



# 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](mailto:Toronto_Optimist@rogers.com)  
A PDF version is available on the website: [www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca](http://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca)

**H** EY! 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 nature of life is change 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: win their third consecutive Nationals and improve the corps standing in the USA.

This issue includes Chapter 7 and 8 of Colin's History of the Optimists. These chapters focus on some of the changes and experiments that occurred during the winter of 1959/60 as well as the 1960 season. In 1960 Don Daber discovered drum corps and this discovery had a positive impact, not only on the Toronto Optimists but on the drum corps activity in both Canada and the United States.

In this issue we have included a special feature, an article about the Preston Scout House Band. Scout House was a truly unique corps that played a very important role in Canadian drum corps history. We hope you will find the article to be both interesting and informative.



Bernie Beer inspecting the Toronto Optimists. (CNE, Toronto, 1960)

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# Contribute to your newsletter

Send your suggestions, stories or articles to Bob: [toronto\\_optimist@rogers.com](mailto:toronto_optimist@rogers.com) or David: [openrd2002@yahoo.ca](mailto: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.

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**WELCOME TO THE INAUGURAL ISSUE**

Don Daber launched the Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter in 1960, and since then they have been connected. David Johns and I decided to continue the Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter.

**WELCOME TO THE SECOND ISSUE**

Our first issue was very well received and all of you will continue to enjoy learning the history of the Toronto Optimists. In this edition we are publishing Chapter 3 of Opti-Corps and the Danforth Crusaders to create a new corps, The Toronto Optimists. The focus of Chapter four is on The Optimists first year in competition. This issue also contains some memories of 1957 and 1958 that were submitted by Phil Hennings. As an added feature we are reprinting an article by Colin Hedworth about the Optimists' drum line. The article, which covers the years 1957 through 1962, was originally published in a 1962 issue of GCC (Volume 2, #6).

Don Daber and Rick Cooper in the clubroom.

History website. The primary purpose of the Toronto Optimists History website is to maintain that objective and will help you learn about our history if you don't have a copy of the book.

LOOK FOR A PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: [www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca](http://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca)

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**THIS IS THE THIRD ISSUE**

The Toronto Optimists History Newsletter is very positive and everyone who competes in the Toronto Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps competition. Everyone, not just the Optimists could hold the title? Since all of this is an answer, however, you might find this issue includes Chapter 4. These chapters focus on the second year in competition.

Phil Hennings, Drum Major (1956)

LOOK FOR A PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: [www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca](http://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca)

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Bernie Beer inspecting the Toronto Optimists. (CNE, Toronto, 1960)

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**TORONTO OPTIMISTS... THE OPTIMISTS!**

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

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

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

PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: [www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca](http://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca)

Above are the front covers of the four 2021 newsletters.

**Editors note:** Very few readers have submitted answers to our contests *We Got Around* and *Website Trivia*. As a result, we decided to remove the contests to reduce our workload.



# Website UPDATE: What's happening with TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

Additions to both the **main website** and the **Photo Gallery** continue to be made. New photos are added to the gallery about once a week.

**T**HE BIGGEST addition to the website since the last newsletter is a slideshow featuring the 1964 Toronto Optimists. The video actually resides on YouTube but the website contains links to the video. This “slideshow” is a bit different from others that I have created in that it also contains snippets of video footage of the 1964 Toronto Optimists.

The video was recorded at the prelims to the 1964 Nationals (held at Varsity Stadium). Unfortunately, the quality of the original video is not the greatest. I would appreciate any feedback - positive or negative - about my attempt to integrate video footage with still photos.



*Title graphic for the 1964 video*



**Mike Thys has been working on two projects:** compiling lists of members for each year and identifying corps members in group photos. I am using this information to create two-page acrobat files which contain a group photo and member names on the first page plus a list of corps members by section on the second page.

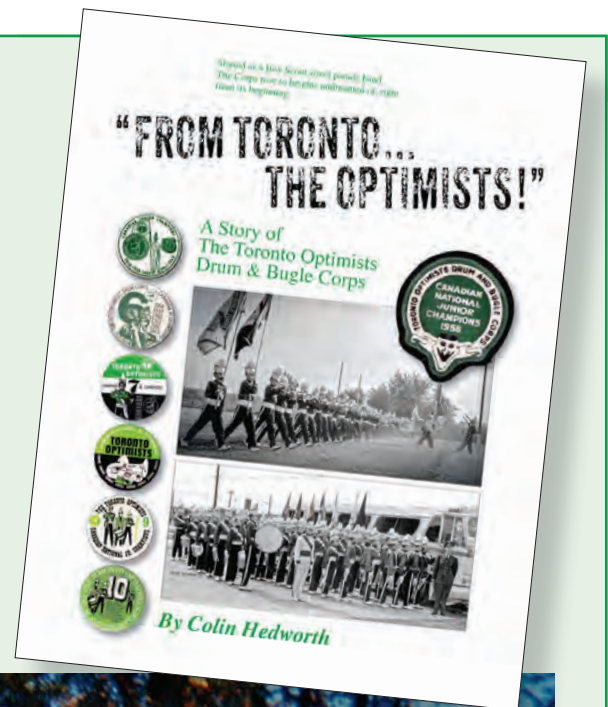
Thanks to Mike the website now contains files for 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964 and 1965.

## In our next newsletter: Chapters 9 and 10 (Hangin' In There and 1961 - The Challenge)

The next issue of the Newsletter (October) will include Chapters 9 and 10 from Colin Hedworth's book "From Toronto... The Optimists!".

**In these chapters** Colin discusses the loss of many members after the 1960 season and the impact of those losses. Optimists were now the "top dog" and other corps were nipping at our heels, hoping to become the new leader of the pack. One of those corps was De La Salle.

In 1961, for the very first time, Del beat The Optimists. Not once, but 3 times!.



Toronto Optimists (St Catharines, Grape Festival, 1961)

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

# Preston Scout House Band

by Roy Wilson (president, board of directors, Preston Scout House Band Inc.)

THE BAND of the 1st Preston Boy Scout Troop started activities in the late 1930s, grew to become one of North America's most popular drum and bugle corps by the mid 1950s, disbanded in 1967, then returned in 1999 and again became one of the most popular units in North America, this time as an alumni band including members who originally marched in the late 1940s and through the '50s and '60s.

The first practice session was held on October 5, 1938. Local industrialist P. R. Hilborn had donated \$250 to help with the purchase of ten bugles, two side drums and a bass drum. Boy Scouts of Canada officials in Ottawa gave permission to the Preston scouting district to organize a bugle band. The band's first performance took place in June, 1939 in Preston's Riverside Park.

With no church affiliation, the 1<sup>st</sup> Preston Troop adopted a rundown old stable near the Grand River as its home. Wilf Blum organized a citizens committee to help Scouts restore the building, which became known as Scout House. The building became the entertainment and cultural centre for the entire community, with Saturday night Teen Canteen dances and other events serving as wholesome activities for local teenagers.

In the spring of 1939, Scout House Bugle Band practiced outdoors almost every night in preparation for the first public performance. On June 11, the Scout House Band of 20 buglers, four side drummers and a bass drummer led Preston's Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Cubs and Brownies to Riverside Park for an outdoor church service.



Both music and marching were ragged, but everyone in town was excited with this innovative new activity for local boys.

During World War II, Scout House took part in many events supporting Canada's war effort. The Band marched an average of 40 parades annually.



Scout House Band escorting WRENS

## FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)

Band members were tested regularly and made to play alone in front of the entire band. The distinctive knees-up marching style with arms swinging to shoulder height was developed during weekly church parades. Every Sunday for three years, Scout House escorted 600 WRENS (members of the Women's Royal Naval Service) on a ceremonial march moving at 96 beats per minute. The Band wore traditional Boy Scout uniforms, switching to Sea Scout uniforms with bellbottom trousers for winter engagements.

Throughout the War years, Band activity remained focused on the local community. When the Band performed outside Preston, up to 45 members traveled on the back of a Cherry Mills Flour truck, often arriving at the parade site with a light dusting of flour on their uniforms.

The Band's first international tour began on July 29, 1947 when 45 members climbed aboard a big green highway bus to start a 1,400-mile tour including performances in Buffalo, Syracuse and Boy Scout Camp Yawgoog in Rockville, Rhode Island.



*Scouts receiving merit badges (1947)*

A new musical era began shortly after World War II ended. Bands began switching to the new single-valve piston bugles that made playing much easier and allowed more complex arrangements. In 1947, the Canadian Bugle and Trumpet Band Association (renamed the Canadian Drum Corps Association in 1961) was developing rules for Fancy Drill contests which allowed bands ten minutes to play and perform marching routines

The premier Fancy Drill contests were at the Royal City Tattoo in Guelph and the Waterloo Music Festival, held on the last Saturday in June and widely considered to be the national championship contest in Canada. In its first appearance in the Waterloo Music Festival in 1948, Scout House won five major awards, including prizes in the senior category, competing against 47 units from across Ontario.

In 1949, Scout House drummers acquired new rod-tension mother of pearl white drums, two pairs of cymbals and two glockenspiels. The drums had no leg rests and the rod holders dug into the drummers' thighs so they often marched with blood running down their legs. In front of more than 20,000 spectators, Scout House marched home from Waterloo as national champions, winning five major awards in six competitions, including two first place prizes, one second place finish and two thirds, again in competition with senior units.

In 1950, Scout House again won top prize playing the junior category test piece titled Mountbatten. It was the most difficult piece the band had ever attempted, written for three valve trumpets and considered by most musicians of the day too difficult to even attempt on straight bugles.

The usual hectic summer schedule took the Band on a whirlwind 76 hour, 800 mile tour of Ohio, performing for audiences totaling 100,000 at the dedication of Cleveland's new \$5 million Union Station, in Port Clinton and at a Cleveland Indians baseball game in Municipal Stadium.

## FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)

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Scout House prepared for appearances in 1951 by practicing on the new chrome plated B flat piston bugles purchased with money donated by area citizens.

Scout House was moving into new territory in 1951, musically and geographically. Music director Harold “Duffy” Duffield taught members the correct technique for playing the new horns. He wrote two original compositions in three-part harmony to honor the people of two communities where Scout House was immensely popular: Port Clinton, Ohio and the French-speaking community of Shawinigan, Quebec.

The debut performance with the new horns in Shawinigan was an outstanding success. The Boy Scout Association in Montreal arranged for Scout House to perform on the way home from Shawinigan. Ten thousand people jammed downtown Dominion Square for the performance.

Before the largest crowd in the history of the Waterloo Music Festival, Scout House swept up

two Canadian championships, fancy drill and best marching band, for the third year in a row.

As the 1952 performance season approached, invitations to appear in special events flowed in to Preston from across Canada and the United States. Ongoing financial problems were eliminated with a wildly successful innovation: an early season indoor arena show to provide operating funds through gate receipts. The first Spring Show in Hespeler Arena put Scout House back in the black, including an extra \$500 from town council in recognition of the publicity the town would receive during the Band’s 25 out of town appearances during the year.

At the 20<sup>th</sup> annual Waterloo Music Festival, Scout House finished first in the fancy drill and street parade categories for the fourth year in a row. No other band in the history of the Festival had ever won a title four years consecutively: Scout House had now won two titles four years running.

