

Don Daber

by Bob Carell

In 1960, Don Daber burst onto the Drum Corps scene with an explosion of creative art, single-handedly changing the way we viewed Canadian Drum Corps and the way drum corps promoted themselves.



Don Daber (about 1967)

His distinctive line drawings, photographs and montages quickly appeared at the highest levels of the North America Drum Corps movement. Who can forget Don's photos that graced the pages of so many drum corps magazines? Or the record jackets, buttons, crests, souvenirs, programs, cartoons and logos that Don created?

Don was a renowned illustrator and photographer in North American Drum Corps circles. He served the Toronto Optimists and Seneca Optimists in various high-profile capacities plus he holds the distinction of being the Optimists' longest serving Director. Don was the creator of Green Capsule Comments (GCC) and, until his passing, continued to contribute to the publication. He inspired many young individuals to enter the professions of management, photography, and publishing. His creative contributions to Drum Corps World have been an integral part of that publication's enduring success.

Over the years, Don wore a variety of hats within the Optimists' organization, usually wearing them at the same time. He has been Optimists Corps Photographer, Publicity Director, Corps Director, and Navigator (not one of his success stories) on bus trips. In fact, Don would accept any job that needed to be done.

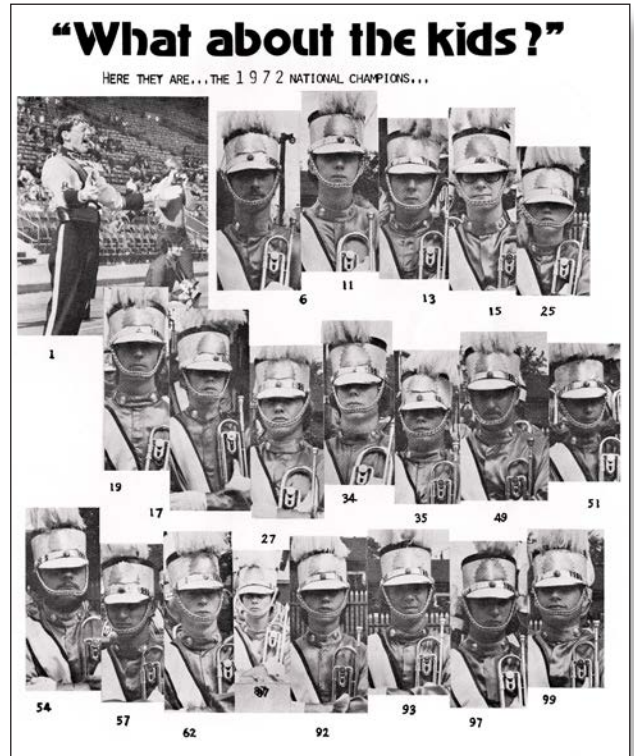
Don's contributions to the drum corps activity extended far beyond the Toronto Optimists, holding various positions with the Ontario, Canadian, New York-Canadian, and AJrC Drum Corps Associations. In his "spare" time, Don designed the album covers for many drum corps records produced by Sunhill, Fleetwood and Corpsdisc. He was the graphic designer for many corps shows, creating artwork for posters and programs. Every major Drum Corps publication, including Drum Corps News, Drum Corps Digest and Drum Corps World, contained Don's photos.

After Don's passing in 2019, Doug MacKenzie wrote this beautiful verbal portrait of Don: *"I first met Don in 1960, my first full year with the Toronto Optimists. I was in awe of his talent as a commercial artist and the many attributes he brought to the corps through his art, writing, and ideas. My tenure playing in the corps lasted for eight years. Throughout that time, Don came up with many inventive ideas that made belonging to the Optimists a special thing – not only the championships we won but the banquets, five-year rings, twenty-one club, GCC and the store on Keele Street, to name a few that he was either instrumental in or partnered with others in bringing to*



Don Daber (1963)

fruition. For many of us, the history of our teenage years was captured by Don on film; if it had not been for that, there likely would be no record of our participation or achievements in the drum corps. In 1974, when I became the corps director, Don was there with many suggestions and ideas that made the 1975 season most enjoyable for me and hopefully for the membership. Don always and only cared about the kids. “What about the kids?” “What about the kids?” That was Don’s rally cry; he really did care. It was always fun to be with Don – I never heard him speak ill of anyone or talk down to anyone. It was always fun to be with him after a rehearsal and a few libations when you knew Don would start up his “Chinese Food, Chinese Food” mantra. We would all wind up a Sai Woo’s, for you guessed it – Chinese Food. Don was kind and generous. In his later years, he suffered a form of dementia that would rob him and his many friends of meaningful social contact. Even though he had to go through this state to where we are today, many of us continue to benefit through his work in the drum corps world and his many photographs on the Optimist Alumni and Toronto Optimists History websites. Don may have left us, but his legacy lives on through the media that he loved.”



