



# 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)

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Our feature article is about De La Salle. Del retained most of its members from 1960 and, as a result, they had an excellent corps in 1961. In fact, for the very first time, De La Salle beat Optimists in a field competition. While Optimists beat Del in the early part of the year, Del pulled ahead as Nationals approached, besting Optimists at the CNE, just before Nationals, at the prelims to Nationals and at the Grape Festival, after Nationals. The loss at the CNE put the "fear of God" into the Optimists, prompting them to simplify the more challenging parts of their show.

We hope you will find this issue to be both interesting and informative.



*Ice Follies, Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto (1961)*

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### January 2022

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TORONTO OPTIMISTS HISTORY - NEWSLETTER: JANUARY 2022

# 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.

The Toronto Optimists History Newsletter is a publication that celebrates the history of the Toronto Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps. It includes historical photos, articles, and information about the corps' past performances and achievements. The newsletter is published quarterly and is available in both physical and digital formats.

**WELCOME TO THE SECOND ISSUE OF THE TORONTO OPTIMISTS HISTORY - NEWSLETTER.** Our first issue was very well received and all of you will continue to enjoy it. In this edition we are publishing 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).

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

**Phil Hennings, Drum Major (1958)**

**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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**Check out the new video: "Memories of 1961" on the website.**

**It has some rare 8mm performance footage we know you'll enjoy.**



### WEBSITE ADDITIONS

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.

**J**UST BEFORE CHRISTMAS, I uploaded another video slideshow to YouTube. The focus of this one is the 1961 Toronto Optimists. My plan had been to do a regular slideshow using music and photos from 1961, but Phil Hennings changed that.

The slideshow was almost finished when Phil sent me a couple of DVDs that included footage from 1961. There was too much camera movement in much of the footage; however, I extracted a few of the better segments and incorporated that footage into the slideshow.

As a result, you can see a bit of the 1961 drill together with footage of the Optimists in the 1961 Grape Festival parade. I do not know the source of the drill segments; however, I am grateful to have them.

The website contains footage showing many units in the 1961 Grape Festival Parade. I have changed the video to include the names of many of those groups. The website also contains video footage showing some of the senior corps at the 1961 Nationals. That video now contains the names of the competing corps.

## WEBSITE UPDATE: What's new on **TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca** – **The 1961 video - Memories of 1961**



## Memories of: 1961

*Title graphic for the 1961 video*



**SNEAK PEEK**

## IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

### In our next newsletter: Chapters 11 and 12 (1962: Winter and the Steamroller)

The next issue of the Newsletter (April) will include Chapters 11 and 12 from Colin Hedworth's book "From Toronto... The Optimists!".

**I**N THESE CHAPTERS Colin discusses 1962. During the winter of 1961/62 turnouts at rehearsals were very poor and those who showed up were discouraged. In spite of this, the competitive season started out with a bang and, as the season progressed, the corps got even better.

In 1962 The Optimists got new uniforms and they first wore those uniforms on July 14, at a contest in Rome, NY. Another first happened at that contest: for the very first time, the Optimists beat the Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights. In September, the corps won their fifth consecutive Nationals..



Toronto Optimists (Rome, NY, 1962)

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

Started as a Boy Scout street parade band  
The Corps rose to heights undreamed of, right  
from its beginning.

## "FROM TORONTO... THE OPTIMISTS!"

A Story of  
The Toronto Optimists  
Drum & Bugle Corps

By Colin Hedworth

# De La Salle “Oaklands”

by Murt Howell

(Historian for De La Salle Drum Corps)

THE HISTORY of the De La Salle Bugle Band and Drum Corps is generally thought to be the period that spans 64 years – from 1910 to the end of 1974. However, the story begins much earlier and doesn't quite end with the 1974 season. The last half of the 19th century was the glory days of the brass band and it is obvious that the Christian Brothers had a fondness for the activity, for it is about this time that we see references to bands being established at their schools in Montreal, Kingston, Toronto and Ottawa (the future Lasalle Cadets).



*This is De La Salle's corps logo. It is a modified version of the Blue and Gold logo. In the early years of the drum corps the band logo was still displayed on the corps' drums.*

We can reasonably assume the first De La Salle band was formed in the fall of 1865, since its first scheduled performance was to be the St. Patrick's Day parade in March 1866. Unfortunately, their appearance was cancelled out of fear for their safety. Racial and religious discrimination was a common occurrence in Toronto in those days and sectarian violence could be guaranteed at least



*De La Salle's Blue and Gold Band beside the school (1951)*

**D**ID YOU EVER WONDER where the name “Oaklands” comes from? – Originally, what is now De La Salle “Oaklands” was part of a 200-acre grant by the Government of Upper Canada in 1798 to Chief Justice Honourable John Elmsley. By 1836 the crown land was given by the Elmsley family to St. James Anglican church. Senator John Macdonald bought 35 acres from the Anglican Church in 1858. He named his new property “Oaklands”, as he often admired the splendid oak trees on the acreage. This land ran up the east side of Avenue Road from Cottingham Street, almost to St. Clair Avenue.

## FEATURE ARTICLE: De La Salle “Oaklands” Drum Corps (continued)

twice a year – St. Patrick’s Day and The Glorious 12th of July. Added to that was the growing fear of invasion from Irish Fenians in the United States, which was expected to happen around St. Patrick’s Day. As a result, the first published report about the De La Salle Band was about their non-appearance. It is ironic, then, that the band’s next reported performance was on Queen Victoria’s birthday, May 24 at a fund-raising picnic for the House of Providence (Providence Villa). It would be another year before we read of the band again, once more at a fund-raising picnic on July 1, 1867, celebrating the creation of Canada.