Later in the year, music director Harold Duffield gave up his position because of career



*Preston Scout House Band in their new uniforms and Paul Bauer’s first time as solo Drum Major (May 30, 1954, Preston)*

responsibilities. His replacements were Gene Seymour, a drummer with the much admired Second Signals of Toronto, and trumpet virtuoso Ted Denver, who introduced five part harmony and began teaching members how to read music. For 1953 events the Band's sound was enhanced by four tenor drums that Gene Seymour added to the drum line.

Enormous changes took place at the end of the 1953, with Scout House Band preparing to burst into the golden age of drum and bugle corps activity in North America with startling innovations that set the activity on its ear for years to come.

Years of friction between the 1st Preston Scout Troop and provincial and regional Boy Scouts of Canada officials finally ignited a blaze that consumed the Band's ties with the scout movement. The provincial association refused to renew the troop's charter, originally granted to Wilf Blum in 1929. The endless disputes over uniforms, Band

publicity, tour schedules, innovative scout activities and some personality conflicts were finally resolved. Scout House Bugle Band would continue but there would no longer be any connection with Boy Scouts of Canada.

Free from Boy Scout Association restrictions, the Band's standard Boy Scout uniform pants became tight black shorts, worn with a wide black belt with silver buckle. The Boy Scout shirt became a red short-sleeved pullover shirt with matching dickie. Red and black were considered the town of Preston's official colors. The Boy Scout neckerchief became a plain white cord. White gauntlets were added to the uniform along with red knee-length socks and shiny black slip-on shoes.

The crowning touch was the Australian-style hat, with the left side turned up and pinned to the crown with a silver maple leaf badge and white plume.

Six weeks before the debut of the "new" Scout House, the demand for tickets for the 1954 Spring Show overwhelmed the organization. Orders for as many as 40 tickets in a block flooded in from communities across southern Ontario. On May 17, 1954 a capacity crowd at Galt Arena buzzed with excitement as they waited, house lights dimmed. The Band's show that night included march music by the entire Band, drum solos, glockenspiel features, drill routines at four different tempos and the introduction of Wooden Soldiers, featuring the rocking-horse choreography that drove audiences wild with enthusiasm in following performances.

At the 1954 Waterloo Music Festival Scout House finally topped the open class competition. Scout House had finally accomplished the grand slam: the first band ever to win four titles at the Waterloo Music Festival. The titles included junior trumpet band championship, street parade and fancy drill championships and open class championship. By the time the year's activities wound up, the Band had traveled 12,000 miles to entertain almost a quarter of a million people.



**CANADA'S FAMOUS SCOUT HOUSE BAND  
CANADIAN JUNIOR CHAMPIONS 1954**

*Preston Scout House Band on the cover of Drum Corps World (March, 1955)*



## FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)

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Competing against 72 bands at the 1955 Waterloo Music Festival, Scout House repeated its sweep of all four titles again winning the junior trumpet band, junior street parade, fancy drill and open class championships. Scout House continued to push into new areas, announcing the introduction of bass baritone horns to further enhance the sound of the brass section. Despite the generally sunny outlook for the future, the first tiny black cloud appeared on the far horizon in the form of a judge's comment during the 1955 Waterloo festival.

“Keep away from the American style of band and the music they play,” he warned.

Earnings from performances in 1955 ran so high that all the Band's outstanding debts were paid, including the cost of the new uniforms. The Town of Preston was so proud of Scout House that each member received a wristwatch during a civic tribute dinner.

But a major administrative storm was rolling closer to Preston. The CBTBA introduced a new



*Scout House (1958)*

rule that made a major impact on Scout House. The Association did away with the open class and separate music classes that had long been the standard for judging at the Waterloo Music Festival. Now, groups would register for competition as either junior or senior organizations and be judged on marching, music and general effect during a single 15-minute performance. The change was hotly debated in the marching music community and was widely perceived to be a political move to end Scout House's monopoly on major prizes. Also, the age limit for junior members was increased to 21, as it was south of the border. The higher age limit allowed several Toronto-based units to compete in the junior category.

Wilf Blum used the fourth annual Spring Show at Kitchener Memorial Auditorium on May 30, 1956 as a forum for innovation under the new rules governing field shows. It was the start of a new era: Scout House as a drum and bugle corps: new music, a new field show concept and new E flat bass baritone horns ranging half an octave lower than the other baritones.

The field show opened with Waterloo Fanfare. The standstill concert number was Rhapsody in Blue, one of the first examples of a drum and bugle corps playing classical music. Wooden Soldiers, with the Band members rocking back and forth like wind up toys led into Wish Me Luck as Scout House headed to the finish line, turned to face the audience, kneeled, and waved goodbye to the people in the stands.

The Band's growing international reputation led to appearances in such high profile contests across the border as the Cavalcade of Champions in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania; Tournament of Drums in Rochester, New York and Drums on Parade in Madison, Wisconsin by invitation of Madison Scouts.

Because Scout House traveled so widely, it was impossible to develop a field show that would meet

## FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)

all regional judging standards: regional associations and contest circuits modified timing and other rules so that standards could not be applied uniformly over a wide area. Despite concerns, Scout House entered the 1957 contest season with confidence in the ability to compete at a high level.

People across the continent were infatuated with Scout House. So much fan mail poured into Scout House with requests for information the Band and the Chamber of Commerce ran out of promotional material. People from across Canada and the United States telephoned the Chamber of Commerce office to request the Band's performance schedule, so they could plan vacation routes to follow the Band.

In September, Scout House won the Canadian junior championship contest in the morning by six full points, with a score of 89. The Band marched in the evening parade to the stadium, appeared in exhibition during the senior championship contest then members jumped into cars for an overnight trip to New Jersey and an exhibition performance at the Dream Contest. The response of more than 26,000 in the audience was so tumultuous, contest officials allowed Scout House extra time to perform their

Canadian championship routine a second time on the field.

The year represents the high water mark of Scout House achievement on the contest field. The Band would never again dominate the activity as it had for the previous decade. En route to winning almost every contest in 1957, Scout House held



*Scout House (1958)*



*Preston Scout House Band performing their renowned "March Of The Wooden Soldiers" (Nationals, Galt, 1958)*

## FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)

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135 practice sessions, traveled more than 8,200 miles through Ontario, Quebec and nine states, marched in 30 parades and entertained more than 1,234,000 people.

September 1958 became the most eventful in the Band's history, beginning with a third consecutive invitation to perform at the Dream Contest. No other group had ever been invited three years in a row. A record crowd of more than 30,000 in Roosevelt Stadium again called, "More, more," and "Don't let them go," as Scout House marched off the field, then played an informal concert in the parking lot, remaining in place to sign autographs.

A week later back at home in Dickson Park in Galt, Scout House scored 80.11 to finish second to

the new national champion Toronto Optimists who scored 81.61. On the following weekend, Scout House finished almost five full points behind the Audubon Bon Bons all girl corps at the second annual International Championship Music and Pageantry contest in Toronto.

There were more highlights to come over the following ten years. Scout House remained enormously popular with spectators, but never again dominated the contest field as it had in the previous decade.



*The discipline of Scout House is obvious as they arrive for a performance (1958)*

## FEATURE ARTICLE: Preston Scout House Band (continued)



Preston Scout House Band (Nationals, Galt, 1958)

# Preston Scout House Band in the 1960s



*Scout House (Sarnia, 1964)*



*Scout House (Shawinigan, 1964)*



*Scout House (Sarnia, 1964)*



*Scout House (Nationals, Hamilton, 1960)*



*Scout House at inspection (Nationals, Hamilton, 1960)*



*Scout House (Grape Festival Parade, 1960)*

# The Scout House Alumni Band

Visit the Scout House website: [ScoutHouseBand.com](http://ScoutHouseBand.com)

Visit Scout House on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/28903338105>



*Scout House Alumni Band (Cambridge, 2009)*



*Scout House Alumni Band (Buffalo, 2010)*



*Scout House Silver Leaves Ensemble (Oshawa, 2009)*



*Scout House Cadets (Burlington, 2016)*



*Scout House Alumni Band (Oshawa, 2013)*



*Scout House Alumni Band (Simcoe, 2014)*

## **Chapter 7: Winter 1959/60 – What’s New, Pussycat?**

The Corps was now a well-established and increasingly well-known unit. Exposure in new areas and almost one hundred percent favourable coverage in Drum Corps publications served to spread our reputation. Certain standards were now expected on the field as well as off. When the Corps was performing, it was expected to be good, and, when wearing a Corps jacket in public, it was hoped that your behaviour would create a good impression.

In order that this growing reputation be maintained and enhanced, it was necessary to make changes. We would, of course, make a run at a third consecutive Canadian title, aware that this would not be easy.

With the expanding movement here, more hungry contenders would appear, to join those already in existence. Our thoughts turned south, toward the United States. We had experienced moderate success there and hoped to return to try again. Both of these goals required that changes be made, to stay abreast of the times.

In order to achieve success in the U.S., it was apparent that we would have to become more American in style.

Since the United States was where the whole business began and developed, they were the best at it. The name of the game became to do what they do, only do it better. Beat them at their own game, so to speak, in their own backyard.



*Jim Stewart, Bill Thorne, Ron Cottrell cleaning horns*

This, of course, was easier said than done, but the attempt had to be made or we, ourselves, would be overtaken by others in Canada with similar ideas.

This was what we all wanted, and, in the future, we would often measure ourselves against, and aim for, U.S. Corps; soon, one in particular. By this method, we hoped to be able to remain ahead of our Canadian rivals. One of them, in retrospect, was of the opinion that their quest after us was what kept us moving up. There is more than a grain of truth in this, but our aspirations toward American Corps was also a major factor influencing the extent and range of our activities.

### **Changes were needed**

The first casualty of this expanded ambition was the “happy type” music theme adopted at the inception of the Corps. It had originally been introduced because it suited the name of the Corps and was in keeping with the concept of the Optimist Club. Now, for competition purposes, it became a limiting factor. Enough of this type of music existed that could have fuelled such a theme for years. It also could have produced stagnant, predictable

performances, or even repetitious, that could have had an effect on scores, mostly through the general effect captions. There are Corps that do adopt this policy successfully; the most obvious, the Hawthorne Caballeros, but we were through with it. Retaining only the official Optimist Club song, “Hail to Optimism”, we moved on.

The result was to be a much harder driving show. It featured a mix of semi-classical, march, and old-time popular music for the bulk of the field presentation. The cadence was stepped up from our hitherto leisurely 124 paces a minute to a peppier 134. This pace would often be exceeded later on, due to enthusiasm and exuberance.

That was change number two. It was also an innovation that was not revealed until the first public airing and was immediately picked up and used by others in Canada. That gave us an edge at the opening of the season, as we had spent all winter rehearsing at the new cadence and our execution was attuned to it.

The horn line was now to begin experimentation with slides and rotary valves. Arrangements of greater complexity required the full capability of the instruments. It was a matter of improving technical proficiency, a definite must for further inroads south of the border.

To refer to the previous chapter, the observers, mentioned at the New York/Canadian contest at Auburn, N.Y., who commented on Scout House, also noticed the relative simplicity of our show. Much block chording in the music and straightforward drill patterns. Scout House, at the time, had a more complex music and drill routine than us. Simple but effective could summarize our show. This was alright, unless you had ambitions to move up. Then it was not good enough. Accordingly, we were the ones to modify our style in the direction of greater difficulty. In the future, such observations would not be repeated. It was a step in the right direction.