From GCC, September 1972

Don’s early days

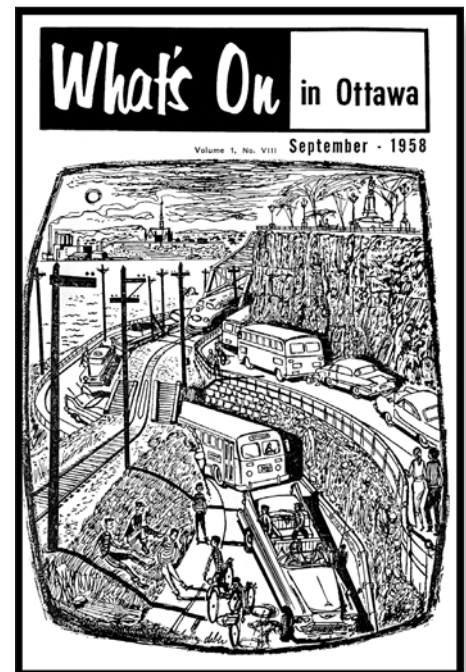
Don was born in Kirkland Lake, Ontario on May 2, 1929. He graduated from Kirkland Lake Collegiate and Vocational School in 1948. He was the only student in special art



A young Don Daber

classes (everyone else was studying Latin). While in grade 9, he was a member of the school’s Cadet Corps. The Cadet corps had a ‘trumpet’ band which, in his words, used ‘brass, roped bugles’. Don had discovered the world of marching and music!

In 1949, Don moved to Toronto to study at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University). After graduating in 1952, he began a career as a graphic artist. He moved to Ottawa, Ontario for his first full-time job, at Crawley Films, where he worked as a graphic artist.



Sample of Don’s early work (1960)

In 1956, Don and a partner started their own company called Advertising Art Associates. One of their clients was The Boy Scouts Association of Canada, for whom Don did artwork and photography. His work with the Boy Scouts included promotional work and comic books about Scouting adventures. This work is very similar to what Don later did for The Toronto Optimists.

Over the years, starting in Ottawa, Don displayed oil paintings and watercolours at various public places for fun and profit. He also hired himself out for streetscapes and art tutoring.

Don discovers drum corps

In 1960, Don discovered drum corps and his involvement with corps progressed at lightning speed. We know the chronology because Don recorded the dates in his journal.

It began when Don was visiting an aunt in Waterloo, and he joined the family for an event at the Kitchener Auditorium. This excursion would transform his life. The outing took them to a Scout House show on May 28, 1960. This gave Don his first taste of Drum Corps and he fell in love with it. After the show, the audience was told that they could enter the arena floor and mix with the participants. Don did that and, in speaking with some members, he got Wilf Blum's telephone number. On June 2nd, Don phoned Wilf Blum.

The very next day, as he was leaving work, Don heard music similar to what he had heard in Kitchener. He followed the sound. It led him to De La Salle College where the drum corps was playing as part of the school's commencement. He spoke to members and found out that they practised at the waterfront.

Don's introduction to Scout House had given him the idea to write an article for the Weekend Magazine. Weekend Magazine was a supplement to many Canadian newspapers, including the Toronto Telegram. Now that he had discovered De La Salle, Don was even more enthusiastic.

On June 4th, Don attended a Scout House practise in Hamilton and, on the 10th, he attended a De La Salle practise at Toronto's waterfront. The following day, Don attended a Junior "B" contest at East York Stadium. The Parkdale Lions Club sponsored the contest, and the Optimists performed in exhibition. This was probably the first time that he had seen the Optimists. It was at this contest that Don first met Clare Reid, the Secretary-Treasurer of what was then called the Canadian Bugle and Trumpet Band Association. Two days later, Don was at Toronto's waterfront watching both Del and Optimists practice (the corps' practice fields were near each other). At this rehearsal, Don met Lorne Ferrazzutti, Optimists' drum instructor.



Painting of a Boy Scout by Don Daber

THE PRESTON SCOUT HOUSE
9th ANNUAL
SPRING SHOW
FRIDAY AND SATURDAY
MAY 27th, 28th
8 p.m.
IN THE
KITCHENER AUDITORIUM

*In addition to the Preston Scout House
Band our special guest will be . . .*

FRIDAY and SATURDAY NIGHTS . . .

CANADA'S MARCHING AMBASSADORS
1956-57-58 WINNERS OF THE CANADIAN SENIOR
CHAMPIONSHIP, IN A DUAL PRESENTATION AS
THE FAMILIAR MARCHING AMBASSADORS AND
AS THE 2nd SIGNALS REGIMENT!

