after roll call and away we went. Usually it was a fine, sunny Saturday morning and all was well as the bus pulled out onto the rolling road, full of young, happy people.

The locations from which we departed were not always the same. Sometimes it would be Jarvis Vocational School, sometimes the Canadian National Exhibition grounds. One good spot was at Church and Adelaide streets. It was convenient because it had an early opening restaurant nearby where one could load up with goodies before leaving.

In the early days, it was usually Barry Bell or Al Baggs, or both, in token charge of the bus. Token because they seldom did much. That would have spoiled the fun. Once on the bus, safely in one’s favourite seat, it was sit back, feet up, and leave it all to the bus driver. For some reason, the rowdiest element always seemed to congregate at the back of the bus. Reflecting this, a song was composed, called “The Back Seat Boys”, that paid tribute to these worthies. The group was fluid and transient, with people joining and leaving as desired, but it was constant.



Jim Patten, Warren Mills and Mr. Baggs on the bus (Falconer, 1960)

People occupied themselves in various and sundry ways; reading, card playing, discussion and debate, usually about the Corps. These pastimes would be accompanied with sleeping, singing, and, sometimes, unbridled riotousness.

This lasted until everybody was exhausted, which often took a long time, young and healthy as we were. The bus driver took it all in stride, probably having seen worse if in the habit of driving weekend groups. It was all great fun and most times ended with us taking up a collection for the driver on the way home. In a Corps hat - remember those!

If the trip was to the United States, as increasingly they were, experience taught us a few things. When US immigration boarded the bus at the border, they would ask, “Where were you born?”, to each individual. It was the best just to say “Toronto”, which came out “Tronna”. When one honest fellow said “Sicily”, we were held up for hours while border guards conscientiously checked that all was okay. This entailed phone calls to Toronto to verify documentation. After that, everybody was born in Toronto, or at least in Ontario.

This little incident served to highlight the homogeneous nature of the Corps. We had all kinds and were a multi-cultural society, in miniature, long before such arrangements were official government policy. Were it



On the bus (1965)

still in existence today, its make-up would likely be even more cosmopolitan, reflecting modern society. Everybody got along very well, different natures and temperaments serving to add to the overall fun of a bus trip.

This Corps, and no doubt most of them, always had a clown or two to liven things up. We had many, but the most obvious in the early days was Don Chisholm. His irreverent wit could keep a whole bus in a turmoil of laughter until he had to be begged to stop. You just could not take it anymore.

Being in a Junior Corps, these trips were pretty clean cut, which was a plus factor. The debilitating effects of alcohol were minimal as it was not encouraged, and the ugly and illegal presence of drugs had not yet made its presence felt. These things would, and did crop up and were handled in a manner designed to reduce, if not eliminate them altogether. Not, it must be said, always successfully. The effects of alcohol abuse became evident once when some wine was acquired in the course of an out-of-town trip. The results were odious and repugnant, serving the discomfort of all on the bus. Such things are, of course, a matter of personal choice, and in a Corps will be found all different types of people. If you wanted to be in the Corps, you did not have to use such things, but sometimes you had to endure them.

Eating on the trips was an experience, not only for the Corps but also for those who worked in the restaurants. When fifty or sixty young people descend on a place all at once, on top of the people already there, things get

pretty hectic. Mostly for the people who worked in these establishments. At night, although fewer local people would be in the place, there were also fewer staff on hand to serve; however, believe it or not, this Corps was a fairly well-behaved lot, and we were never refused entrance. It can happen. Everybody always got fed and back on the bus in a reasonably short time. This was a credit to the restaurant staff as well and the Corps. Even years later, with a much larger Corps, there were seldom problems, certainly none caused by the attitude of the Corps itself.

Often people, who were not officially connected, went on trips with the Corps just to see the shows or to act as a cheering section. These could be friends, relatives, or, in many cases, ex-members following their old Corps around. This was quite a common practice and could result in a whole convoy instead of just a single bus.

Girlfriends were a bit of a different story. If one had a girlfriend who liked the Corps, it made things a lot easier. Many of these would come to all the practices as well as the shows if they were really keen. Some were, almost all Corps had some groupies and we were no exception. It was not all that much fun for the girls, though, as all they could do was watch whatever the Corps did. Nowadays, with the gender mixed Corps, it is possible for the girls to participate. They were capable of that at the time but things were just not done that way. Either you were in a boys Corps or a girls Corps. When, at last, the girls did become truly involved, they proved to be an asset in more ways than one.



Barry and Pat Bell (1961)

It would be interesting to speculate how many budding romances were destroyed by membership in a Drum Corps. The Optimists certainly experienced their share of these. There were people who got married while still in the Corps, and the wise ones left. Then there were those who married but did not leave, and this could have been the cause of broken marriages. It did happen. Corps life, with its constant demands on one's time for rehearsals, and all the travelling involved, was not truly compatible with domestic bliss. Possibly, another category common in years to come, marriage between two people in the Corps was the answer. Whatever, marriage and Drum corps, two fine institutions. It is of course, a personal choice, but not an easy one.

During the trips many things occurred, usually in a fashion to punctuate the tedium that could set in. On a memorable occasion, one of our better horn players, Ed Nanni, was encouraged to challenge Barry Bell to a horn playing contest. Barry agreed, picked up a horn and began triple-tonguing as a warm up for the bout. The contest was cancelled in the face of such expertise.

There were, of course, mishaps that occurred. Those that involved the bus, or an accompanying car, caused the most inconvenience to all. Often assistance had to be sought from many miles away. We always got home in one piece, never experiencing any disastrous accidents as plagued some other Corps. Considering the amount of travelling involved, this was lucky and fortunate. It was also a tribute to good management.

The Corps “Identity”

There was always a good “Corps identity” for want of a better name. When we met to go on a bus trip, we were not a bunch of individuals. We were “The Optimists”, and this helped to make the trips more enjoyable. During the early years, things were not so demanding and there was more free time available. Later on, almost every minute was scheduled and the Corps, though better, demanded more of its members. The people in it at the time thought nothing of this because, to them, it had always been this way. What had been one or two day trips became week long tours that were a whole different ball game from early times.

On the bus itself, the mixture of people sometimes created an unruly atmosphere. This was a group of teenagers, most of whom were in the process of being educated. As a result of this partially civilized stage of development, it did not take long for the descent into near savagery.

If this involved only certain elements of the Corps, many found it hilarious, some, only to be tolerated.