The people who made these remarks about Scout House and us were off-duty American judges. Their opinions could be considered valid and had appeared at a later date in a Galt newspaper.

**WR**

*Imperial*

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*Baritone bugle with a piston and rotor (the piston was for full tones and the rotor for semi-tones)*



To some more advanced units these things were already elementary, but to us it was all new. The greater technical ability involved allowed greater range and variety in the repertoire. When mastered, it would make its presence felt on the field.

The colour guard, still under the control of Eric Burton, and increasingly feeling the influence of the ambitious and enthusiastic Ivor Bramley, moved into more intricate routines. The rifle squad, especially, had

become more specialized in their drills, involving spinning and tossing. It had come as a surprise to some that they used nine-pound Lee-Enfield rifles, the real thing, not lightweight imitations.

The flag line was growing in size as new flags were added, always by virtue of having been won, or presented to represent an occasion or institution. At the 1959 Civic Reception, we had been awarded the City of Toronto flag and, later, the St. Lawrence Seaway flag.

Major changes, but the least evident, took place in the drum line. To the unschooled observer, one drum line looks and sounds much the same as another. To those who are aware, there can be, and are, great differences.

It began when Lorne Ferrazzutti, still drum instructor, required that all current members of the line work on snare drum rudiments. This was before the days of the matched-grip and thirty-piece percussion squads. The only members of the line who played the full range of rudiments were snare drummers. Now everybody would become familiar with them.

During the previous season, we had acquired two new snare drummers due to the breakup of the Sky Raiders Drum and Bugle Corps, who were also 180 Squadron Air Cadets. In 1958, we had used only two snare drummers but had



*Scout House being inspected (Nationals, 1960)*



*Toronto Optimists flags (Merritton, 1960)*

acquired a third for 1959. With the two more now added, we had, at the moment, a total of five. A couple of weeks later, in walked another one, Ronn Prokop. He had drummed with Sea Cadets and then spent one year in Scout House. People seldom left Scout House for other Junior Corps, and this could be seen as a sign of the times.

Although Mr. Prokop would eventually achieve international fame, he was, right now, just another new guy.

## The “Big” Drum Line

We now had six snares, which, along with the three tenors, two bass, and one cymbals, gave us a total of twelve people working on rudiments. Anybody else who was interested was invited to try out on tenor, bass, etc. The offer was taken up by more than a few. All winter the regular drummers worked on rudiments, all of them, even some Swiss. The old standard drum solos; “Connecticut Halftime”, “Old Dan Tucker”, “Army 2/4”, and “Three Camps”, became familiar to all. A few actually managed to play them.

At this point, it was realized that we had a very good chance of fielding a six-man snare drum line. Modern Drum Corps types will say, “so what”. Well, in those days, this size of line was unheard of. Three snare, three, tenor, two bass, and one cymbal was the standard line and was almost

universally in use. A few Corps had tried other combinations. Four and four, even two and two, but usually stuck with three and three. This was mainly due to the requirements of execution and the size of one’s horn-line. Techniques for eight, or ten, well-executing snare drums, along with twenty or more other percussion pieces had not yet been developed. It would be some years yet before drum lines grew in size and complexity to become the large, well-executing percussion sections that are the norm today.

Thus, with our six snares, we were a bit ahead of our time; nevertheless, it was planned to use them – until circumstance and practicality intervened. Further along we shall see how, but, meanwhile, no less than Wild Bill Hooten, leader of The Reilly Raiders had visited us in January. Having watched the six in action, he had been most impressed.

Drill-wise, the major change, as mentioned earlier, was the increased cadence. This took some getting used to. The fact that we had the fall, winter, and spring rehearsals to master it was an asset. Also, style changes were introduced. The arm-swing was altered from stiff-armed to a more relaxed, bent-at-the-elbow position.



*Toronto Optimists “Big” drum line (Maple Leaf Gardens, 1960)*

Snapping horns and body into position became the norm, rather than a casual moving into position. More emphasis was placed on military bearing and, for the first time, a genuine effort was made to standardize leg heights when marking time. In addition to raising leg heights we began the first experiments in using a measured pace. Many hours were spent trying to find the best methods for doing all of these things.

To everyone in every section, all of this was innovation. Everybody was eager and strove to grasp everything for the beginning of the new season. Of course, the coming season would be the most challenging yet.

A common practice among Corps was to visit the rehearsals of other rival Corps, thus gaining insight into how the enemy was shaping up. It was not uncommon for De La Salle people to drop in at our rehearsals, and vice versa. They were always welcome, and, usually, so were we. I use the word enemy with reservation. We never saw anybody from Grantham or Scout House; they were too far away. De La Salle were not much more than a mile away, in the same city. There was already a rivalry between the two Corps and their fans. Most of the time it was friendly and the two Corps often mingled and exchanged ideas. For years, the two Corps practised on the adjacent fields that we had found on that day in 1958 when looking for a new practice spot. That day, De La Salle was already there.



*Members of the Optimists watching De La Salle practice (Lakeshore, 1960)*

This rivalry, though healthy and friendly, revealed its depth when we acquired a former De La Salle member, Frank Gabriel, the only one we ever got\*. At the time, in local circles, this was akin to one of the Hatfields joining the McCoys.

## **Change of Drum Major**

To round off our slate of changes, we lost the services of our flamboyant second Drum Major, Don Chisholm. He had distinguished himself at the 1959 Nationals. When we were on the line, ready, as winners, to perform the exhibition after the senior contest, he marched out to his starting position in a parody of the Scout House style. This entailed almost the full width of the field, and it was unmistakable. It caused both humour and unrest, but not enough of either to cause any serious disruptions. Needless to say, Mr. Baggs was not amused. Don was a genuine loss, his wit and irreverence served to create many an uproarious bus trip. We would not see his like again.

Phil Hennings was still with us, as Drum Major, and as military as ever. It was felt, though, that with the added variety of music, someone more musically inclined should be doing the actual conducting.

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\* In 1964 John McAlpine, who played French Horn with De La Salle, joined the Optimists.

The responsibility fell on none other than a slim, slightly stoop-shouldered, and overworked fellow by the name of Barry Bell. He had done this before with the Danforth Crusaders. As musical director of The Optimists, his plate was full. He did not really need or want it now, but nobody else suitable was available. Ever compliant with necessity, he took it over.

## Corps Spirit

The overall spirit that existed in the Corps had yet to subside. It was as pervasive now as it had been at the beginning. In an army, this would be called morale, and it was an important factor. It had its ups and down, of course, but it was mostly up, likely due to the almost constant run of success that the Corps had enjoyed.

Its manifestations were varied. There was seldom a lack of volunteers for anything that had to be done. Section rehearsals, on ones own time, had become almost second nature to many, as well as individual practice to increase ones ability.

One fellow, a baritone horn player had, I saw it, worn a smooth groove in the concrete floor of his basement. This had resulted from many hours of marking time playing his horn, on one spot. Needless to say, he was one



*Barry Bell, Drum Major (Nationals, Hamilton, 1960)*



*Corps members at a diner near our rehearsal site with the owner of the diner and a restaurant patron (1960)*

## “From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 7. (continued)

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of our more concrete members. His playing and marching ability was admired and imitated by others. His name was Al Punkari, and he was one among many similar stories.

Also, as at the restaurant near the school, when at the waterfront practising, people would stay after practice. They would often stay until one or two in the morning, or later, talking about Corps. The presence of more than a few of the aforementioned people, not only then but also later, helped the Optimists on their gradual climb to success.

As a unit, the members, instructors, and executive got along remarkably well. If there were any disputes between instructors and executive, they never reached our ears. There was friction of course, and this is almost unavoidable, even healthy, in a large organization such as a Drum Corps. The staff ironed out cases of disagreement or dissension that surfaced in the Corps itself, and friction never lasted long.

Many had different ideas about things and were usually allowed to try them out. Often, they were adopted, to the advantage of all.

An every growing sense of unity, “Corps Spirit” as it was called, focussed on the desire for a better Corps.

This “spirit”, “esprit de corps”, “elan”, or what have you, would in the future reveal its extent when disaster was imminent. As yet, we had encountered no major emergency.

If all this sounds like a regimented unit of willing slaves, it was not exactly that at all. Rehearsals were carried on in a mood of good-natured application to the task at hand and were interspersed with



*Some guys from Opti and Del in the stands (Rochester, 1960)*

breaks. There was always fun. Many associated with people outside the Corps itself, doing things that all other normal people do. (It was thought that people in Corps were not quite normal.) Cliques and groups existed but not to a rigid degree, and it was just one, big, usually happy, family.

## The “Tough Guys”

Our practice spot at the corner of Carlton and Jarvis streets served to be the source of rumours and theories that had no great basis in fact. This was part of the tenderloin district. Interested parties often thought that one reason for our success was the fact that we were from a “tough” area. Being “tough” kids, we had to fight harder

for what we got. This attempt to explain our repeated dominance of the local scene was not only misplaced but also indicative of much deliberation in this direction. It was wrong because actually very few of us were from this area itself. Some were, and were “tough” kids; but, as described before, many came from all over the city and from out-of-town. This theory holds less water when it is realized that “toughness” does not a good Drum Corps make. Skill, dexterity, planning, and creativity are just a few of the requirements. Toughness may only play a part in the length of hours put in. This is also called dedication. As a sop to the theorists, I will say that those who did originate from that area really were tough.

They had to be. Humourously, as ordinary young men who often like to think themselves tough, we did profess a certain, maybe misplaced, pride in this circumstance. Unofficially, we adopted the name, “The Jarvis Street Commandos”.

This area, however, did produce its pathos and humour. One very warm night, we had opened the doors of the auditorium to the outside to let some air in. The music floated out onto Jarvis Street. Unobtrusively, a young lady of the night had come right to the door and stood observing

the proceedings. We were having ensemble practice, and she stood looking in on a world she had not been aware of before. One of our members approached and spoke with her, but it is not known what she thought. Although some of our members were familiar with her world, she was obviously, until now, unfamiliar with ours. Eventually, she slipped away, to who knew where, and we remained in our comfortable niche.

On another occasion, one of our members encountered a local resident performing an act usually confined to the washroom. He was prompted to make uncomplimentary remarks, whereupon she went to bring her mate. He was about 150 pounds heavier, but fortunately a streetcar came along at that moment and our man made his exit safely. Due to past, and present prominence, the name is being withheld, to protect the guilty.

All this had nothing to do with the Corps and its operation; it was where we practised. Just part of life in the big city.

## **Finalizing the show**

Before the season came around, the show required finalizing and membership, again, finalized. We still had some music from the previous year, but most of the show was new, both music and drill. The concert had been slated for change, but this did not happen. The first number, “Serenade from the Student Prince”, was a beautiful vehicle for solo horn work by Joe Gianna and Al Morrison and it had proven itself popular for the one year that



*Barry Bell and Dave Hanks kidding around at a rehearsal (Lakeshore, Toronto, 1960)*

we had played it. It provided a fine contrast for the now trademark, “In The Mood”, that we had played since 1958. This was the number to be replaced, but later, the selection chosen<sup>1</sup>, when aired, would prove to be a flop. So, “In The Mood” stayed for the third year. The fans loved it, we loved it, and the judges as well.

The horn line had been boosted into the thirties, from the original 27 to around 33. In those days, 36 was considered big. The colour guard had twelve men and, with our bigger drum line, we would have close to 60 members on the field. What a contrast to today, when 128 is considered normal, and anything less can endanger ones chances for top contention.