FOR TICKETS WRITE:
Blum's Pharmacy, Preston, or Kitchener Auditorium
Admission 75¢ - Reserved \$1.00

CANADA'S FAMOUS
SCOUT HOUSE BUGLE BAND

Poster for Don's intro to corps (May, 1960)

On Saturday the 18th, Don was back in Hamilton for a Scout House practise and, on Monday, he returned to the waterfront where the Optimists were practising. This would be the first time that Don spoke with actual members of the Optimists. Don mentions corps members Ivor Bramley, Bob Davis, Jim Fletcher and Colin Hedworth. Carol Robinson, who worked for Weekend magazine, was also at the rehearsal and she became Don's contact at the publication. Two days later, Don attended another Optimists' rehearsal at which he first met Optimists' Corps Direct, Mr Al Baggs.

In the next few days, Don accompanied the Optimists to a show in Kitchener and attended practices of both Scout House and the Optimists. On July 2nd, Don travelled with the Optimists to a contest in Rochester, NY.



Toronto Optimists (Rochester, 1960)

On Wednesday, July 6, Don gave a preliminary 'rough outline' of the type of story he was proposing to the Weekend Magazine. Since the text does not match the photos I am assuming that Don might have used an existing layout, before adding the images and headings. Don received a letter dated July 14/60 from Weekend Magazine rejecting his proposal. The reason given was that they already had their quota of music articles for the year; however, they encouraged him to try again next year. Don does not appear to have followed through; however, in 1964 the Toronto Telegram published a two-page spread on the Toronto Optimists. This spread included photos taken by Don.

Over the next few days, Don attended practices of both De La Salle and the Optimists. On Monday, July 11, Don asked Mr. Baggs if he could become the Corps' official photographer. This was barely a month after discovering drum corps and weeks after encountering the Optimists! Mr. Baggs did not give an immediate answer; however, a few days later, on a trip to Falconer, NY, Mr. Baggs invited Don to join the corps on every trip.

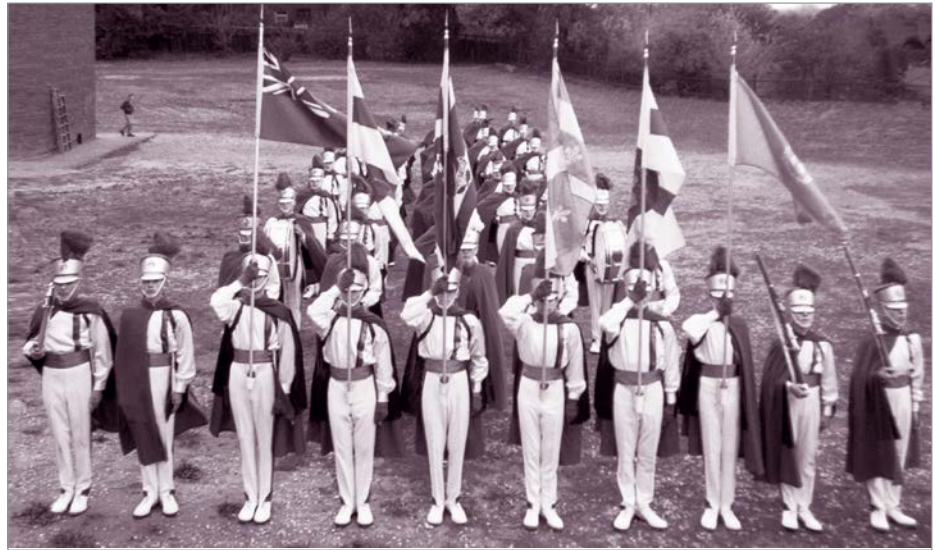


The first part of Don's draft layout for Weekend Magazine (1960)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Don Daber (continued)

Don does not mention in his journal why he chose The Optimists. He once told Vern Reid how thrilled he was that The Optimists had invited him on trips so soon after meeting them. Regarding Scout House, Don mentioned a possible reason to Vern Reid. He thought that, after hearing that he was also spending time with the Optimists, Mr. Blum might have thought Don was a spy for the Optimists. Another possibility is that Don did not have a driver's licence and getting to Preston could have been a problem.

Even though Don was now the official photographer for Optimists, he was still helping Del. The day after going to Falconer with the Optimists, Don was at De La Salle "Oaklands" photographing the corps in their new, white uniforms.



De La Salle (First time in new uniforms, 1960)

A week later, he accompanied Del to St John's Training School in Uxbridge, where he took some colour photos of the corps.

Don travelled to Hamilton with Mr. Baggs and Clare Reid, for a CDCA meeting (then called the Canadian Bugle and Trumpet Band Association). At this meeting, Clare gave Don a contract to do the artwork and program for the upcoming Championship contest. Don also designed the cover for the record album of the 1960 Canadian Championships.

On Wednesday, August 3rd, at the waterfront, the Optimists surprised Don with a huge membership card (30 by 24 inch), cementing their relationship. Don was, now, an official member of the Toronto Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps! The membership card, signed by Mr Baggs and every corps member, is still in his files. In just two months he had gone from knowing nothing about drum corps to being a member of, and the photographer for, the Toronto Optimists. The next day, on August 3, Don informed De La Salle that he was, now, officially connected to the Toronto Optimists.