The inside of the bus could become a haven for the vilest noises and exclamations known to man. These would be accompanied by the appropriate offensive odours, and the whole served to create a scenario that was not for those of delicate sensibilities. Any inclined this way would soon learn this. But nobody was ever physically



Ivor talking to a police officer while Ronn Prokop, Ron Kaiser, Orest Burak and Colin Hedworth listen (1962)

injured, even though many fights took place. They were all in good fun. To the best of my knowledge, nobody ever quit the Corps because of the atmosphere on the bus. The later addition of girls to the Corps, it was noticed, did have a beneficial civilizing effect on the whole operation. If things did get too out of hand, as sometimes occurred, there was always an adult or two on board to keep things under control. This was a good thing because occasionally things got just too bizarre.

Probably the best all round bus leader during his tenure was Barry Bell.



Toronto Optimists (Varsity Stadium, 1962)

He could maintain a semblance of order with a potent mixture of wit and discipline. This would serve to preserve order, suppressing extremists, who were a minority, thus allowing the majority to enjoy the trip. It was the majority who usually gained the upper hand and trips were conducted in a pleasant and tolerable atmosphere. As a whole, the Corps was rather a culture unto itself, tough, harmless, and, if you did not like it, you could always leave. This seldom happened.

The overall attraction, even addiction, that the Corps exerted on its members is best illustrated by events of today. Whenever reunions occur, formal or otherwise, after the first few minutes, all talk is of the Corps. Most of these people are successful, in the accepted fashion, in their latter day lives. Some are high ranking business executives, others business owners. Nearly all are solidly capable in some field or endeavour. Some have families, and some are now retired. No matter. Seldom meeting other than at arranged occasions, when they do, the Corps and its activities dominates the conversation. In some instances, this phenomenon applies to people from forty years ago, and to many from thirty years ago.



Toronto Optimists (Grey Cup parade, Toronto, 1962)

Reasons for the initial interest have been mentioned, but why such a lingering attraction, even a possible longing for past experiences. One can only guess, and then it would vary for each individual. One thing, though, that is doubtlessly near universal, is the remembered feeling of “All for one, and one for all” that generally prevailed. No matter one’s status or ability, in the Corps all were the same and when that unit marched out on the field it was the “Optimists”, not 50-100 individuals.

It is a fact that people in Drum Corps are a breed apart and never forget those days, no matter how distant they may be.

Tradition

The Corps first became champions almost by chance, and in doing so established a tradition that was ever harder to maintain. Championship status was increasingly promoted as a goal to strive towards. In spite of this, membership requirements remained pretty much the same. Anyone could join, and did, but, as stated before, as the Corps got better, it would be harder to get a spot. Once in, you were expected to conform to the regimen. Manuals covering almost every aspect were written and expected to be followed. These could include dress, uniform care and maintenance, personal practice time, behaviour, instrument care, and so on and so forth. In the later stages, these things would grow ever more complex.

Such organization was non-existent when the Corps began but developed piecemeal as the Corps got older and grew in stature. Except for the name, a guy who joined in 1958 and a guy who joined in 1968 would think they were in two different Corps. It was all part of the attempt to maintain its record in the face of increasingly

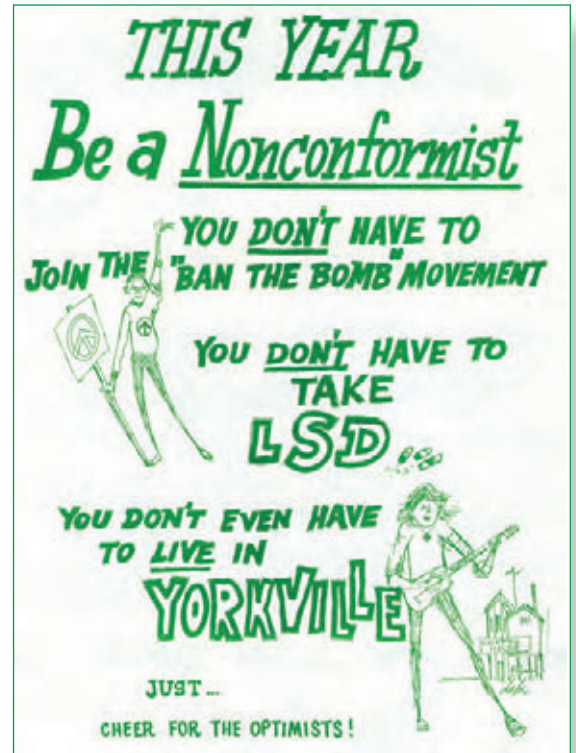
rigorous competition in the form of more, and better, Corps on the field and in the efforts to move up in places where success had yet to be achieved.

All this striving and the development that it spawned were to ensure the success of the Corps for a long time. Everybody knew that its winning streak, especially locally, had to end one day. The establishment of traditions, and the attempt to maintain them, ensured that it was a long time before this happened and was the one thing that made the “Optimists” distinctive.

Was the Corps hated for its success?

Possibly! During the early years, we were cheered as the underdog. Later, anybody who could beat us was cheered as the underdog. Often the Corps was booed, even when winning, if the affair was a close run thing. Many were. Just as often, the Corps was cheered when a performance left no doubt in anyone’s mind as to who had won. No matter what the reactions in those far off days, a look at the records reveals a streak that can never be erased, because that is what actually happened.

As this chapter winds down, and we get back to the real story of the Corps, on the field, we can anticipate a whole range of drama yet to come. There are seventeen years of story telling yet to cover, where anything and everything could, and did, happen. So let’s have a coffee and a smoke and relax for a while, and then carry on with this absorbing, real life, soap opera.



Another of Don Daber's creations (late, 1960s)



Rick Robida, Ronn Prokop, Fred Lombard and Joe Palanica (1963)

Chapter 14: Movin’ On

At the end of 1962, it had been ten full years since the formation of the tiny Boy Scout band, way back in 1952. What Bud Parker had started was now probably light years removed from what had been originally planned. It was also five years from the inception of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps, the unit that had evolved from those humble beginnings. What had begun with a diverse group of people, who had a common, binding interest, had ended up, through the efforts of all, as a going concern. There were very few left of that



The Toronto Optimists began life in 1952 as the 18th Troop Scout Band (18th Troop Scout Band, Oakwood Collegiate, Toronto, 1952)

original group, most having been replaced by new generations. This, of course, was due to age restrictions. They had helped to mould a Corps that had a brief but glorious history in its field, establishing milestones on its way and creating traditions as it grew.

Other than Al Baggs original idea of winning the Canadian Championship in two years, there had been no detailed long range planning, certainly not any that anticipated five years on top. Rather, it had been handled year by year, facing challenges that arose and most often surmounting them.

The Challenge

To reverse an old saying, there was no place to go but down and the challenge now was to try to maintain what had thus far been achieved. Two factors existed to make this goal difficult.

The first was the fact that there were more contests in Canada than ever before, due to growing interest and participation in the Drum Corps movement. This gave more units a chance to gain experience, thus improving their quality. The other obvious factor stemming from the first was that there were more Corps in the C.D.C.A.