The drum line by now had sorted itself out. Those who had left tenor, bass, or cymbals, to practice snare for the winter, returned to their original places. Those who had tried for their positions went back to where they had come from, leaving us with six more snare drums. If Lorne had been searching for some hidden, missed talents, he was unsuccessful, but the experience was good for all.

The six snares formed a competent line, but it would not last too long, which would lead to some difficulties. Of the new members on snare, Ronn Prokop, who was already a good drummer when he joined, showed real potential to become extraordinary. Coming into contact with Lorne Ferrazzutti had taken its effect and he really began to develop into a snare drummer par excellence. Others would too, but, if one was around Prokop, it was to usually be in the twilight, rather than the limelight. This was evident to all, even those with little or no knowledge of drumming. To Ronn’s credit, he never allowed himself to be affected by any admiration or flattery, always being a solid lineman and a first-class Corpsman.



*Ross Cation, Ronn Prokop and Joe Gianna (Rochester, 1960)*

## The Social Side

The changes referred in the title of this chapter not only apply to style and material but also additions to the Corps in various departments. This was how it grew bit by bit, and, at this time, the ladies decided to get in on the act.

Mrs. Nonie McKolskey, who had a son, Terry, in the Corps, together with a number of other enthusiastic “mums” began what became the Ladies Auxiliary. This was the year that they started, and it took them a while to get themselves organized. Once they did, they began to assume responsibilities and, the following year, their influence began to make itself felt. Coincidentally, Mrs. McKolskey herself, after being with the Corps for two years, would become the wife of Bernie Beer.

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<sup>1</sup> The new number was “Blue Skies”. Optimists played “Blue Skies” at the Preview in Jersey then dropped it in favour of “In The Mood”, the previous year’s concert.

## “From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 7. (continued)

There was another ladies organization that had been around for a while to help the Corps. Less obvious, but no less effective than the Ladies Auxiliary was to become, was the Opti-Mrs. They were the wives of the men of the Optimists Club. Seldom heard from and even less seen, they nevertheless played a big part in activities like dances and parties. Such people helped make the world go round.

On April 17, 1960, a dinner / dance was held and a tradition began. The first 5-year rings were issued; it being five years since the Optimist Club had assumed the sponsorship of the Corps. Seventeen were given out that night. All was well with the club. There had never been a word of regret, at least publicly, about the reversal of opinion that originally led to the sponsorship. The Corps had exceeded all expectations, while bringing the club much good publicity. It was a living advertisement for their good works.



*At a corps dance (1960)*

During the previous year, the Corps had set up another band composed of much younger fellows, at Oak Park Public School in East York. They were called the Bantam Optimists, and they were what was known as a Feeder Corps. Run by various people during their existence, they were initially organized by Bill Jay, an ex-Optimist bugler, and Fred Johnson. Fred later became a successful Scarborough politician. Members of the Junior Corps itself would go, one or two nights a week, to instruct. The idea was to create a reserve pool of talent from which the Corps could draw new players. It was rapidly becoming harder for someone new to join the Corps without some prior training. By this year, the Bantams a thriving enterprise. In the future, it would prove its value beyond all doubt.



TOP: *Bantam Optimists*. BOTTOM: *Toronto Optimists and Bantam Optimists (Union Station, Toronto, 1960)*



All these things described were new, adding weight and complexity to the whole organization. Where would it all end? Who knew? Who cared? This was a rolling stone that gathered moss as more people jumped on the bandwagon (no pun intended).

## Our Competition

Rumours were more rife this year than usual, and reports reached our ears that De La Salle and, particularly, Scout House were red hot and raring to go. We could check out De La Salle, if we cared, but Preston was harder to observe. Now, some units often held closed rehearsals, which was supposed to hide something. It was the beginning of the cold war, one strange report that reached us was that Scout House would only enter two contests this year, one of which was the Nationals. This proved to be true, with results that we shall cover later. De La Salle were never to be taken lightly, and seldom were by us. Many who had been around for a while generally found it best to ignore rumours and wait to see what was real. This was because they were usually the same every year, and it took the first show to confirm.



*First recipients of 5-year rings: Front row: Harry Clark, Jim Patten, Ed Nanni, Ron Cook. Back Row: Phil Hennings, Don Yeaman, Henry Beben, Ian Robertson, Hector Roberts, Bob Brown, Larry Cheevers, Bob Owen, Bob Cook*

As for us, we were again scheduled to be busier than ever. We would again open at the Ice Follies. By this time, we should have been doing it on skates. The Corps was sounding the best we had ever heard it, and all were eager to see how the new style and show would be accepted by both fans and judges.

There stretched before us a full season of tough competition, against both American and Canadian opponents. We were not the only ones to make changes and progress, as this year would demonstrate.

As so, we anticipated much activity, but, at this early stage, uppermost in our minds was the fact that we were going back to New Jersey. What better place to test one's new ideas and innovations.

And the band played on.



*This picture – believe it or not – was taken on a Sunday in Toronto.*

*Toronto Optimists rehearsing near the lake (1960)  
Photo originally published in the Toronto Star*

## **Chapter 8: 1959 – And On And On**

As the Corps grew its influence was felt in more ways than on the field. Many of our people, instructors and members, were instructing other Corps. This was a common practice, not unique to us, even extending indirectly to helping ones rivals. Being the current champions, though, did increase the demand for Optimist personnel to act as teachers to others, a logical occurrence.

For instance, Eric Burton, the colour guard instructor, besides still being responsible for the Optimists guard, was also instructing four other guards. One of these was Grantham, one of our chief rivals. Also, Mike Layton, our guard captain, was the instructor of the Guelph Royales, a top Canadian Senior Corps. People from the drum line and horn line also participated in this activity. Later in the year, it reached a degree with one Corps that served to cause repercussions.

An interesting highlight of the off-season that had nothing to do with us occurred in February, in the New Jersey area. There was a testimonial to Charlie Nabors, the Chief Judge of the Eastern Judges Association. He had been the chief judge when we first appeared at the Preview of Champions in Jersey City. His Drum Corps career had spanned forty-eight years. Forty-eight years! And we thought what we were Drum Corps nuts. It is noteworthy that he was head of the Eastern Judges Association. At that time, in the USA, there was more than one judging association. Canada, of course, had its own.

In the USA, we had so far encountered the N.Y. State and Eastern Judges Association. Later, we would encounter the Mid-Atlantic Association and others. Because of this situation, there were different score sheets and standards. Much of this has now disappeared due to the standardization of things under the D.C.I. banner. This is much better.

To get back to the theme of this story, (it is hard not to digress) we had quite a bit of activity to keep us occupied during the later winter and early spring period. There was, of course, the Ice Follies. It was a good opportunity to try out new music.

Canada’s Marching Ambassadors, one of the better Senior Corps anywhere, annually organized a military ball. It was called, aptly enough, “The Ambassadors Ball”. These affairs were grand, glittering occasions, attended by any or all Corps members who cared to come. The men wore their respective uniforms and the ladies wore evening gowns. Always colourful and well attended, they were reminiscent of military balls of a bygone era.



*In no order: Doug MacKenzie, Ed Nanni, Hector Roberts, Dennis DeCarli, Len Perrin, Glen Durish, Harry Clark, Al Miller, Joe Gianna, Bob Cheevers, Warren Berger (Falconer, 1960)*

This year, it was held at the Tam O’Shanter Club in Scarborough. This site has long since gone, having been destroyed by fire. The balls have also gone, as have the Marching Ambassadors, and the Canadian Drum Corps scene is much the poorer for it.

## A Corps Song

Around this time, it was decided to have a contest within the Corps itself, to come up with a Corps song. This would be another tool to help engender Corps spirit. Not that it was flagging. It never had. Six good entries were received and judged. Glen Durish, who lived in Windsor, Ontario, and commuted to practice weekly, a long trip, won it. His entry entitled “On, March On” (sung to the tune of Optimists’ opener “Meadowlands”) was adopted as the official Corps song and was hereafter sung lustily at all contests, usually before the show.

There were also other unofficial songs sung only in the confines of the bus, away from public ears. Some of these were entitled:

- “Lulu”
- “The Backseat Boys”, and
- “The Ollie Miller Moses Song”

Though not suitable for public airing, they were fun, harmless, and almost equally as effective as spirit raisers.

This year the annual Canadian Drum Corps Association convention was held at Prudhommes Motel, near the City of St. Catharines, Ontario. Usually, the whole motel and its neighbour, The Beacon, just down the road, was taken over for the weekend by Drum Corps. Apart from much partying, many things were accomplished, which was the intent in the first place. Drum, bugle and drill clinics were held with the purpose of spreading knowledge and ideas to any that were interested. This year, we provided the demonstration drum section. Lorne conducted the clinic and was well received. The six snares were used and created much interest and speculation. Also, new tenor drumsticks of unique design, created by Lorne Ferrazzutti and Eric Burton, stirred much curiosity. They became sought after by others.

Dates are very indistinct for this period, but around this time, we were involved in two events. For the first time, we sent a four-man drum squad to compete in an American individual contest, in Philadelphia, PA. The four of us, of which I was one, competed as a drum quartet, and Ronn Prokop entered the solo snare drum contest. None of us fared very well, our material and standards apparently not on par with more experienced entrants; however, it was a learning experience, and we saw what was probably a final appearance of the famous Liberty Bell Cadets, on the streets of Philadelphia. We were also entertained with first class recordings at the post home of the Archer-Epler Musketeers Senior Corps in Upper Darby, PA. That alone, was worth the trip.

**BIG BIG CONTEST!**  
**WIN A CORPS JACKET FREE!**  
**ENTER THE OPTIMIST CORPS THEME SONG CONTEST**

Write an 'official song!' for the Green Machine!!!  
\* Your song must mention only the TORONTO OPTIMISTS and no other Corps (except the former Crusaders (Danforth) or the original Scout Band.)  
\* Your song must have at least three verses.  
\* Your song should be based on a popular tune. "Hail to Optimism" would be a "natural"  
\* This contest open to Optimist Corps members only.  
\* All entries become the property of the Toronto Optimists Drum Corps.  
\* In the case of a tie the vote of the Corps will decide the winner.  
\* If the winner has already purchased a jacket the complete price of jacket & insignia will be refunded. Contest closes April 1961. Hand your entries to Don Daber.

\*\*\*\*\* HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTED SONG THEMES \*\*\*\*\*

GREEN, BLACK & WHITE...a short history to include original Scout and Optimists Club...top Corps in one year, 1950...consistent people & personalities, Al Baggs, Born Beer, Barry Bell...Grocer Seaway flag, city flag...In the Mood' ...Keep smiling...be an



Glen Durish (1961)

The second event was our participation in a local standstill contest. This featured local Corps, and, for the first time, we used the six snares in competition. It was also the last time. Besides winning the competition, we topped the execution drum caption by two points, even though our closest competition used only two snare drums. This was a statement on the junior drum lines of the time, and a bright omen for our big line. But it would not last.

## Woodstock

In May of this year, there was a long weekend called “Empire Day” weekend. This occasion was a national holiday and is still in effect, though the name has been changed to one more appropriate “Victoria Day”. We spent this interval in a fashion that was then rare but is now commonplace. A three-day camp had been arranged in the town of Woodstock, Ontario, and the purpose was to practice, preparing for our trip to New Jersey.