Don's BIG Membership Card, signed by all corps members (Aug, 1960)

Don's photographic work

Most people outside the Optimists only know of Don through his photos. These images, primarily documenting the history of the Optimists, graced the pages of every major drum corps publication. Without these photos, there would be no record of our involvement with the drum corps activity.

Over the years, I have scanned and restored thousands of Don's negatives and about 1,500 slides. Most of these photos cover his early years with the corps and represent only a small percentage of Don's work. Sadly, much of Don's work has disappeared.

Even though the Seneca Optimists disbanded after the 1978 season, Don continued taking photos. In fact, he photographed corps all the way into the 1990s. Don never learned how to drive so, unless he was driven to a contest, he would have taken these photos in the Greater Toronto area.

This publication contains many images taken by Don, so I will not include additional ones here.

Don and The Optimists

During his years with the Optimists (Toronto Optimists and Seneca Optimists) Don was the corps' photographer, the publicity director and the Corps Director. In fact, Don replaced Al Baggs as Optimists' Corps Director in 1963, only three years after he had discovered drum corps. Don served as Corps Director from 1963 through 1971, as well as 1973 and 1974. This gives him the distinction of being the longest serving Corps Director in the history of the Optimists.

Don had many creative ideas which he felt would benefit the corps and increase the dedication of its members. One of his earliest ideas was an annual post-season banquet at which awards were handed out. Initially, this included the presentation of Membership Certificates and corps rings, given to those who had been members for five years. Later, he added tie tacks, with the corps crest, for those who had completed three years in the corps. Those who were aging out, the twenty-one club, were given beer mugs, which included the corps crest. Don started handing out wallet-sized Membership Cards to members. Another of Don's ideas was to produce a new corps button and jacket crest each time the corps won another Nationals. Starting in 1963, he produced pocket calendars which showed the corps' schedule for the spring and summer.



Don Daber (1966)

For many in the Optimists' organization, the crowning achievement was Don's 1961 creation of Green Capsule Comments (GCC). In 1976, after the Seneca Optimists was created through the merger of the Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Princemen, GCC was renamed Gold Capsule Comments. This was a clever way of leaving the acronym, GCC, intact. GCC began as a communication vehicle for members; however, it eventually became a subscription publication available to the greater community. Published from 1960 until 1978 when the Optimists vanished from the competitive field, it was the cornerstone of the Optimists' championship caliber communications..

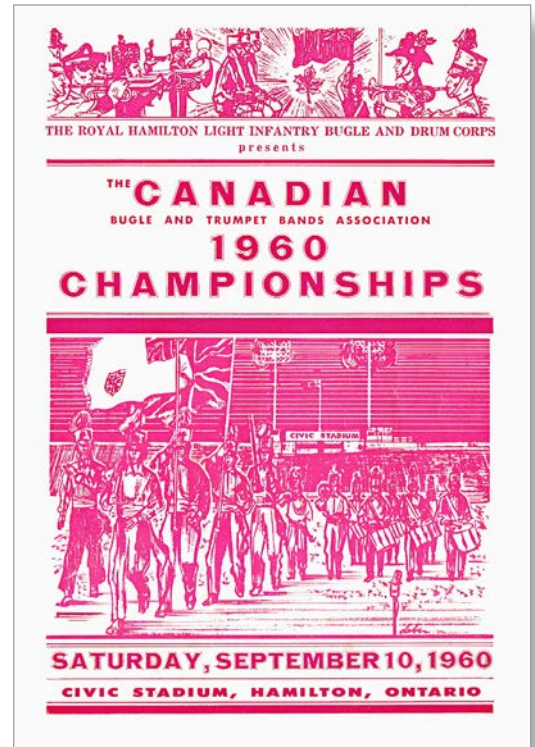
Corps associations

Don began working with the Canadian Drum Corps Association (CDCA) in 1960, just months after he discovered drum corps. His first commission was to do the artwork for both the program and the record album cover for the 1960 Nationals.

In the ensuing years, Don held positions on the boards of the CDCA, ODCA, NY York-Canadian and the AJrC Associations. In fact, Don and the Optimists were founding members of AJrC.