Things could, and would, get tougher. A new, very promising Corps from Ottawa had made an appearance on the scene lately. They were the La Salle Cadets, or Cadets La Salle, and they had all the makings of a strong contender. You could never relax in this business. One of the bad things about being on top was that you hated to think about not being there, thus every move, every contest becomes vital. Because of this, it is a matter of personal opinion whether the Corps was as much fun to be in, at this stage. However, the drive for victory was the idea fostered, and I suppose that, at the time, no one would have had it any other way. The Optimists had been on the top of the heap locally for almost all of their first five years, so let’s have a look and see how they managed for the next five.

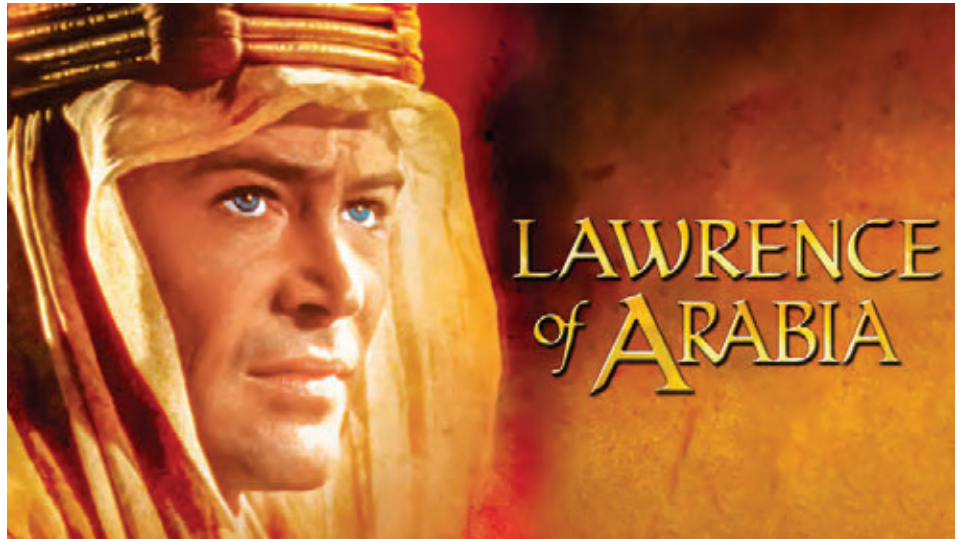


LaSalle Cadets (1963 or 1964)

Reflecting the success of 1962’s show, not too many changes were contemplated for 1963’s. It is always prudent to make some changes, as no presentation is beyond improvement, and fans tire of repetition. Some Corps kept certain numbers in their field repertoire for so long that they became familiar trademarks. Hawthorne Caballeros, with “España Cañi”, and Blessed Sacrament, with “National Emblem” were two examples of this tactic. However, units that did this usually changed some, or all, of the rest of their show, over a period of time.

Changes for 1963 and an Unusual Rumour

For the Optimist Corps of 1963, planned changes included using the themes from the movies “Lawrence of Arabia” and “El Cid” to open the show. “Ain’t Necessarily So” and “Chattanooga Choo Choo” for the standstill concert. A first choice for the opening number, “Barabbas” did not work out. This is where judgment plays a large part in planning. It is often not known if any changes made are for the better until the season opens and they are judged.



Poster for the movie “Lawrence of Arabia”

There were other changes in the offering for this year, not all of them concerned with the content and presentation of this year’s offering.

One thing that never changed was the annual proliferation of rumours that always swirled around the Corps. The most outlandish circulated this year, indeed, likely any year, was that the Optimists were going to appear on the Ed Sullivan Show. This was humorous as well as misleading. A mainstay of Sunday evening prime time CBS Television, this show often featured unusual acts. Drum Corps, however, was not usually, if ever, included. Besides, Drum Corps does not come across well under studio conditions. Even outside, where they belong, the visual effect lends itself well to television coverage, but the audio leaves something to be desired. It is the nature of the instruments. Finally, in a humorous vein, if Ed Sullivan had wanted Drum Corps on his show, he would have wanted the whole contest, not one Corps.

Mr Baggs steps down

Definitely, the most drastic change came as a surprise to some, but it was inevitable. Al Baggs stepped down as Corps Director of the Optimists Drum Corps.

This sober, somewhat aloof, but always friendly man had made a profound impression on this Corps, and much of the class it displayed was of his stamp. He had visualized and overseen the original merger that led to the existence of the Corps in its present form. His vision of a future championship Corps had given this outfit a goal, without which it might not have progressed as it did. Selecting the right people, who became infused with

his ideas, and his organizational ability, provided them the vehicle with which to proceed. He was the ideal manager, seldom sticking his nose into the mechanics of the Corps, rightfully leaving that to the instructors. The success of the enterprise, due to their competence, was a direct result of his selection of the right people in the first place.

Once it was on the road to success, his guidance with a firm hand kept things under control. He stood up in meetings of a political nature for his Corps and was respected, if not always liked, by many outside of the Optimist circle. One measure of that respect, within the Corps, was always evident during meetings. If an instructor or a member was addressing the Corps, there was often a low hum of conversation and much fidgeting going on. It could distract and embarrass the speaker. When that sombre, conservatively dressed figure walked in, complete silence immediately descended and all disturbances ceased. He stated his business quietly and effectively, nobody daring to disturb the scene. This phenomenon was always evident.

Yet, Al Baggs would sit in the restaurant with everybody and be part of the whole. It was just that you never doubted who was the boss. Even those of his colleagues who did not adhere to his ideas, often had to, as the modern phrase states, “shape up or ship out”.

Mr. Baggs had been a member of the Optimist Club since he helped engineer the takeover of the band, by the club, back in 1955. Now, with his resignation as Corps Director, he was made a lifelong member of Optimist International. Both he and his wife, Gladys, had devoted much time to the Corps, and, with other responsibilities, no doubt felt it was time to step aside. Whether this was due to an overload of work or to give somebody else a chance to run the Corps is not known. There was somebody in the wings.

The official reason given was that he wished to devote his time to the affairs of the Canadian Drum Corps Association, working for Corps in general. Along with this, he still remained as Chief Judge of the Canadian Association, where his administrative abilities were an asset as, indeed, they had been with the Corps. Hardly anything ever went wrong when Al Baggs was in charge of the Optimists. When another capable fellow by the name of Clare Reid stepped down as Contest Co-ordinator for the C.D.C.A., Al Baggs was given that position.

The prolonged discussion of this man does not even scratch the surface of his activities within the Optimist Corps, and Drum Corps in general. That alone could fill another book. Not without his faults, and who is, he to this day, 1998, is still vividly remembered by all who crossed his path within the Corps and otherwise. To say that the success of the Corps had much to do with him would be an understatement.