Woodstock is a very pleasant town, situated approximately one hundred miles west of Toronto. Its pleasant atmosphere was more than enhanced by the friendly nature of the people. For three days, as guests of the Woodstock Imperials Senior Drum and Bugle Corps, we were housed and fed by the local residents. Since most were city kids, it was a wonderful experience being out in the country for three days. Those who were there have never forgotten this occasion, and the Optimists Corps was ever grateful to the town of Woodstock. Apart from this, uppermost in our minds was the fact that this was a work weekend, to prepare for our second appearance at the “Preview of Champions” contest in Jersey City. And work we did. Three days of solid practice culminated in a street parade and exhibition. The six snares were used, as it turned out, for the last time, until big drum lines became a common thing.

A lot of things were settled at this time. One of them was the dropping of “Blue Skies”, the replacement concert number, and the re-introduction of “In The Mood”. This was the third year of its use but this was offset by a new arrangement. Also, the drum line was dropped back to its regular size. This move caused some disturbance.

The people in the snare line, themselves, had determined that the use of six snare drums in New Jersey would set us at a definite disadvantage, in that much tougher area. They approached Lorne with this conclusion and it was decided to use only three snares. This decision forced some hard action. Only the three best, or most compatible, would be able to remain, and the other three would have to find new positions. As it turned out, one drifted away with no hard feelings as he had not been there very long anyway. A position on tenor drum had been open for a while, when one of our members



*Rehearsing for The Preview of Champions*

married and wisely left the Corps. This spot was taken by one of the now excess snare drummers. The third man, Jim Reynolds, left the Corps, and this was unfortunate. He had been a conscientious member from day one, being an original from Danforth Crusaders. His attendance and efforts were beyond reproach and, due to our ambitions, he became a victim of expediency. This was the one that hurt, although the general membership was unaware of it. All this maneuvering was done behind the scenes and all that we saw was the end result. As a consequence, we were all happily ready to go to New Jersey, unaware of any hard feelings, and thinking ourselves well prepared for anything they could throw us.



*Neil Ibitson, Al Lavigne, Ross Colville & Robin Weatherstone with guys from Garfield (which was still using the Holy Name sign)*

## 1960 Preview of Champions

They threw it, and we caught it, again. It was not as bad as before. Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights took top honours, with a score of 86.90 points. We were fifth, and last, scoring 80.0. In between were Chicago Cavaliers, Garfield Cadets, and St. Catherine’s Queensmen. This score was a definite improvement over the previous year and served to vindicate the style and material changes that had been adopted. Also, it still showed that we were not, at this time of year, fully prepared to compete at this level. Results later in the season would bear out this observation. There were other, positive, signs.

Our abbreviated, but now normal size, drum line had scored only 1.1 behind that of the Golden Knights, and 0.1 from that of the Chicago Cavaliers. This was a definite plus, as both these lines were known for their precision.



*Blessed Sacrament and Chicago Cavaliers (Preview of Champions, 1960)*

Also, our public image was improved when a columnist, Jim “Ratsy” Warfle, made the following remarks in the June issue of “Off The Line” magazine. “Impressive drill, music as good or better than the rest of the Corps”. He also used the term “green machine”, referring to us. This colourful term had long been applied to the Chicago Cavaliers and was well known as their name. Well, now we were to hear it more often, as “Go, Go Green Machine” began to be heard at competitions. This name had first been heard at the 1959 Grey Cup parade, but now, with the wider publicity, it began to stick.

Still on the subject of names, the Corps had, by now, acquired a few unofficial ones. Within the Corps, in a humorous vein, we would sometimes refer to ourselves as “The Toronto Optimists Drum and Bungle Corps”, or “Barry Bell’s Buggered Up Bugle Band”. Heard many times, more publicly, would be “Opti-Corps” or just “Opti”. Occasionally would be heard “The Green Latrine”. Terms like these were all part of the Corps scene and were all taken with a grain of salt. Of course we also had names for other Corps. At this stage of the game, any names directed at us were somewhat flattering compared to what others would call us later.



*Toronto Optimists (Preview of Champions, 1960)*

When describing the past, present, and future success of the Corps, one important element must be included, musical arrangements. Music was arranged for us by a variety of people. Foremost in this category was Truman Crawford of the U.S. Air Force Drum & Bugle Corps<sup>1</sup>. The use of his musical arrangements was a strong factor in the success achieved to date. Barry Bell also did some arranging, and his work had stood the test, or we would not have scored as we had. This year, for the first time, we played a number arranged by Jack Bullock of Geneva, New York. His expertise in this department would be recognized by anyone who had ever heard his Corps, “The Appleknockers”. With probably the smallest horn line in Senior Drum Corps circles, they would always bring down the house with their classy arrangements and superb playing.

This use of outside talent to help the corps to improve in the music category would later extend to the marching and maneuvering caption, writing and teaching drill patterns. Strangely, though, it did not extend to the drum line. It was not necessary, as the line constantly improved. This says something about the instruction. Not until many years later, and after great changes, was outside instruction brought in, and then the results were less than ideal.



*Getting ready to practice (1960)*

Rehearsals were still Monday and Wednesday evenings at the school, and Sunday at the Waterfront. During the winter, Sunday rehearsals were held at the A.E. Long plant in Scarborough, the workplace of Bernie Beer. When at the waterfront, people who worked downtown would go straight from work, to secure the best of the two fields. One had fewer potholes and better grass.

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<sup>1</sup> Truman Crawford was with the U.S. Air Force Drum Corps from 1953 until it disbanded in 1963. In 1966, he was asked to join the U.S. Marine Drum and Bugle Corps as chief musical arranger. He stayed with the Marine Corps for the next 30 years.

## The arrival of Don Daber

One night, a few of us were there early to stake our claim when we noticed someone standing nearby. He was a sandy haired young man who obviously wanted to get acquainted. We invited him over to join us, and thus began a long and fruitful career in Drum Corps.

This was Don Daber, and the Optimists Drum Corps, and Drum Corps in general, would never again be quite the same.

His purpose, he explained, was to write a freelance article on Canadian Drum Corps which, he hoped, would interest one of the major Toronto newspapers. We were immediately all for it since newspapers seldom, if ever, had any news about Drum Corps. We, of course, thought that all Corps news should be on the front pages. Don had been to Scout House and De La Salle but neither were very interested. He had found us by chance, not knowing of our existence, or that we were the current Canadian Champions.

After this meeting, it was not long before he became a full-fledged, albeit, non-playing member of the Corps. At a Sunday rehearsal a couple of weeks later, we officially drummed him into the Corps.

By profession a commercial artist, by inclination a photographer, his influence soon made itself felt. Publicity in the form of drawings, paintings, and photographs soon began to appear all over the place. His instrument was the camera, his subject the Optimists Drum Corps, and later all Corps and associated activities. From here on he becomes an integral part of this story. In fact, it was not too long before it was wondered how we had ever gotten along without him. Like a piece of a puzzle, he fitted into the growing mosaic that was the Corps.

Another, more frivolous, part of the scene was the frequenting of two taverns by some members. The Graymar and Merchant House on Front Street, in downtown Toronto, became a sort of unofficial meeting place after practice. That some (most) were underage never seemed to bother anyone, least of all the proprietors. These establishments were directly adjacent to each other and were definitely not what would be called upscale; however, they had a certain air about them that suited us perfectly. Interestingly, the Graymar was reputedly the oldest hotel in Toronto, and its appearance did not belie this rumour. Also, a waiter named Frenchy Belanger worked there and would regale us with stories of his younger days. He claimed he had been a championship calibre boxer. No one took him seriously until the time his picture was spotted in the Canadian Sport Hall of Fame, at the Canadian National Exhibition. Thereafter, he was regarded with greater respect. We loved those places!



*Clare Reid, Don Daber and Mike Andrews (Rochester, NY, 1960)*

## “From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 8. (continued)

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Meanwhile, back in the Corps world, there was still a full season ahead to contend with. An April issue of “Off The Line” magazine had commented on the lack of contests in Canada. This, unfortunately, was true, but we were lucky enough to face a fairly busy schedule. Socially, Phil Hennings, drum major, and Fred Johnson, a founder of the Bantam Corps, had both acquired wives. Whether these were already “Corps Girls” or not, they certainly were now. Both couples had Optimists honour guards at their weddings. Social functions were often part of corps activities.

Technically, we began to use back sticking on drums. It was a technique picked up in the United States. We were the first to use it in a field show in Canada.

Regarding the general scene in Canada, Scout House were still one of the biggest box office draws, but De La Salle were increasingly being touted as the chief contender for the championship. The end of the season would put all this speculation into place.

June was not very busy, with an exhibition for a Junior “B” contest at East York stadium in Toronto. This was actually our first full show in Canada this year and a good opportunity to gauge the effect of new material on the public. Apparently, it was acceptable, even “In the Mood” was still being well received. It was the month of July that really saw the corps come into its own, the new music and drill proving their merit.



*De La Salle (East York, 1960)*

After a July 2 exhibition at the senior “Tournament of Drums” contest at Rochester’s Aquinas Stadium a columnist for “Drum Corps World” magazine wrote: “Optimists, almost whole new show, music and drills. ‘In The Mood’ back by popular demand. Wild new arrangement!”. This last statement was a half truth. Demand for it did exist and this number had become sort of a trademark, however, coincident to this was the fact that a suitable replacement had not been found.

Further to this positive summary: “Optimists driving hard, hotter than ever. Faster cadence. Horn powerful, very clean, excellent tone. Drums outstanding. Only using three snare instead of the six planned”. “Had to bolster the tenor line”, another half-truth. The tenor line had been filled, as was necessary, but only as a result of cutting the snare line for New Jersey. No matter, the end result was what counted. This attitude, when expediency overcomes all else, is a common factor in human affairs; in successful enterprises, it’s sometimes a necessity.

Finally, the guard was noticed for its new intricate rifle work, and the Corps in general for a fast, company front, duck and spin.



At this show, Al Baggs took his field test for All-American Judge in the field marching and maneuvering caption, having already passed the written test. He was already a qualified Canadian General Effect Marching and Maneuvering Judge, and now would become the first Canadian Judge to become an All-American Judge. Not too far down the road, this situation would lead to great political uproar, as we shall see.

To vindicate all this written glory, on July 16, we again competed at Falconer, New York as the only Junior Corps in a field of seniors. We took first place by almost six points, topping all captions. Significantly, the drums scored 18.5 in execution. The drum line was really pulling its weight, a factor that before now, and later, would often prove decisive.



*Optimists horns practicing a duck and spin (Falconer, NY, 1960)*

## **August 6, 1960, Back to Rochester**

Back to Rochester, this time to defend our New York/Canadian Association Title. Whereas, the previous year we had barely won it over Scout House, this year rumours were confirmed when De La Salle came second to us by only four tenths. They also were using much new material, with lots of solo horn work that was a big hit with the crowd.

The Canadian Championships were just over a month away. Full attendance and extra rehearsals were the order of the day. This sense of urgency was to pay off before then, on August 27, at the Eastern Junior Drum Pageant, at Rome, New York. As was expected, the Golden Knights won the affair, but we were only one and a half points behind them. Derision was evident when a Knight horn player kicked his horn in disgust at the close score. We were still the hicks from the boondocks. It was probably about this time that we began to often gauge our performances against those of Blessed Sacrament. They were the best, and no harm could come from aiming at them, even if one might never fulfil ones aspirations.