Record album covers

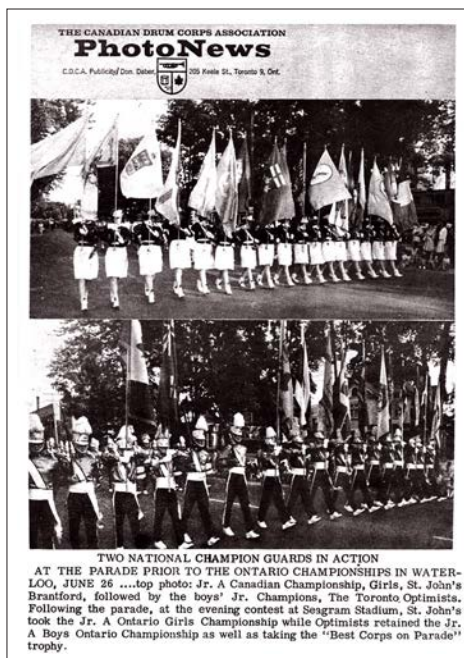
Within months of discovering drum corps, the CDCA had commissioned Don to design an album cover for the 1960 Canadian Nationals. In the following years, many record companies hired Don to design album covers for their drum corps records. Those companies included Sunhill, Fleetwood, Corpsdisc, Fantasy Sound and DCI. In fact, Don not only designed the first album covers for DCI, he also designed the first logo for DCI.



Don's first program cover (1960)

Publications

For many years, almost every issue of every drum corps publication included, at least, one of Don's photos of the Optimists. Don also supplied these magazines with photos of other corps. Issues of Drum Corps



PhotoNews (Drum Corps News, 1965)

News regularly included one of Don's PhotoNews montages. These montages, sponsored by the CDCA, included photos of various Canadian Corps.

Many editions of GCC included one or more of Don's cartoons. Later, Don started producing cartoons for Drum Corps World. Many of these fall into a series called "The Rookie". Steve Vickers included many of Don's cartoons in his book "The Art of Drum Corps World".



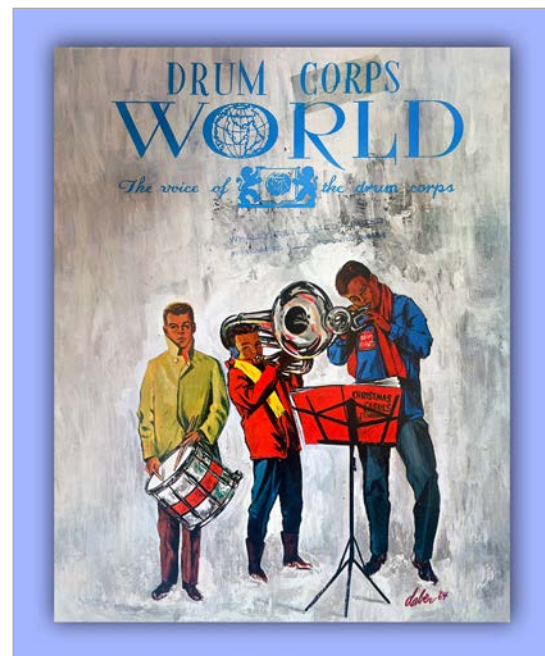
The Rookie (GCC, 1973)

After the Optimists

Don continued to create and display oils and watercolours at various public places. In addition, he enjoyed wandering the streets, taking photographs of interesting buildings. He always carried a small sketchbook to draw whatever caught his fancy as he went about his daily life.

As a youth and into young adulthood, Don was a postage stamp collector. Although not actively involved for many years, he continued his interest by reading about the hobby.

Don's biggest music interest was jazz from the 30's, 40's and 50's. He had a comprehensive collection of LP's, reel-to-reel tapes and cassette tapes. Interestingly, Don had very few drum corps recordings. In fact, Vern Reid, Don's archivist, has talked about these tapes. After discovering a real "gem" he would get excited; however, when he listened to the recording, he'd find that Don had overwritten the drum corps tape with jazz music from the radio!



Don's cover for December, 1964 DCW

On the website

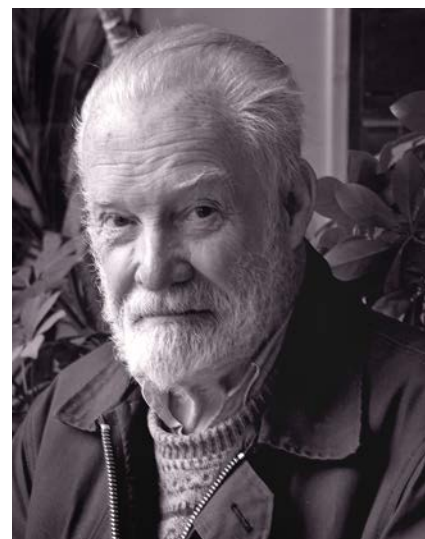
A section in the Toronto Optimists History Photo Gallery is dedicated to Don. To find it, go to the Home Page of the Photo Gallery and look for Don Daber under category. This section contains five albums showing photos of Don plus selections of Don's work



Don Daber (Reunion, 1998)

Don began photographing drum corps in 1960. The majority of the photos in the Toronto Optimists, Seneca Optimists, Optimists Feeder Corps and Other Corps albums were taken by Don.