On January 28, 1963, at the Ice Follies, the Corps played for the last time with Al Baggs as Corps Director. It was a poignant moment, as all had come to respect and like this man. Not given to public displays of emotion, he went as he came, quietly, soberly and with dignity. His like would not be seen again.

Now, the problem arose, who was to replace this outstanding person.



Gladys and Al Baggs (Falconer, NY, 1960)

Our Staff

As often, the solution to this was somewhat surprising, if not entirely unexpected. Waiting in the wings, young, enthusiastic, intelligent, and by now knowledgeable enough, was none other than that paragon of diligence, Don Daber.

Yes, Don Daber now became the Corps Director of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. This Corps had been winning championships before he even knew what a Drum Corps was. When he did become aware of the activity, it was still quite a while before he ever heard of the Optimists. Now, he was the director. In the approximately three years that he had been connected, his accumulated knowledge and enthusiasm had made him a very good candidate for the position. It was also possible that nobody else wanted the job. It is easy to move into a successful enterprise, but not so easy to keep it that way.

However, the future cannot be foretold, and he willingly picked up the reins laid down by Al Baggs. It was a good job somebody did. His assumption of this task only added to a host of others for which he was responsible. As of now, Don Daber was:

Corps Director of the Optimists

Publicity Director of the Corps and the O.D.C.A. (Ontario Drum Corps Association)

Director of the Booster Club

Editor of Green Capsule Comments

The remainder of the staff stayed pretty much the same. Barry Bell and Lorne Ferrazzutti were still on horns and drums, respectively. Often, they both had capable assistance from talented, ambitious members. One of their assets was that they generally knew when and how to use it.

Ivor Bramley now became a full-time drill and guard instructor. The creator of much of that drill was still the undeniably creative Doug McPhail.

The Optimist Club, who formally confirmed these appointments, oversaw all of this. They would not neglect their investment.

As far as the actual marching unit was concerned, there were also alterations. Jim McConkey stayed on as Drum Major for another year, but now to be accompanied by one Glen Durish as an assistant D.M. Andy Henderson, a former rifleman, became the Guard Captain. The previous year, our riflemen had used genuine bayonets attached to their rifles, to give added flash to their performance. These were looked upon with some misgivings, as they were a real weapon and capable of inflicting injury. There had been incidents in which a flag was torn, and one bayonet had flown off a rifle and stuck in the ground at a contest. It could have stuck in a person. These bayonet/rifle combinations would be spun at high speed and flipped in the air to a height of six to eight feet. The people handling them were long-time veterans and good at what they did. In 1963, new people came in and a rash of near accidents that occurred when training led to the bayonets being removed. It was probably for the best.



Don Daber

Phil Hennings, who had been the first Drum Major the Corps ever had was now the Equipment Manager, a post he had held before.

One of the eight bass horn players the Corps had lost due to age, yes, eight out of twelve, was Richard Boehnke. He now became Treasurer/Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, and assistant to the executive. Staying around to help out when one's playing days were over, was a common thing in Drum Corps. Often it was an attempt to prolong one's days in the Corps, staving off the inevitable. It was also an indication of the attachments that developed.

Besides being Assistant Drum Major, Glen Durish was also Social Director of the Corps, which was becoming increasingly a world unto itself. A modern offshoot of this development is the tendency of Corps to play for themselves rather than for the crowd. By this I mean the choice of music. The average Drum Corps crowd is usually possessed of ordinary tastes, neither lowbrow nor highbrow, nor prone to one particular type of music. A policy of choosing a music program that only follows a theme pleasing to those playing it can result in negative reactions. An often heard comment is, “They are very good, but what are they playing?”. It is not always a good idea to lose the common touch.

Other News

The Toronto Senior Corps, the Jesters, mentioned before in connection with rumoured Optimist affiliation, were still largely instructed by Optimist people. Their Assistant Director was one Bill Jay, who went back through the Optimists to the Danforth Crusaders. He was also, along with Fred Johnson, very much responsible for the creation and operation of the Optimist Bantams. Jesters' bugles were taught by Barry Bell and Lorne Ferrazzutti taught their drums. Numerous members of this Corps were ex-Optimists. Their director, at this time, was one Vince Macciocchi, also a bugle judge, later to become Chief Judge of the Canadian Association. The situation that had existed between these two Corps, and led to some rancour due to the number of current of past Optimist people involved, was not entirely unavoidable. Nearly all Senior Corps in Canada actively solicited Junior Corps personnel, sometimes even before their junior playing days were over.



Jesters (Nationals prelims, Waterloo, 1962)

This could take the form of verbal inducement, often accompanied by lavish treatment at parties or rehearsals. If one was accorded this treatment by one Corps and then went to another, the backlash was strong and sometime long-lasting; however, it should not have been, as no one was really obligated to anyone else.

Don Daber again outdid himself in this, his busiest year yet. He produced a Drum Corps Association Directory, the first publication of its kind yet issued. It listed all the Corps in Ontario, their location, directors, instructors, etc., and was very well received all around.

In line with uniform changes of the previous year, new black and white shakos were acquired, to add new lustre to the uniforms. Along with these were to be added, later, new white pearl drums to replace the gold sparkle ones that were currently in use. The white pearl of the drums was designed to match the pearl on the new shakos, creating a more uniform appearance throughout. Many people must have wondered at the use of gold drums in the past. They were the original drums of the Optimist Trumpet Band, gold being an Optimist Club colour. Although the gold did not really fit in with the green, black, and white of the uniform, they were used because that was all there was. The more appropriate colour of the new instruments was somewhat offset by the fact that the old “distinctive” sound of the Optimist drum line was never duplicated. Often drum lines have their own distinctive sound, and that of the Optimist was altered forever when the original drums were discarded.



Toronto Optimists Colour Guard (St. Catharines, 1963)

Too few new shakos had arrived so the guard wore hats borrowed from the Jesters.

Green Capsule Comments, the Corps paper created by Don Daber, was now in the hands of others, who often changed. Its size varied, but it was now always more than double its original size. The content reflected its variety. There were columns at one time or another from Chicago Cavaliers, Garfield Cadets, Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights, and Scout House. Others also contributed, sometimes on a regular basis, sometimes once. Mostly, it was about the Optimists and their capers and was widely read inside the Corps and out. People love reading about themselves. One reason for its almost professional appearance was the fact that Don Daber was a commercial artist and indirectly connected by trade to such projects. His artwork and photography produced much in the way of publicity, not only for us but all Corps, through his connection with the C.D.C.A. It reached the point of familiarity where his work could be recognized without any signature or identification.