As the season ran on to its climax, there was the C.N.E. contest to contend with before the Nationals. Because of our busy practice schedule before this, we were in good shape. Our closest rivals, De La Salle and Grantham, were defeated decisively, by six and eight points respectively. This nailed down our third C.N.E. title and led to the Canadian Championships (Nationals) at Hamilton’s Civic Stadium (now Ivor Wynne Stadium) on September 10.



*De La Salle’s colour guard (1960)*

## 1960 Nationals

This was to be a landmark contest for various reasons, which revealed themselves as the day moved on. The stadium was speckled with only a few spectators for the daytime preliminaries. These few would be witness to some Canadian Drum Corps history, albeit of a sad nature.

In the junior standstill division, the scores were:

- Brantford Belltones 74.5
- Trafalgar Police Boys 72.7
- Renown Sea Cadets 72.0

Renown Sea Cadets were the band in which Ronn Prokop had began his drumming career. Of more significance was the Trafalgar Police Boys, whose existence was shortly to be an interesting addition to the Optimists’ story.

The Junior “A” preliminary began at 10:30 a.m. Three of five entrants would reach the finals, along with four of seven in the senior division. A change in procedure was introduced when it was required that each Corps play only the marching portion of its show, omitting the standstill part.

The rumours heard at the onset of the year, that Scout House would only enter two contests this year, were found to be true. This, the Nationals, was the second one, the first being only one week before, in Quebec. Thus, they were largely on unknown quantity, but the results of this policy were evident that day. For the first time in as long as anyone could remember, Scout House did not make the finals. They were overshadowed by The Optimists, De La Salle, and Grantham; the two latter Corps doing it for the first time. Preston sounded very good and, as usual, had the crowd with them all the way. It was not enough, and, whatever the reasons, not competing had to have something to do with the outcome.



*Preston Scout House (Nationals prelims, Hamilton, 1960)*

Now, for all intents and purposes, they leave our story. Although Scout House was to remain on the scene for many years, they would never again pose a serious threat to the dominance of the Canadian Drum Corps scene. They would continue as a competition and exhibition band, even pulling themselves up to third place at a Nationals in the future. Finally, after many trials and tribulations, demises and regenerations, they would disappear, probably forever, in 1983.

That September day in 1960 was Canadian Corps history, as were Scout House themselves. Their eventual disappearance left a gap never likely to be filled, let alone equalled. In the ongoing search for a Canadian identity, Scout House was a piece of Canadiana that cannot be denied and they represented Canada in unique and incomparable fashion in many places and their like would not be seen again.

Back to the more conventional Drum Corps. The fact that Scout House had declined has to be in contrast to the

## “From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 8. (continued)

fact that everyone else was getting better. Our improving scores against U.S. Corps and the close challenges of our Canadian rivals stood as confirmation of this.

De La Salle made a tremendous impression at the preliminaries where they displayed new, white uniforms with capes of scarlet and green. These new uniforms had been introduced at the New York/Canadians in Rochester. As quoted in “Drum Corps World”, along with the colour, they gave a “superb, class ‘A’ performance” on the field. Likewise with Grantham, whose show was noted as “inspired, sensational, horn line overshadowed Del, with crystal clear tone”.



*De La Salle (1960)*

The Optimists? The rough edges on the new show had mostly disappeared, thanks to a year of dogged practice, interspersed with frequent competitions. This showed at the Nationals when others applied comments such as “very polished look, tremendous all round, fabulous sound” to the show.

Optimists, De La Salle, and Grantham made the finals, and although, for some reason, the scores were withheld, a leak occurred. We had scored 88.67 to Del’s 84.0, a comfortable margin but not one to induce complacency. Everybody was genuinely sympathetic to Scout House as it was recognized that we were witnessing the end of an era.

At the night finals, there was high drama. De La Salle took high field bugles and high general effect marching and maneuvering. This was not a great surprise, as these captions were always among their strong points. Grantham, with their first real shot at a title on the line, received a foul stroke of fortune. During their performance, seven people collapsed from food poisoning, due to having eaten beforehand in a strange restaurant. This ill luck detracted from a fine effort, but they still managed to top the general effect bugle caption. What would have happened had their misfortune not occurred is known only to the gods.

When the outcome of the day was revealed to all, the Optimists stood in first place by only two points ahead of De La Salle, and three and a half in front of Grantham. We now possessed our third consecutive National title. De La Salle had now established themselves as the main contenders for first place, a position they would seldom relinquish.



*Toronto Optimists (Nationals Prelims, Hamilton, 1960)*

What made the biggest difference between first and second place was a large spread in the drum scores. This situation had existed since 1958, the Optimists drum line was yet to be defeated in Canada. It often was the determining factor in other contests as well, but here it really paid off. Del’s drum line was good, but not quite good enough, possibly due to having a competent but part-time instructor. We had the services, full time, of one of the best. Del’s horns, music, and drills were on par with anyone in Canada. If they could plug this one gap, we would have real problems. As it turned out, they could, and we did.



*Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Hamilton, 1960)*

An interesting sidelight to this contest was that Al Baggs served as a G.E., M&M judge at the senior portion of this contest. His judging activity was eventually to culminate in his appointment as Chief Judge of the Canadian Association.

## Post Nationals Shows

There was still much activity in store before the season was complete. At Varsity Stadium in Toronto, we, along with Del, appeared again at the Leaside Lions International, a junior and senior contest. The Audubon Girls were again in attendance, but this time we were better prepared. Taking every caption, we won by over three points. This was also history. Not only was it the first time that we had defeated them, it was the first time that a Canadian Corps had beaten a major U.S. Corps. Some attributed this to overconfidence on the part of the visitors. Whatever the reason, it happened. De La Salle was only 0.78 behind Audubon.

Optimists took the trophy for highest score of the evening, over top U.S. and Canadian Senior Corps, as well as that for highest score for Canadian Corps. The former trophy had, until now, been won by an American Senior Corps, while the latter was regarded somewhat as a consolation prize.



*Someone from Scout House and Ron Cook (Grape Festival, 1960)*

## “From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 8. (continued)

Into October and the Annual St. Catharines Grape Festival parade and show. This was the one that we had so unceremoniously pulled out of the year before. This year, the show was all exhibitions, and the only contest was for the street parade. De La Salle, Optimists, and Scout House placed first, second, and third in this event.

Another step in the progress of Drum Corps in Canada was the fact that CHCH-TV of Hamilton taped this parade, and CFRB radio of Toronto began giving results of Canadian and U.S. contests. Actually, not much has, if at all, improved in this respect to this day. Only half of D.C.I. finals are shown on TV, if one lives in the right area. A true indication of where Drum Corps really stands in the scheme of things.

At this time, one facet of Don Daber’s influence became evident, with the appearance of “Optimists money”, green dollar bills made with Optimists symbols and along with this came Corps buttons, emblems, pennants, and a record (remember those?). These were all his creations, publicity gimmicks.

Previously in this book was mentioned the fact of Drum and Bugle Corps breaking away from their service sponsors. Just before this year’s Grape Festival, The Marching Ambassadors had severed their connection with the army. As a consequence, they had no instruments with which to perform, although being in attendance. Using instruments borrowed from Grantham and Guelph Royalaires, they managed to put on a commendable performance. This type of action became increasingly common as Drum Corps and army philosophies clashed.



*Optimists Money*

The competitive season was now almost over for this year, and on October 18 a rally night, which would become an annual event, was held. One hundred and twenty people were in attendance, including, of course, current members of the Corps. Others were new recruits, alumni, Optimist Club officials, executive, and instructors. A good time was had rehashing the past year and anticipating the one to come. There were also innovations, to add to the growing appendages that were accumulating around the Corps.

Contracts were introduced, to be signed by all members. This, no doubt, was an attempt to bind people all the more closely to the Corps. An Optimists alumna was created, and their function was social events, booster club, and fund raising activities, etc. In this capacity, we already had the Ladies Auxiliary and the Opti-Mrs., but the alumna were a welcome addition.



*Some members of Optimists (First Corps banquet, 1960)*

## “From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 8. (continued)

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New recruits were now introduced all around. They numbered about thirty-five and were all hopeful of getting into the main Corps. It was concluded, amid much convivial partying, that 1960 had, to date, been the most successful year in the history of the still young “Green Machine”. They had placed first in every field contest in Canada. This was a repeat of 1959, but minus any dubious last minute cancellations.

A new executive and slate of instructors was introduced, much swollen in comparison to the original staff.

For the year ending 1960, into 1961, the officials would be:

- Corps Commander (Director) A. W. Baggs
- Assistant Corps Director Bernie Beer
- Equipment Manager Warren Copp
- Musical Director Barry Bell
- Drum Instructor Lorne Ferrazzutti
- Colour Guard Instructor Eric Burton
- Publicity & Public Relations Don Daber
- Bugle Instructor, Drum Major Al Morrison
- Drill Instructor Doug McPhail
- Bugle Instructor Ed Nanni
- Corps Adjutant Jim Patten
- Guard Captain Mike Layton



*Toronto Optimists Instructors and Staff (Rally Night, 1960)*

Contrast this total list with the beginning of 1958

- Corps Director A. W. Baggs
- Bugle Instructor Barry Bell
- Drum Instructor Lorne Ferrazzutti
- Guard Instructor Eric Burton

Just an indication of how this organization had grown in size and complexity. Many of these new people on the staff had been playing members of the Corps, and others had come from the outside.

One more show remained to be attended, and it produced an ominous blip on the horizon. On October 29, the International Standstill Contest at Buffalo, New York, was held. To our chagrin, we placed last, albeit with a 1.0 penalty for overtime. This puzzled us as we had taken pains to ensure this would not happen, but it did, and we lost.

First were Irondequoit, formerly Hilton, who we had never beaten. Niagara Militaires who we had beaten before, though not consistently, followed them in second place. Third was De La Salle, who were jubilant at having beaten us for the first time ever. We, of course, were fourth, the penalty dragging us down to eat humble pie.

Although no one could see into the future, less than a year from now, three factors would combine to create what was arguably the most disputed result in Canadian Drum Corps history. These factors were the Optimists – De La Salle rivalry, the election of Al Baggs to the position of Chief Judge, and a penalty. Such things can “do one in” as Eliza Doolittle might have said before she became a lady.

Don’t leave yet, were not finished.

## Optimists personnel instructing other Corps

On the first page of this chapter, the fact of Optimists personnel instructing other Corps was noted. Also cited was the fact that this activity caused dissensions in another Corps, due to the intensity of involvement. This was true. It concerned one of Canada’s better Senior Corps, The Jesters, formerly called Service Corps, reflecting their army origins. They were located in Toronto and, this year, our three main instructors Lorne, Barry, and Eric were also instructing them.

Added to this was the fact that many ex-Optimists people continued their Drum Corps activities in The Jesters. Some friction developed between factions because in some quarters The Jesters were beginning to be regarded as a “Senior Optimists”. They had many members of long standing; Eric Burton had been one, and a long tradition of their own. The acrimony that developed caused some of their membership to leave, some going to the Marching Ambassadors, their biggest rivals. Among certain people, there had been plans afoot to create an “Optimist League”, so to speak. This would have Optimists influence controlling the Bantam, Junior and Senior Divisions in Canadian Drum Corps. These plans never came to fruition, which was probably a good thing. Drum Corps partisanship runs deep, and this would have been too much for some people.