You will find many of these photos in "The Old Days" section of the Toronto Optimists History website. This section contains albums for the Toronto Optimists, Seneca Optimists, Optimists' feeder corps (Bantams, Cadets, Lancers and cadet-Lancers) plus many other drum & bugle corps.

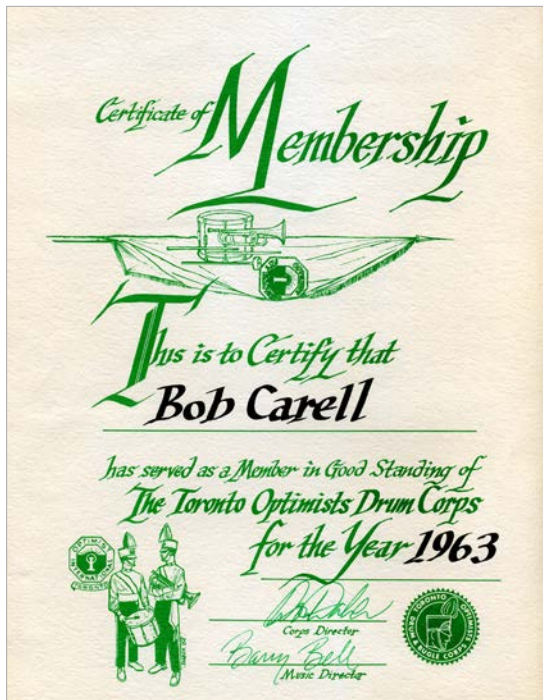


Don Daber (2006)

I have just created a new remembrance video of Don and posted it on YouTube.

To watch it, here is the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETAbBq7jxjI>

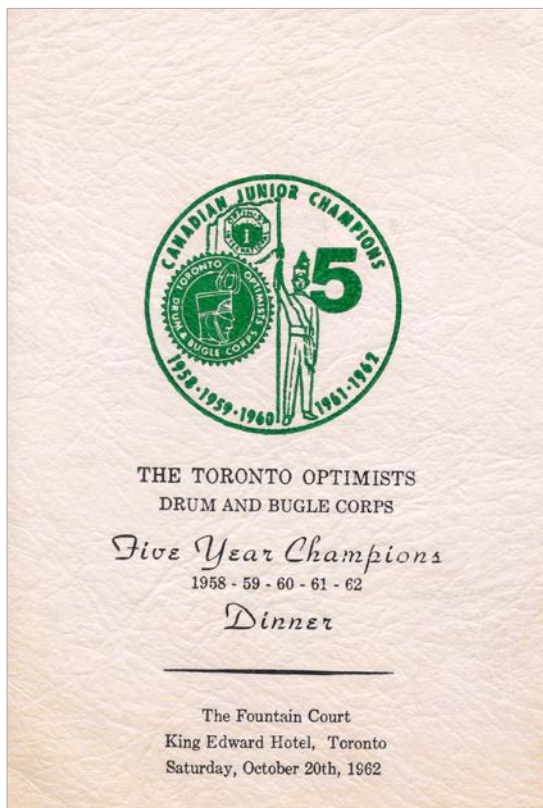
Here are a few of Don's ideas for corps members



Membership Certificate



Membership Card



1963 Banquet Program



5-Year Ring



21 Club Beer Mug



3-Year Tie Tack



Cuff Links

Don was always looking for ways to promote the Optimists. Here are a few examples.

NOW AVAILABLE!!
TORONTO OPTIMISTS DRUM CORPS

sweat shirts & T-shirts

Canadian-made "Sons-of" Sweatshirts, white only with long sleeves as illustrated on the left. On the front, the Official Optimist Crest with lettering CANADIAN JUNIOR CHAMPIONS 1958-1959-1960-1961. Sizes available---small, medium and large. Also available The Official Corps' T-Shirt with the "Stanfield" label---the quality name in T-Shirts. Features Non-sag Neck Band; Nylon reinforced---finest combed cotton...will never lose its shape or fit. White only, with the Corps' crest in green, as illustrated. Sizes---Small, Medium and Large. SWEAT-SHIRTS--\$4.50, T-SHIRTS--\$3.00. Sent to you, post paid.

TORONTO OPTIMISTS DRUM CORPS
PUBLICITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS
SUITE 302, 205 KEELE STREET, TORONTO 5,
ONTARIO, CANADA

Selling Optimists-branded merchandise

Seneca Optimists

APPEARANCES (as of May 31, 1978)

JUNE

- 10 Contest 1--Seagram Stadium, Waterloo.
- 11 Contest 2--Brimstone Stadium, Scarborough.
- 12 Contest 3--Ajax High School, Ajax.
- 13 Oshawa.
- 24 Contest 4--Rose Festival, Welland (Parade)
- 25 Exhibition--Scarborough
- 26 Exhibition--Algas Football, CNE Stadium, Toronto.