Toronto Optimists with their new drums (Salamanca, NY, 1963)

Other winter activities that served to keep members occupied were numerous and varied. Some of them entered an individual contest in Geneva, N.Y., and two people won first place; one in the French horns class and one in the soprano class. These were Ross Cation and Joe Gianna, respectively. Mr. Gianna was an original member, not only of the Optimists but also of the Danforth Crusaders.

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 14. (continued)

On a more sombre plane, Drum Corps, Garfield Cadets especially, mourned the passing of Mr. Charlie Nabors. He had been the Chief Judge of the Eastern Judges Association, mentioned in Chapter 8 in regard to his forty-eight years in Drum Corps. Garfield had reason to remember him as he had played a big part in their victory at the 1957 Nationals.

We had run into him when he presided over the 1959 Preview of Champions contest in New Jersey. His comments had always been constructive and complimentary.

The Corps had managed to fill the gaps in the line and planned to use thirty horns this year. It might be thought that people would flock to join a top Corps, but such was not always the case. Often it was touch and go whether the required number of people would be available. There were still the Bantams to draw from, which was a good source, and sometimes people from other Corps would show up to join. Right now, this was sufficient since thirty horns, a slight increase from the usual twenty-seven, did not stretch resources too much. This year, though, one Corps, St. Josephs of Batavia, would field forty-two bugles, reflecting a trend that would lead to the very large horn lines of today. Modern bugle sections are now much bigger than our entire Corps, back in the “good old days”.

Chicago Cavaliers had, this year, come out with a Corps paper of their own, appropriately called “The Green Machine”. The Optimists had been tagged with the same label, but by others, not themselves. Because of this there was no rancour between the two Corps over this issue.

Among Senior Corps in Canada, the number of Corps that had severed their links with the armed forces reflected a growing trend. To-date, they included the Kitchener-Waterloo Flying Dutchmen, the Hamilton Viscounts, the Marching Ambassadors, the Jesters, and the Guelph Royales. Oddly enough, the one with the most military title, “The Niagara Militaires”, had never been a military unit.

As far as instructing other Corps outside of Optimists, Optimist Bantams, and the Jesters, some of our people travelled extensively to do this. Joe Gianna and Jim McConkey instructed two Corps that required this. One was the Hamilton Optimists, more colourfully known as “The Conqueror”, and the other was the Sarnia “Lionettes”, a girls Corps. The Girls Corps, a separate division in Canada, had elected to keep things that way rather than throw in with the overall Junior “A” class of Corps. This was not necessarily good, as some of them were very capable and would have made their presence felt. The days of totally mixed male and female Drum Corps was still a long way off.



Conqueror, aka Hamilton Optimists (Varsity Stadium, 1962)

There is a question that should be asked, and its answer leads to an interesting observation about the Optimists Drum Corps. What was done with all the trophies that had been won?

Most of them had ended up in someone’s closet, usually a member of the executive, but occasionally that of an ordinary member. Sometimes, some were put on display when there was a party or dinner but they always disappeared afterward,



Sarnia Lionettes

usually back to where they had come from. Many years later, some were stored in a building where a fire broke out. Whether they were rescued or not, they vanished forever. This situation points to the fact that the Optimist Corps never had a permanent base of operation, a Corps “home”, where such things could have been stored. They were not unique in this respect by any means, such luxuries being beyond the means

of many Corps to finance. The spirit never dropped because of this and might have even been enhanced. It certainly adds a sheen to their accomplishments. All practice facilities were obtained through the goodwill of interested parties, or the machinations of people connected with the Corps. If one facility became unavailable, it was never long before another was acquired. It would have been nice to have had a place to store all those trophies, there were a lot, and to have a sort of headquarters. Although some places, i.e. Jarvis Vocational School, were used for years, these locations were always tentative; therefore, the Corps led a transient existence, the members going where it went. The Corps spirit that existed was the glue that held it together.

Out at Oak Park School in East York, the Bantam Optimists, the feeder Corps, was still a flourishing enterprise. Still instructed by members of the Junior Corps itself, it was good enough to perform parades, shows, and concerts of its own. The younger lads in this band were kept busy with these affairs, often travelling out of town to perform their routines. Although several people were involved in its operation, and these often subject to change, the unit remained under the overall direction of Mr. Fred Johnson. Under his careful management,



Fred Johnson, co-founder and Director, with his Bantams

the original purpose of the band was maintained, and that was to produce talent for the Optimist Corps itself. He never attempted to promote its independence, which, had it come about, would have altered its original concept.

Springtime rolled around, and with its advent came the first shows, concerts, and other affairs. For those in Drum Corps, the milder days, budding trees, and chirping, cheerful birds, served only to waken the tingling sensation caused by the proximity of a new season. It was what had kept one going during the long, cold winter, when everything was worked out. Springtime heralded the completion of preparations for another turn at the merry-go-round that was the wonderful world of Drum Corps. It was a fact that people in Drum Corps were



Spring drill rehearsal at the Shell Tower (CNE, Toronto)

different in outlook from most others. Those who were in the Corps, never envied those whose pleasure lay in work or school, cottage or car, house or hotel. In fact, the Corps was, for many, an escape from these things, and the sometime mundane existence that they represented. Often, even during summer holidays, from work or school, people would not travel very far away, in order not to miss Corps practice.

It is appropriate here that we jump ahead a little in time, in order to deal with an issue that arose. It was Sept.–Oct., 1963, to be exact, and

the subject was the 1962 Optimists. The vehicle of discussion was a periodical similar to our Green Capsule Comments, but with a different format. It was put out by De La Salle and called “The Corpsman”.

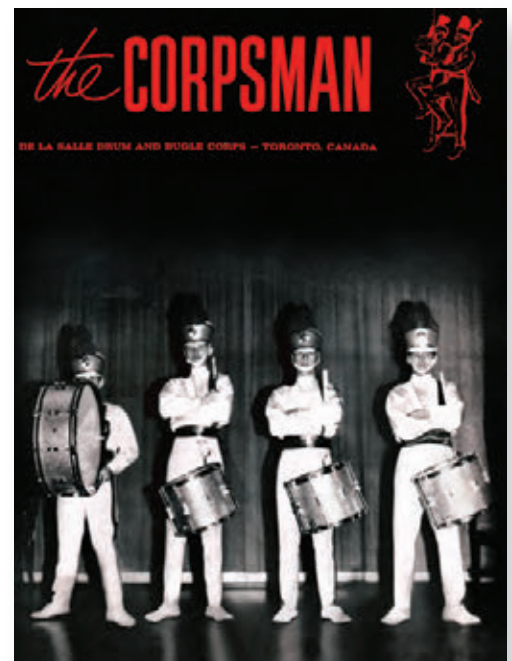
An article by a noted member of that Corps dealt with the fact that Canada had yet to produce a “great Corps”. It went on to say that small thinking led to mediocrity, but that our Corps, the 1962 version of the Toronto Optimists, had risen above this. Considering the source, this was high praise indeed. The article, well thought out and written, praised the 1962 Corps and its accomplishments, and then criticized the Optimists in general for subsequently not maintaining the same standards. In Canada, the Drum Corps infrastructure that existed then was not really conducive to the production and continuity of “great” Corps. As previously explained,

it was the combination of a rare set of circumstances that made the 1962 Corps what it was. These conditions were not always readily apparent, and it was ever necessary to adapt to altered circumstances and bend with the breeze.