Altogether, at the end of this year, thirteen people left the Optimists, the largest group yet to leave en masse. Their names are now lost to posterity, but mostly it was due to overage. Still others would leave in ensuing months for a variety of reasons. There were replacements available, but those who left were experienced veterans and would be missed.



Jesters (Rochester)

**GREEN CAPSULE COMMENTS**  
*Inside*

PERSONAL COPY OF NO **19**

editors: Doug McPhail  
associate editor: Don Daber

VOL. 1 NUMBER 1 second section of issue number 6 May-June 1961

an open letter to The Optimists from Barry Boll...  
RE: OPERATION 'INDIVIDUAL PERFECTION'

Dear Corporals!

Do you want the Corps to be unbombable this year? Of course you do. Do you want the Corps to climb to a greater degree of perfection than ever before attained? Naturally you do. Here then is the secret to success in two words---INDIVIDUAL PERFECTION.

"Ah yes," you say, "this is something we've heard a great deal about, lately, O.K. That's fine...but what have you done about it? Have you tried to improve your ability to the stage where you can say "I'm as good as THE BEST player in ANY Corps...AND PROVE IT. This I doubt, and here's another thing...is the only practicing you do accomplished at Corps' rehearsals? If this is so then you can never hope to achieve a... high degree of perfection either individually or collectively.

You must identify yourselves with other phases of Show Business, for instance ---an actor receives his lines, goes home and memorizes them and practices saying them...then he rehearses with the rest of the cast. He does not 'waste' the time of his associates by having to be taught his lines.

In a Drum Corps a PRACTICE is time utilized by one member striving for INDIVIDUAL PERFECTION...A REHEARSAL is time utilized by a GROUP striving for uniform perfection.

CONCLUSION: THE CORPS will improve tremendously if you first improve yourself to the point where you can say modestly "I AM SUPERIOR" and then be able to PROVE IT.

RESULTS: Better performances by the OPTIMISTS---this greater enjoyment for YOU!!! I have a complete and sincere faith that you will drive yourselves to this new and much needed phase of improvement, that of "INDIVIDUAL PERFECTION" with real Optimistic enthusiasm---

Let's GO you guys...

*Barry*

Introducing Green Capsule Comments

## **“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 8. (continued)**

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Nobody worried too much about such things. They were all part of the Corps scene, and a year-end victory dance was held, the tab being picked up by the Optimist Club. The debacle at Buffalo was forgotten, and it was announced that Al Baggs was now on the Board of Directors of the New York/Canadian Association.

To cap the year, the first issues of “Green Capsule Comments” rolled off the presses. This was the brainchild and product of that master of publicity, Don Daber, who hand-rolled the first three page editions. G.C.C., as it was known, became the official publication of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps.

Finally, after yet another civic reception, the year was laid to rest, all successes and failures going permanently into the record books.

Only fate knew what lay in store, and it was to unerringly show its hand in the near future.



*Optimists members who aged out at the end of 1960*



*Optimists performing for the Mayor at a civic reception (Toronto City Hall, 1960)*



## A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of 1960 progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Jersey City (May 29)	Falconer NY (July 16)	Rochester NY (Aug 6)	Rome NY (Aug )15	CNE Toronto (Sept 5)	Nationals Galt ON (Sept 12)	Toronto International (Sept 17)
Toronto Optimists	80.00	83.64	82.11	81.15	83.50	87.80	87.23
Preston Scout House						missed cut	
De La Salle			80.40		77.50	85.40	83.12
Grantham Boys			75.98		75.75	84.30	
Leaside Lions					61.96		
Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights	86.90			85.45			
St. Catherine's Queensmen	82.05						
Garfield Cadets	84.80			83.25			
Chicago Cavaliers	86.40						
St. Joe's Batavia			73.44	71.55			
Braintree Warriors				79.55			
St John's Girls					66.10		
Audubon Bon Bons							83.90

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



Toronto Optimists (Preview of Champions, Jersey City, 1960)

### How I joined The Optimists

by Frans Rood

**M**Y INTRODUCTION to Drum Corps came through a visit from a recruiter to our school, St. Clare's. He was looking to start up a new Boys Band for the Knights of Columbus. This was to be a totally new corps and I anxiously joined up.



Frans Rood, Columbus Boys Band (1959)

I had hoped to learn to play drums, snare perhaps. I settled for tenor drum, swinging tenor drum no less. I played swinging tenor for a couple of years before moving to bass drum. I spent four years in this Junior "B" corps, the Columbus Boys Band, along with a good friend, Vic Krukalis, who played snare.

In 1960, Vic left Columbus and joined the Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. The Optimists had been Junior "A" Canadian Champions for two years and were going for their third consecutive title in 1960. I had been looking to join the Midtowners, another Junior "B" corps, until I ran into Vic. He said that the Optimists bass drummers had aged out and they could use someone like me! Right! The bass drummer for a Junior "B" corps moving to the drum line of the Optimists, the Junior "A" Canadian Champion!

I was quaking in my shoes when I went to the practice at the Duke of York school on Jarvis Street in Toronto. Vic Krukalis introduced as the new bass drummer. The corps welcomed me as "the new guy" after which I was handed a bass drum and "Sheet Music"??? The Optimists became my personal history for three championship years, with some of the most exciting and best times of camaraderie in my life.

My first full corps rehearsal that eventful evening



Frans Rood (1961)

did not go off without a hitch. After the different sectional practices, the corps assembled in the main gym for ensemble practice. It was then when it really hit me - here they were, Canadian Junior Champions, and I was going to be part of them for the first time, maybe my last. Who knew?

I met Lorne Ferrazzutti, drum instructor extraordinaire, for the first time. Lorne asked my name and I became "Rud"! He welcomed me on board, and that was that.

Now the nerves really set in, the corps, all set, drum Major Al Morrison, horns up, four bass beats into it and away we go... and I did - at a cadence of about 160! Barry Bell called a halt, calmly walked over to Ronn "Skip" Prokop, muttered a few words, then walked away. Barry asked Al to start again. Ronn motioned to me saying that he would take the four beat cue, and away we went. I basically kept that cadence during the rest of rehearsal. Believe me, I remembered it for the next three years running! After first going to join, to try out, to totally messing up and being so bloody nervous I was told..."see you next week!"

I was now going to be an Optimist. I was totally blown away!

## My Path to The Optimists

by Mel Dey

I STARTED OUT with the 618 RCAC (Royal Canadian Air Cadets) squadron band out of Fort York Armory around '56/57, along with Terry Sweeney, Jim Stewart, Ron Cottrell and Bill Thorne.

In 1958 most of use ended up in a military band out of the University Armory (ordinance unit or something) with Doug Saunders in charge. Doug wanted to develop a drum corps and compete. The military said O.K. but we could not wear their uniforms. The result was a unit called the Royal Knights, we had a calypso theme, marched barefoot and wore straw hats. Check the list of scores and you'll see the Royal Knights dead last at the 1958 National Championships.

At the end of 1958, Saunders amalgamated us with Leaside (they were struggling to survive), so we marched one season (1959) with Leaside Lions Jungle Kings.

I joined the Optimists after the 1959 season. At that time there was an exodus from Leaside as Terry, myself, Jim, and Ron joined the Optimists. As I recall we each auditioned individually for Barry Bell in the corridor of

Jarvis Collegiate. Within a week or two Phil Campbell, Dave Nesbitt, Neil Ibbitson, Dave Bignell, Bill Thorne and Doug MacKenzie had also left Leaside to join Optimists. That's a total of 10 ex-Leaside members, providing about 20% of the (50-55 man) 1960 Optimists line.



Mel Dey in the 618 RCAC Squadron Band



Mel Dey (1961)

Terry, myself, Jim, Ron and Bill were together thro' Air Cadets, Royal Knights, Leaside and Optimists.

### Recollection:

On a long haul bus trip I fell asleep in my seat. I wore glasses at the time, and when I woke up I wasn't sure what was going on, I couldn't see much. The lenses of my glasses had been painted with white buck shoe polish while I was snoozing. I have a feeling my friend Ronn Prokop might have been involved.

*(Editors note: It was Dave Johns, who was sitting behind you.)*

Also the first time in Jersey, Ronn introduced me to some Garfield guys he knew from his Scout House days. These guys jokingly referred to Ronn as "Pork chop".



Leaside Lions Jungle Kings

# UCKALUK MUCKALUK

by Phil Hennings

**O**UR TIME in the Corps. was with members you joked with and had lots of fun. Some of members liked to put a nickname to different guys. The names I remember were Fink, Wiffis, Stinkey, Thumper, Crash, Red, and Uckaluk Muckaluk, to name a few.

Of course we all knew the reason why we called the guys by these names. The story of one in particular member was Uckaluk Muckaluk. It happened on a May long weekend in 1960, we had been invited to play at the Preview of Champions in Jersey City N.J. in the Roosevelt Stadium. The trip there was about 12 hours but, this was a long weekend so it could take longer. The trip ended at the church where St.Pats Drum Corps was billeting us.

They knew that we were from the far north. We thought it would be fun to play a joke on the Host Corps. To my recollection, this is what happened.

A member of the Optimists, Kenny Nakagawa said he would go along with the joke and we would say he was an Eskimo. Kenny was Oriental but, we knew they wouldn't know the difference. They were greeting each Corps. member when Kenny exited

the bus and we told the Host Corps that he doesn't speak English. They wanted to know what he ate and they were told he only eats raw fish and whale blubber. We did have lots of laughs from this trip to the USA. This is the story of how one persons name {Kenny} was changed to UCKALUK MUCKALUK.

Thanks Kenny for being a good sport.



Kenny Nakagawa, AKA Uckaluk Muckaluk



Toronto Optimists (Preview of Champions, Jersey City, 1960)

## A Story of “Crash” Hennings

by Phil Hennings

**H**OW COULD anyone, who was a member of this fine Corps, not have fond memories. The length of time I was a member I met so many people that I could not forget.

One memory was in 1960, after a contest that we were in that night, it was time to leave for home. Lorne Ferrazzutti had worked all day and managed to arrive at this contest just in time to see us go through our show. Like always, he never liked to



Mr. Lorne Ferrazzutti, shown on the left, owner of the late model white car, arrived on the crash scene and immediately began “discussing” the details with Mr. Phil Hennings, the alleged driver from Toronto (Mr. Hennings was later identified as the driver). Mr. Hennings was quick to point out that the car he hit was just sitting, stopped in the middle of the highway and...

miss a contest, always got there no matter what. Lorne being tired because he had worked all day asked me if I would like to drive his car back to Toronto with him and a couple of Corps members. I was happy to be able to help him. Lorne was one who would always go out of his way to help someone.

The time came to leave and off we went it was about 11:30 PM and an hour later down a lonely stretch of a two lane highway with the passengers half asleep, all of a sudden in my lane on the road was a car stopped with no lights on. I had no chance to avoid the car in front of me, suddenly we collided and I smashed into the back of the car. The car I hit went forward up into a driveway and stopped. The driver fell out of the car, he and his passenger were drunk. All the years of driving this was the first time I ever seen someone stopped in the middle of a highway. I was so pleased that nobody was hurt. The OPP (Ontario Provincial Police) came almost minutes after the collision and told us that they would look after things and for us to be on our way. Lorne got home, he spoke to his insurance company and to this day Lorne says I owe him for the deductible. Ha ha just a joke, I hope, ha ha.

Members in the Corps were always there for somebody who was in need of help. Friends are never forgotten. Lorne and I will never forget that night. Oh ya, we are still friends. A friend to the end.