JULY

- 1 Exhibition--Queen's Park, Toronto, "Canada Day"

AUG.

- 1 Contest 5--DCI East, Allentown, Penn.
- 2 Contest 6--Garfield, N.J.
- 10 Contest 7--"CVC Nationals" Boston, Mass.
- 11 Contest 8--"Dabco Invitational" Montreal, Quebec.
- 13 Contest 9--"Seneca 11 Championships" Toronto.
- 15-16 Camp.
- 16 Contest 10--"N.T. Open" North Tonawanda, N.Y.
- 17 Exhibition--T. Carr Football, Hamilton.
- 18 Exhibition--Galt, Pope Championships, Toronto.
- 19 Contest 12--Centennial Stadium, Kitchener.
- 20 Contest 13--North York Fairground, Toronto.

TOUR 2

AUG.

- 1 Contest 14--American International Butler, Pa.
- 2 Contest 15--"DCI North" Ypsilanti, Mich.
- 3 Contest 16--"J.S. Open" Marion, Ohio.
- 4 Contest 17--DCI Lafayette, Indiana.
- 5 Contest 18--DCI--Spartan City, Iowa.
- 11 Contest 19--DCI--Omaha, Nebraska.
- 12 Contest 20--DCI--Hot Springs, South Dakota.
- 13 Contest 21--DCI--Scottsbluff, Nebraska.
- 17 Contest 22--DCI--Boulder, Colorado.
- 18 Contest 23--DCI Championships, Denver, Col.
- 20 Exhibition--Missouri, Wis.
- 26 Contest 24--Canadian Nationals, Toronto.

The Contest of the Year in Ontario. 8 DCI Corps in competition the evening of July 13th, at Langens Stadium King St. W., Toronto.

SENeca 11

BLUE DEVILS-BLUE STARS-CROSSMEN-GARFIELD MADISON SCOUTS-PHANTOM REGIMENT-SANTA CLARA VANGUARDS IS THE SENeca OPTIMISTS... Tickets from Minkler Auditorium Box Office, Seneca College. Contest sponsored by Seneca College in conjunction with DCI (Drum Corps International)

PARACHUTE POWER '78

Seneca Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps

Mainline Address: P.O. Box 464, Postal Station 'D' Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5P 2K1

SPONSORS: Seneca College of Applied Arts & Technology and The Seneca Optimist Booster Club.

DRUM MAJORS: Keith Guttmacher, 19 & Mike Grimes, 18.

REPERTOIRE: "Seneca and The Larks", "Thames River--West Side Story", "Water On the Run", "Drum Solo--"Bare Dancer", "Seneca".

TOTAL MARCHING MEMBERSHIP: 121. Average age--16. 51--Bass, 25--Percussion, 20--SNC, 19--Rifle, 2--DM.

UNIFORMS: Crest style in traditional cut, highlighted by the colours of yellow & black. Black shaka with black plume. Bays--Black trousers with white stripe. Guard--Black skirts with black boots.

TITLES: 1976-1978, at the DCI Championships, Philadelphia, Penn.
1977--U.S. Open Champions, Marion, Ohio.
Ontario Provincial Champions.
Canadian National Champions.
9th at the DCI Championships, Denver, Colorado.

HISTORY: The Seneca Optimists were formed in February of 1976 with the joining of the Toronto Optimists Drum Corps and The Seneca Percussion. Both corps had been past Canadian National Champions.

PUBLICATIONS: Corps Newsletter "Gold Capsule Comments & Vexillots", Editor Mike Grimes, 126 Lakeshore Drive, Toronto, Ontario M5V 2A2.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Chairman--Wolfgang Petzicka, 40 South St. East, St. Catharines, N.Y.

INSTRUCTORS:
BASS--Peter Byrne, George Novello, Tim Watt, Bill Thomas, Brad Tingley, PERCUSSION--Al Silverstein, Al Kristensen, Pat Irving, Gary Hendry, Phil Porter, GUARD--Stevy Pagan, Lynn Hammy, Lisa Austin, Kim Rozanski, M&M--Cathy Pappino, Mike Williams, Mike Arsenault and Garth Skypa.

EXECUTIVE: Gord O'Halloran--Director.
Assistant Director--Rob Brown, / DCI Representative--Al Tammy, / Registrar--Lore Blakeney, Tour & Transport--Jack Bitt, / Booster Club President--Dan Corning, Finance--Joe Ganna, / Booster Club Rep--Alex Martin, Ways & Means Chairman--John Sklar, / Purchasing--Evert Antonsson, / Director, Seneca Daber--John O'Leary, Publicity & Public Relations--Don Daber, Mike Grimes & Garth Skypa, / Equipment--Colin Medhurst, Barry Vlasak, Bernadette Schiel, Jennifer Moore & Gord Moore.