The Optimists of 1963, a willing, enthusiastic and Optimistic bunch, were ready to take the field, hoping to emulate the successes of 1962.

So let’s pack our bags, park the car, wish the others goodbye, and hit the road with the Optimists and see how they made out in 1963.

And away we go!



Cover of Del's publication “The Corpsman”

The Aurora / Newmarket Ambassadors

THE AMBASSADORS Drum and Bugle Corps was formed in September, 1973, in Aurora, Ontario, as a junior parade corps by Paul Ranson and his wife Bev. Initially, the corps was sponsored by the Aurora Kiwanis Club. When Paul retired in 1981 Bob Middleton became corps director. Middleton was, at that time, the president of the Newmarket Lions, who took over sponsorship of the Ambassadors.

The corps was open to everyone, drawing members from Aurora, Newmarket and Bradford mostly, with those lacking formal training being trained from scratch. The original uniform was made up of a white cowboy hat, white shirt, neckerchief, black pants or skirts and gold cummerbunds. Later they changed to royal blue shirts, crossed with white, black pants and white headgear.

By 1985, they began to experience a large turnover of corps members, only competing in two contests, including the Canadian Nationals. In 1986, reduced numbers and growing expenses facilitated



Ambassadors (1978)

an amalgamation with the Oakland Crusaders to create “Out of the Blue”. By 1987, the Ambassadors are inactive and, in 1988, their bugles were loaned to the Dutch Boy Cadets Corps, effectively signalling the end of the Ambassadors Drum and Bugle Corps.



Ambassadors (1978)

Spotlight on the Aurora / Newmarket Ambassadors (continued)



Ambassadors (1977)



Ambassadors (1977)



Ambassadors (Simcoe, 1978)



Ambassadors (1978)



Ambassadors (1978)

Mike Thys Discovers Drum Corps

By Mike Thys

DRUM CORPS played a major role in my life from the time it was introduced to me in late 1957 while in grade seven. Jack Eli, a Dutch immigrant a year or two older than me, who with his family lived a few houses away from us on Toronto's Ford Street, marched in the colour guard of a drum and bugle corps. Early one evening he convinced me to accompany him down to a rehearsal of the corps, which was sponsored by The Knights of Columbus. The location, the Boy's Club on Bellwoods Avenue, had various games, activities, and equipment including a boxing ring available on the ground floor, but the best part of

the facility was the large open area on the second floor. As Jack led me up the stairs, I could first hear and then see the corps marching around the perimeter of the room in parade formation while the drums pounded out the rhythm and the brass belted out the tunes. I was immediately smitten and captivated, and I joined on the spot. I was quickly given a very unusual instrument, something I had never seen before – a glockenspiel, and the next thing I knew I was learning to tap out the tunes in a section rehearsal.

The four members of our section were assigned a rehearsal spot in the alleyway behind the clubhouse. This kept our clinking, clanking, and chiming well away from the drum and the horn sections trying to learn their parts. The one great advantage for the four of us was that there was a bakery in the building on the other side of the alleyway. Our olfactory senses would tell us when a new batch of French Sticks or similar loaves were being taken out of the ovens. We would knock on the back door



Knights of Columbus Boy's Band (about 1960)

Recollections: Mike Thys Discovers Drum Corps (continued)

of the bakery and buy a hot loaf to share for a few cents. Delicious!

We did many church parades and some competitions where we would compete against other corps in our class. Many parishes and service clubs at that time

recognized that sponsoring these groups was of great benefit to the community's youth. The Knights did not stint on their sponsorship. Our uniforms consisted of navy blue cadet style jackets with a red sash and cummerbund, navy pants with red stripe, and for the hot weather the jacket was replaced with a red silk blouse sporting a white diagonal stripe and a cummerbund. The instruments were all of good quality. All we had to supply was black boots.

We competed in the parade division of our Junior B class at my first Canadian National competition in 1958. Later that day I saw the Toronto Optimists win their first Junior A National title. This was the first time I had seen a Junior A corps competition, and while I was impressed with Preston Scout House, especially since they had a glockenspiel



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Galt, 1958)

section, it was the Optimists who knocked my socks off. The precision and snap of their drill was astounding to me, and their music seemed to my neophyte ears to be of professional quality. The sound

and the power had me mesmerized. I decided then and there that this would be the corps that I would join as soon as I was a little older.

In 1961 I joined the Optimists and for seven years helped to continue winning the National title until aging out after turning twenty-one. After my first year in Columbus, I had been given another unusual instrument – a French Horn bugle, with its odd mouthpiece, bell, and sound. I played various versions of this horn for a total of nine years. I credit my time in the corps for giving me a purpose and a sense of accomplishment during my formative years, and for helping me to navigate my teen years while striving to continually improve in the company of my corps mates. I knew it then and I still believe it now.



(Mike is the 3rd horn from the left) Toronto Optimists (Falconer, 1962)

MY UNFORGETTABLE FIRST DRILL REHEARSAL

By Mike Thys

WHEN I JOINED a small drum corps in Toronto in the fall of 1957, the director was an ex-army man. To us young teens and preteens he was an older man (maybe in his mid to late forties) who could regale us with some army stories and could teach some slightly ribald army songs to the older kids. Of course, they then taught them to us younger kids.

In the early spring of 1960, a decision was made to move up from being mainly a Junior B parade corps. We would begin the journey by learning a field drill so we could compete on the field as a Junior B marching and manoeuvring corps. Our first outdoor rehearsal to start us on this quest was to take place at a nearby park where there was a suitable field available. We marched over to this park since it was very close to the corps' home base. This was very convenient, except that to reach the field we would have to get down a very steep and high hill. Our horde of about 45 kids rumbled downhill with arms flailing, and horns, drums, and flagpoles bouncing and banging against our legs. When we had all arrived at the field more or less intact, we looked back up the hill to see our esteemed corps director still standing at the top of the hill, clearly contemplating his method of attack on this obstacle.

Our director did like his drink. He liked it well enough to live in a rented room very conveniently located one floor

above a local tavern. This may have had some adverse effects on his physique since his body shape somewhat resembled an egg with arms and legs.