## Terry Sweeney joins The Optimists

**W**ELL, IT WAS the fall of 1959. The Drum Corps season was over and decisions had to be made. Mel Dey, Jim Stewart and myself decided to try out for The Toronto Optimists. Ron Cottrell had just returned from spending the 1959 competitive season in England and decided to follow us and hopefully join the reigning Canadian Junior Champions.

For the past two years, one in Royal Knights, and then Leaside Lions Jungle Kings we had listened to them at our rehearsals near the Shell Tower on the CNE (Canadian National Exhibition) grounds and they sounded great. Did we have any chance of joining? Down we went to Jarvis Collegiate, each of us played for Barry Bell (wow) in a stairwell. We all made it.

I joined the solo soprano line (lead line today) with Al Morrison, Jim Patten, and Warren Berger. A week later more Jungle Kings followed: Phil Campbell, Dave Nesbitt, Neil Ibbitson, Bill Thorne, and Doug MacKenzie. Later in the year we learned that we were most welcome as the Corps had lost



*Terry Sweeney (1961)*

a number of members. That winter we practiced at Jarvis Collegiate and then moved to the CNE grounds in early spring.

Our first show with the Optimists was in Jersey City in May. We were billeted with The Chicago Cavaliers who were chasing Blessed Sacrament. We made a lot of friends, played acey-deucey and practiced hard for the show. *(continued next page)*



*Toronto Optimists relaxing while Blessed Sacrament performs (Preview of Champions)*

## Recollections from Corps members (continued)

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Out we went onto the field at Roosevelt Stadium which was filled with thousands of spectators. As we stood waiting for the inspection Barry could see that the newcomers were nervous (what a crowd) and asked permission to face the Corps backfield away from the crowd to complete the inspection. The 1960 season had begun. With the inspection over, we turned and stepped up to the starting line. We opened with Meadowlands off the line. It was a powerful number and we did an acceptable show finishing with a standing ovation. Last place and boos from the crowd to show their displeasure with the placement left all of us empowered and ready for the season.

Falconer NY, a senior contest, and we wowed the crowd and finished about 8 points above the rest, even though our split horn line marched towards each other and one line (mine) came in four beats too early!!! With a party and dance afterwards it was a great experience. August saw the Corps in Rome NY. Blessed Sacrament (The Golden

Knights) had just won the VFW Championships. Their bus arrived at the practice field covered in sayings: “Chariot of the Gods”, “Pinnacles of Perfection” and many more. The members opened the windows and piled out of the bus. No door exit for these guys.

That evening found us on the starting line, again waiting for inspection, perhaps we were nervous but not like Jersey City. We had worked hard all season and knew that we were ready. Of course, during inspection on the line Blessed Sac formed up behind us and the comments flew. The only one that I can remember is: “get this garbage off the field”. At the retreat ceremony the “garbage” placed second to Sac by 0.5 points.

Another Canadian Championship with De La Salle becoming our new rival, a show at Varsity stadium and an indoor show in Buffalo NY and the season was over. The “Green Machine” had arrived and I and my buddies are a part of it.



*Toronto Optimists (Rome, NY, 1960)*

# Lorne looks back at the early days

**A**T DANFORTH TECH, Barry was the corps director, the music director, the horn instructor, the arranger and the business manager. He also wrote and instructed the drill, taught music lessons to new recruits, plus other duties. I helped where I could; however, we were spinning our wheels.

Our new corps, the Optimists Drum Corps, began with experienced horns, drums and guard members. It was a dream come true! And we had the planning skills of Al Baggs and Barry!

Barry and I worked with the corps while Al Baggs did all the rest. He even started a feeder corps to teach young people how to play horns, drums and guard. That gave us two corps: the competing corps and the feeder corps, with both of them under one umbrella. Barry and I no longer had to teach recruits.



*Bantam Optimists (East York Stadium, 1960)*

Even though 1959 and 1960 were building years, we won both years convincingly. During that time, we added more instructors and staff. We went from four people: Barry, Burton, Baggs and myself to 12 people, including a drill instructor named Doug McPhail.



*Lorne Ferrazzutti (2013)*

Doug had played a horn with both Western Tech and The Optimists before aging out. He was a friend of mine and Barry. He also had a very high IQ. Doug wrote some very high General Effect drills!

In 1959, we had a competition at the CNE (Canadian National Exhibition) on the west side baseball diamond. At the competition, a young gentleman introduced himself. He was an assistant drum instructor to the great Bobby Thompson from



*Doug McPhail*



## Looking back by Lorne Ferrazzutti (continued)

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the Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights. He was visiting the C.N.E. when he heard the Drum Corps. He asked whether he could give me a couple of pointers. He said he noticed instructors giving their corps a big pep talk before going on the line. He said never “rev” the corps and especially the drum line because they will lose cadence. All the corps here came running off the line. When coming on the field, use a simple beat to calm the corps and put them in a groove. The beat should be at a cadence of 120. That was brilliant advice!

I mentioned to Barry what he said and Barry’s response was, “OK, let’s do it! But keep it secret!”



*Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights (Rome, 1961)*

At our next rehearsal, I told the drumline and asked them to keep it confidential. Let’s all think about a beat we want to use. When we next rehearsed the drumline began experimenting with different beats. I was walking away when I heard a bass drum beat, played at 120 beats per minute. One bass drummer played all the eighth notes and accents while the other bass drummer played only the accents. I stopped in my tracks and I turned around and said to myself there’s the magic beat! I don’t know who came up with that beat but I knew we were going to use it. Back then, we called it the “Indian” beat. I guess that, today, we would call it the indigenous beat.

I talked to Dave Johns before writing about this. He and Frans Rood were bass drummers back then.

He told me they were told to play at 116 beats per minute. He said that we played at that cadence to get the corps members in a good frame of mind.

I know we had a great drum section even with Harry Clark gone. His replacement was Vic Krukliis who came from Columbus. Vic was a fantastic drummer who was as cool as a cucumber. Nothing rattled him. He was a godsend to The Optimists’ drum section.

We also had an outstanding Colour Guard. They worked out in the school gym, but nobody paid much attention to them. Barry and I kept our focus on the horns and drums, so we never went to the gym to see them.

Eric Burton (the guard instructor) went to Rochester to learn about all the protocols of colour guards. Eric had a lot of friends in the Grey Knights Senior Drum Corps and they were willing to share all the information he needed. Eric did a fantastic job instructing The Optimists’ Color Guard. In early 1961, he got a job offer in Rochester, left The Optimists and moved his family to Rochester. A young man named Mike Layton replaced him. Mike was a great choice!

Grantham Drum Corps invited us to a show that they were sponsoring in St. Catharines. It was an indoor show, not a contest, that included corps from the Niagara area. The performance venue was a local armoury. I was on the second floor when they announced the Optimists. I could hear our bass



*Grantham Police Boys' Band (1960)*

## Looking back by Lorne Ferrazzutti (continued)

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drum beat outside the entrance. Our Colour Guard preceded the corps. First was the Guard Captain dressed in white. He came out with that drum corps style of strutting while the rest followed at five-foot intervals.

It was amazing the way the guard marched to their positions with rifles spinning, flags parallel to the floor, then one-by-one, snapping them up. The audience applauded loudly. I was standing behind Police Chief Norm Fach who was the director of Grantham. He said in a loud voice, “these guys are taught by professionals”. A rumour was floating around that The Optimist Club had a lot of money and had hired professional musicians to teach the corps. He then said that “they should be banned from competing”. Both Barry and I had heard that rumour but that’s all it was - a rumour.

The corps did their drill using smaller steps. The acoustics were so bad that you could barely recognize the music! The guard did their drill. Actually, it was like a drill within a drill. I couldn’t keep my eyes off the guard. Doug McPhail had written some outstanding guard manoeuvres. As the show progressed, we went into the Colour Presentation and the guard did their magic. Rifles spinning and flags snapping up as the guard formation came through the cops to the sideline.

Then the rifles knelt - still doing rifle tricks - before holding their rifles in one hand high over their heads - honouring the National Flag. That brought the house down! All of our guard members, except the rifles, were six feet or more. They looked even taller in their shakos! Eric had once said to me he wanted 6 foot plus people for the guard. Eric was a good friend and we all missed him.

At the 1961 Canadian championships at Waterloo I missed the prelims because of my job in retail. When I got there Barry told me that De La Salle had beaten us by 2-1/2 points. He then said the corps

was in the gym. I told them to meditate and think about what they could do better at the finals.

The Optimist were the last to compete. De La Salle was on the line before them. I was watching at a field level with my back to the wall. Del was all charged up and came off the line like gangbusters at a cadence of about 130 beats per minute. My opinion was that they lost cadence off the line and I heard some ensemble problems. They had lost enough points to make a difference. From there on, they did a powerful show.

The Optimists were next. Off the line was powerful. The company front had a bit of a curve but the corps quickly recovered. The corps put on their best show of the year. I think the advice Barry gave them paid off.



*Toronto Optimists Colour Guard (Nationals, Hamilton, 1960)*

After the contest, I went for a drink of water and one judge came up to me and whispered, “the Optimists won by 5/100 of a point. But don’t tell anyone!” I was walking back to the field when I saw Barry coming to meet me. He was pale and concerned that the Optimists had lost. I said “hey Barry, a judge told me we won by 5/100 of a point”. Barry stopped in his tracks, looked at me but said nothing; however, the colour came back to his face. The Toronto Optimists had won their fourth straight championship!

In 1962, De La Salle lost many members from aging out. The tables were turned.



## John Robert Coull

February 17, 1951 - September 2, 2021

**Corps: Toronto Optimists, Scarborough Firefighters**

John marched 1968 and 1969 with the Optimists. He took 1970 off then joined the Scarborough Firefighters/Princemen to march with his brother Doug. He played with Firefighters in 1971 and 1972. John's brother, Doug, was a drill instructor with the Seneca Optimists and his sister, Sandy, was a member of Seneca Optimists' excellent colour guard.

*"John was just a fine and talented guy. Our loss. "*  
(Greg Oxenham)

*"John was a quiet and determined guy who gave his all to our group. "* (Larry Blandford)



Toronto Optimists, 1968



Toronto Optimists, Batavia, New York 1969



## **Chris Taylor**

**September 16, 2021**

**Corps: Guelph Opti-Knights, De La Salle, Oakland Crusaders, Anaheim Kingsmen, Guelph Royales and Optimists Alumni**

Chris was a passionate drummer who always had a pair of drumsticks. He kept his passion for music throughout his life.

He began his drum corps career with the Guelph Opti-Knights then, in 1973 or 1974, he joined De La Salle. In 1975 Chris moved to California and joined the Anaheim Kingsmen; however, Kingsmen did not field a corps that year. He marched with Oakland Crusaders in 1976 and 1977 then was Oakies' tenor instructor in 1978. In later years he marched with the Guelph Royales.

Chris was one of the very early members of the Optimists Alumni. He joined the Optimists Alumni's excellent drumline and played quads in both 2003 and 2004. The corps had four quads: Chris, Jim Kane, Mark Lewis and, keeping it in the family, Chris' brother, Al.



*Toronto Optimists reunion (2003)*



*Chris, Mark Lewis and Jim Kane.*



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

## Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter: Staff and contributors

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

**Or mail:** Bob Carell:  
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E-Photos should be sent to:  
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If your photos were taken using a digital camera, please save them to your hard drive then email the unedited photos.

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