Corps schedules (1963-1978)

green capsule

oomments 1971

Address all correspondence to:
SUITE 302, 205 KEELE STREET, TORONTO 165, ONTARIO

The official voice of the Optimists. Eleven years in publication. Published monthly or every two months, whichever comes sooner. \$2.00 a year.

Ads in magazines

BANK OF OPTIMISM

ONE UN

OPTIMIST CLUB OF TORONTO INC. DRUM AND BUGLE CORPS

Optimists Money

THIS YEAR

Be a Nonconformist

YOU DON'T HAVE TO JOIN THE "BAN THE BOMB" MOVEMENT

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TAKE LSD...

YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO LIVE IN YORKVILLE

JUST ... CHEER FOR THE OPTIMISTS!

DESTROY THE GREEN

Smile!

THE TORONTO OPTIMISTS DRUM AND BUGLE CORPS

Don designed record album covers for a number of companies, including Sunhill, Fleetwood, Corpsdisc, Fantasy Sound and DCI.



Don's first Album



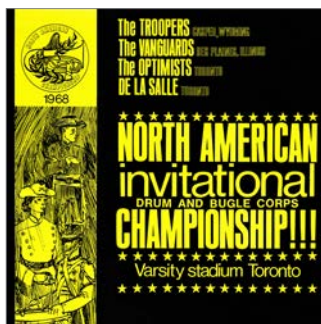
1967 Garfield



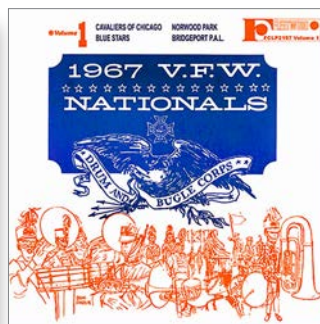
1963 Canadian Nationals



1965 Symphony in Brass



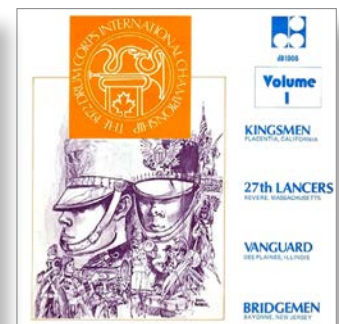
1968 North American



1967 VFW Nationals



1969 Shriners



1972 DCI Finals

Don occasionally painted portraits of corps members. Here are a few.



Rick Cooper



Ray Skyvington



Ray Skyvington with his painting

Here are a few samples of Don's Optimists buttons



These are some of Don's crests for the Optimists



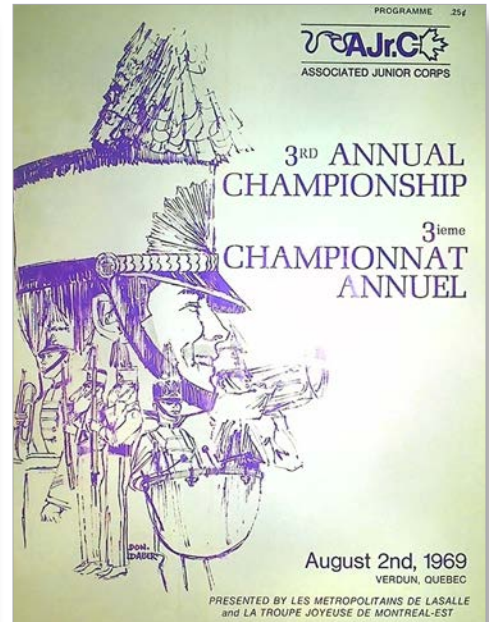
A few examples of Don's promotional materials



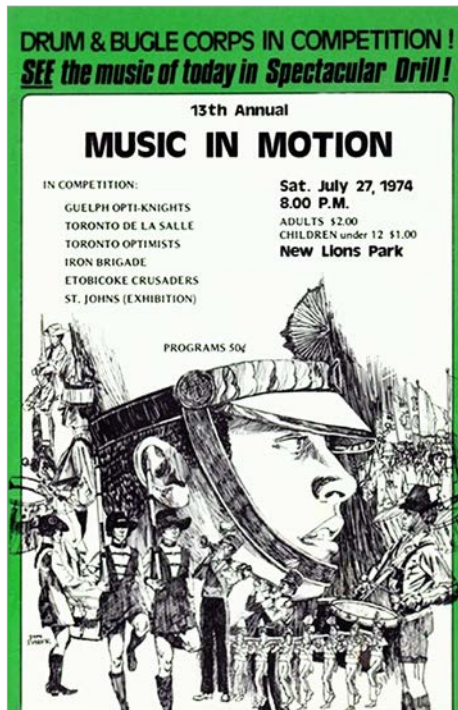
Advertisement for Whaley-Royce



1973 World Open



1969 AJRC Championship



1974 Music In Motion



1972 Canadian Nationals



1977 contest



1971 Shriners Contest