We could see him standing at the top of the hill, contemplating the problem, making a decision, taking a big breath, and then starting his descent. It took only a few steps for his upper body to outpace his lower body, and he became a human cannon ball rolling down the hill with increasing velocity. After crushing and crashing through various shrubbery on the way down he rolled out to a stop on the flat field. He popped up onto his short but sturdy legs and walked back to pick up his porkpie hat that had stayed with him until almost the very end. While replacing the hat onto his head he turned to our group of youngsters who still stood frozen in awe, wide-eyed with our mouths agape, and calmly issued the first instructions that started us on our journey to learning a field drill. We were on our way!



Mike Thys (1965)



Toronto Optimists drill rehearsal (1964)

The 2022 Buglers' Hall of Fame Induction

By Douglas MacKenzie

I WROTE THIS not knowing what to expect at the 2022 induction of the members to the Buglers Hall of Fame. Always better to be prepared than caught unaware. This night was for the inductees of 2022; those of us from 2021 were sidelined by COVID 19.

Funny, it's Thursday night; I've just come back from tonight's men's only thirsty Thursday at the bar in my condo. As I write, a few scotches have been consumed. We have great camaraderie in my building of wealthy, professional septuagenarians, and our primary relationship is that we have all done well in our vocations.

When I get back to my suite, I go to my emails and see Billy Hightower, Dave Hill, and Keith Griffin, and as I write this, Brad DeWall are corresponding about the Buglers Hall of Fame this weekend in Batavia.

So what's your point, Mack? The point is that my buddies in the condominium have no clue what we, you and I went through in drum corps, and I can't articulate what that was about to them. They wouldn't get it. They know through my wife that I played the bugle, and I'm in some sort of hall of fame, and I see them roll their eyes with thoughts of Sam Jaffe as Gunga Din.

Regardless of how competitive you were or what position you played, Drum and Bugle Corps is one of the most extraordinary of life's adventures you could go through short of camaraderie out of war.

Most of us started very young through service clubs, legions or CYO. Those were the good old days; we are all the better for it and lucky to have been part of it.

The competition was fierce and often bad blood resulted. That is called passion, and that



Doug MacKenzie (East York, 1967)

was then; this is now.

We had a song in the Optimists that had the lyrics we've beaten Sac and Garfield and Mighty St. Joes! That wasn't bravado; that was respect. Boy, were they great! I'll add Chicago Cavaliers, Chicago Royal Airs, Kilties, CMCC, Boston Crusaders, Blue Rock, De La Salle and La Salle Cadets, to name but a few.

Here we sit tonight, old adversaries and, in many cases looking back and at the time, if not admitted, in awe of the accomplishments of our competitors.

Hard to explain the music we made with a crook, slide, valve and rotor, legs lifted waist-high, company fronts and three-man squads. The game has changed.

We are the Buglers of The Buglers Hall of Fame.

But how did that happen? For most of us, it came about through attrition and dedication.

Some of us just hung around long enough to see our mentors move on to senior corps, instruct, or fade away.

But if the truth is to be known. Not one of us became members of the Buglers Hall of Fame without the contribution of those who backed us up. The line players. *(continued next page)*

Doug MacKenzie: Buglers Hall of Fame Weekend (continued)

So, is there anyone here this evening who could or would have had the opportunity of standing in front of crowds ranging from 500 to 30,000 cheering fans without the second, third soprano, French horn, baritone, or contrabass? Excuse me, tuba? Cymbal player or colour guard? Not to forget our brothers in the drum line “who won every contest for us” that we ever entered. There’s EGO!

The answer is it always was and always will be a collective made up of the least talented and most talented as a drum and bugle corps, regardless of the instrumentation or position, acting as a single unit.

Drum and Bugle Corps cannot be truer than Alexandre Dumas’s Three Musketeers, One for All, All for One. That applies to Drum Corps more so than any other endeavour where personalities of various backgrounds get together for a common competitive goal.

I’m honoured to be a member of this illustrious group. I thank those who performed with me, including my long-time friend Mike Thys, French horn player for Optimists, who is with me tonight, who, along with many others over the years, made me look (sound) better than perhaps I was.

THANKS TO MY lifelong friend Gord Lefevre for contacting Wayne Dillon, who put me forward to the committee for the BHoF. As a young teenager, Wayne sat in the back seat of my car on the way to practice when I was the Director in the final year of the Toronto Optimists. Wayne would become a featured soloist with the 1975 Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Optimists. Wayne became a respected music educator and judge in marching bands and DCI and continues to be a fine musician and person.

Thank you all; I’m honoured.



Doug MacKenzie (left) plays a solo with some line players in the foreground (Sarnia, 1965)

The Last Time

By Doug McPhail

(Reprinted from the Nov/Dec 1963 issue of Green Capsule Comments)

(Editor's note: This article was written by Doug as a tribute to Joe Gianna. Joe, the last of the original Toronto Optimists, aged-out in 1963. His last contest was at the Grape Festival in St Catharine's, Ontario)

THE HEAT OF THE SEASON, the trips and the big shows had passed and the Grape Festival was as cold as usual. Besides the cold, the wind blew in October amid the confusion that follows and surrounds the last contest of the year.

For too many, it was your last show with the Corps, your last show. But there wasn't any sentiment to speak of; not yet. No remorse, no sighs, no drama; just Optimists and their casual indifference that preceded "another show". There was the normal amount of crabbing and whining, not about anything in particular, just something to crab and whine about. There was no regret. You were Optimists and the time for remembering wasn't even in sight yet.

It was cold on the line, but you'll remember it only as good. Time, besides aging, mellows the past, and the nagging instructors, the tired lips, stiff wrists and sore feet on a hot drill field will have been worth it. You'll remember crab-apple fights, grape fights, water fights or just plain fights. Everybody fought because



Doug McPhail (1961)



Joe Gianna playing a solo (1963)

The Last Time: Reprinted from the Nov / Dec 1963 GCC (continued)

they liked to win, and winning is better when you fight for it. Maybe you'll remember contests and the winning; or maybe card games and the losing. Or perhaps you'll remember a girl. But you will remember the Corps. It was good then. You were in it.

By now you were coming out of concert. The grass moved deftly under you. Your feet turned, stepped out and pivoted with the thoughtless instinct of confidence. With a mean snap of intent the horns came down, a roll-off and just as meanly the horns came up... "I Believe".

I believe it's good to be a part of something that's worth while; and something that strains for your best is worth the while.

Rear march: Horns up!! "The Party's Over."

Yes, now the party was over. "Take off the make-up, all games must end. The Party's over, my friend." Your eye's were watering a bit then, Joe. The wind was cold and mean. Seven years is a long time.

On to retreat, off with the trophy and into the box went the plumes.

WHEN YOU HUNG UP your blouse you pulled the sleeve down so it wouldn't get creased and you smoothed down the shoulders almost with a little reluctant affection. But that'd silly; imagine getting sentimental over a piece of cloth. A little piece of green cloth; green satin cloth; a smooth green satin cloth that shimmered with pride beneath the lights and heard the cheers that made it strong. You mused at their missing it; it'd be nice to keep.

But they'd miss it. They'll give it to some new guy who's greener than the pinnacles of his optimistic aspirations and who'll end up beating the corps that made you leave the field muttering... "Next time...!"



Toronto Optimists El Cid Trio: Jeff Shimotakahara, Joe Gianna and Jack Roberts (Nationals prelims, Waterloo, 1963)

Along with your years of work, your uniform was packed away.

The stands were empty and the wind pushed bits of paper across the field. The bus was revving up and the guys were waiting.

They had grapes.

Note: Joe is still playing a horn! He has been with the Optimists Alumni since its inception.

Randy Cochrane

April 18, 2022

Corps: Toronto Optimists



Rita and Randy (Coldwater, 2006)

A message from Randy's wife, Rita:

It is with a heavy heart that I share that my beloved husband of 46 years, Randy Cochrane, passed away early Monday morning after complications following surgery. Randy and I were blessed to spend so many years together and grow our amazing family, including our two sons (Jason & Trevor), daughter (Jamie), daughter-in-law (Emily) and three grandchildren (Benjamin, Bryce, and Nora).

Randy and I met when I was in Optimist Lancers (and later Etobicoke Crusaders) and he was a member of the Toronto Optimists, where we ultimately made many incredible memories and lifelong friendships. Randy shared his stories and deep love of the activity with his whole family. All three of his children, and many nieces and nephews, became members of Kiwanis Kavaliers, Rochester Patriots, Crossmen, and the Emerald Knights, where Randy volunteered his time over many weekends and

during competitions. It was clear to all who knew him how grateful he was to have known so many of you.

We know Randy has touched many lives and will be deeply missed. We will continue to celebrate and honour him for the incredible man he was; a loving husband, father, grandfather, brother, uncle, cousin, and of course, friend.

We will host a celebration of life in the coming weeks and will share details once available.

In lieu of flowers, we ask for donations in Randy's honour to SickKids. Warmly, Rita (and family)

Here are a few comments from some who knew Randy:

"As a rookie in the Optimist Randy was everything a role model could be. With greatest respect and admiration he will be missed." (Séan Williams)

"I met Randy in 1969 during my corps years & remember him as great individual with a big heart!" (Dwight Angus)

"Randy was a great guy, dedicated, giving, just an all round wonderful person! I will cherish all of my memories of our time together." (Jim Kane)

(continued next page)

WE REMEMBER

“I had the great fortune to march with the two of you in the Toronto Optimists and I recall both of you being just wonderful people.” (Richard Martin Bruton)

“I loved my time in Opti with Randy. He was the hardest working drummer and had a great sense of humor to boot.” (George Kopetski)

“When I took over the corps in the fall of 74, Randy was a well-respected member. I recall relying on Randy and other stalwarts at the time that influenced some of the decisions I made. Randy was very dedicated and mature as an individual; he made the Toronto Optimists better for his being there.” (Doug MacKenzie)

“Randy was the ideal of what it meant to be an Optimist member, gentleman, brother and friend.” (Brian Hogan)

“I had aged-out before Randy joined the Optimists but we connected when I took over the Optimists Alumni website. Randy sent me numerous photos and identified many corps members who came after me. His support and encouragement meant a lot to me and I learned what a wonderful person he was!” (Bob Carell)



Toronto Optimists tymps, Doug Harrison, John Baye, Randy Cochran and Ray Skyvington (Wearing of the Green, 1971)

Jan Burgess

December 26, 1957 - May 5, 2022

Corps: Optimists Alumni



Jan, her husband Dave, their son James and their daughter KT were all regulars at Optimist Alumni rehearsals and performances. It was a family affair! Dave was one of the corps' drum majors, James played bass drum, Jan was a support person and, together with KT, brightened up corps rehearsals.

Jan was not just a friendly face, she was always there to help out – in any way that she could. At times she would work at our booster table while, at other times, she would take photos of performances. You name it and Jan would take it on!

Jan was a real gem of a person and will be missed by all those who knew her.



Frans Rood, Jan Burgess, Clare Reid and David Johns (Waterloo, 2007)

The Booster Table

Jan was such a treat to know and work with. She had such enthusiasm and a gazillion ideas to help promote the Alumni Corps. We would sit over coffee while the corps rehearsed and develop strategies and implementation.

And she was always there, at the booster table or wherever corps memorabilia could be offered. Jan supplied the ideas and I did the graphics. It was exhausting for us both, and very rewarding.

I miss her saying "Hey... let's try this".
(David Johns)

Marilyn Sturino

December 29, 1957 - May 18, 2022

Corps: Etobicoke Crusaders, Toronto Signals, Optimists Alumni



Marilyn with John Parkinson (Highland Creek, 2015)

Marilyn was Drum Major for the Toronto Signals Band and had a long time family connection to drum corps. Her father, John Longstreet, had marched with the Western Tech Trumpet Band and was once the drum major of Toronto Signals Band while her grandfather was one of the founders of Second Signals. As a result, Marilyn's primary connection was with Sigs.

In her younger years Marilyn marched with the Etobicoke Crusaders. Later, she marched with the Optimist Alumni when they were still performing field shows. Usually she was part of the Honour Guard; however, she also played cymbals.

Marilyn was a kind, friendly, caring person who was filled with life. She brought that joy of life with her, everywhere she went.



Marilyn leading Second Signals (Woodstock, 2012)



Toronto Optimists (Allegheny County Fair, Pittsburgh, 1963)

Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter: Staff and contributors

Editor: Bob Carell. **Assistant editor, design and production:** David Johns.

Photo Credits: David Johns, Don Daber, Eric McConachie, Doug Smith, Keith Rattray, the Collard Collection, Peter McCusker.

Contributions From: Mike Thys, Doug MacKenzie

HOW TO REACH US

CORRECTIONS: We tried to get everything right. If not, please let us know:
toronto_optimist@rogers.com

Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter is published quarterly.

Please submit your material to Bob Carell at: Toronto_Optimist@rogers.com in one of the following formats:

E-mail. A Microsoft Word document, saved as “Rich Text Format” or “text only”.

Or mail: Bob Carell:
1407 - 3050 Dufferin St, Toronto, ON M6B 4G3

E-Photos should be sent to:
Toronto_Optimist@rogers.com

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.