Since there are no reports of the band in the local press during March 1868 or 1869, it would appear the situation was once again volatile around St. Patrick’s Day. They contributed their talents to a number of fund-raising events and religious festivals during 1867 and, by 1868, were performing about once a month, including a big concert at the Academy on St. Patrick’s Day.

In May 1868, it was reported they were wearing uniforms for the first time and had new instruments.

In that year they also began performing concerts at the St. Lawrence Hall, Toronto’s premier music venue. On March 17, 1869, the band not only participated in the St. Patrick’s Day parade for the first time, but also took up its position at the head of the procession. It would lead the parade every year thereafter. By 1872, they had two bands, the main band at the head of the parade and the junior (or No. 2) band further back, leading the students of De La Salle and the elementary schools.

The 1870s was a period of great growth within in Toronto and surrounding areas. And the Del band was everywhere, doing everything to help, including fund-raising concerts and picnics for new schools and churches. They would continue to be called upon to perform similar services throughout the next 100 years. Unfortunately, on St. Patrick’s Day 1878, a major sectarian riot erupted at St Lawrence Hall only a short block south of De La Salle Duke Street. The result was that the City banned any further St. Patrick’s Day parades and it would be 110 years before there would be another.



De La Salle’s Blue and Gold Band at the CNE

### The Cadet Band

THE CADET MOVEMENT first took root in the elementary schools during the 1890s and had expanded to many high schools in the first few years of the new century. De La Salle had established a cadet corps by 1903 but there is no further mention of the band until 1910. This is the date generally cited as the beginning in Del’s history of the bugle band/drum corps. During the First World War, the cadets and band played an extremely active role in victory bond drives and parading with the troops heading overseas. In 1915, the school relocated after 45 years on Duke Street (Adelaide East) to a new building on Bond Street, next to the Cathedral. It would be the home of the band until 1931. It was also at this time that each cadet corps became affiliated with one of the local regiments and De La Salle was attached to The Irish Regiment. Given their history and heritage, it was a very logical connection that resulted in a return to their musical

roots of 50 years before. They would continue to play Irish music as part of their repertoire for the next 50 years. Another aspect of this connection was the addition of pipers.

A newspaper report of June 1919 (when they were declared the best cadet corps in Ontario) refers to the 200 cadets being paraded by both their pipe band and bugle band. (They also had a String Orchestra.) The cadet corps and band quickly established an international reputation as one of the finest in the world and maintained that level of excellence until they ceased operation in 1948 and 1958, respectively. This is no idle boast – they have the hardware to back it up, including The King’s Cup as the best cadet corps in the British Empire.



Cadet Corps hat badge



De La Salle Cadets and Band (Toronto City Hall, 1910)

### The Blue & Gold

THE BAND GRADUALLY took on a life of its own, mainly due to its entertainment value, beginning in 1928 with the arrival of Bill Jordan and Johnny Jackson. They were assisted by Percy McGillivray, who would devote more than 20 years to the band as both a playing member and instructor. Together, they took the band in a whole new direction. The first major change was to the famous blue and gold uniforms, which would be worn until the beginning of the drum corps era. A campaign was launched to raise \$1,500 to equip and uniform a 70-member band, although more than 100 attended practice every week. The response was so successful, raising more than \$2,400, that they were able to increase the size of the band, order new military drums with metal shells and plan to outfit 100 cadets in the same uniforms.

On March 19, 1929, the Blue & Gold made its first public appearance, followed two months later by its participation in the annual Garrison Parade with 95 members. The new band created such a stir that by the following September there were 100 new applications to join during the first week of school. Not only did they look better than any other band

(cadet or otherwise), they were also bigger, usually with 120 members throughout the 1930s, 1940s and much of the 1950s. Can you imagine the sound of a 48-piece drum line coming at you down the street? It might have been difficult to hear the 64 horns or eight glocks. One of Jackson’s innovations was a form of indoor drill, unlike the typical military parading of the time, and entire military shows would be built around Del’s participation. Jackson remained with the band as director and drum major until 1951. In September 1931, the band and cadets moved to the new campus, the 13-acre estate called Oaklands. The band had become such a Toronto institution by then that they were being asked to also participate in a variety of civic and social functions. In 1931, they performed for the first time on radio in aid of a charity and for many years they were the advertised drawing card for numerous commercial and sport interests. Their annual inspections became entertainment events, with up to 3,000 people jamming the upper gallery at the Armouries to watch the spectacle.

In 1938, they replaced their instruments once again, this time with a set of silver-plated bugles and chrome drums, a gift from their biggest supporter, Sen. Frank O’Connor (of Laura Secord



De La Salle’s Blue and Gold band at the 1939 World’s Fair (Flushing Meadows, New York)

## FEATURE ARTICLE: De La Salle “Oaklands” Drum Corps (continued)

fame). Their reputation became so widespread that in 1939 they were invited to perform for a week at the New York World’s Fair. While there, they participated in a number of other events, including the American Legion parade. Also that year they formed an Honour Guard for King George VI and Queen Elizabeth during their visit to Toronto. But 1939 brought war again and Del threw itself into the effort at recruiting rallies, victory bond drives, parades and concerts. At the conclusion of the war, De La Salle had 250 cadets plus 110 members in the band, but due to government limits on cadet corps the cadets were disbanded after 1947. This had little impact on the band’s activities and it carried on as before. They made a recording in 1947 which the school used to recruit students from Latin America.

In 1949, the band received a set of “harmony” bugles and for the first time had an opportunity to play bugles with valves. Throughout the 1950s, they continued to participate in parades and religious festivities, but their last big outing was the Montreal St. Patrick’s Day parade in 1954, where they once again performed on radio. By the late 1950s, with opportunities to perform becoming fewer, the school decided it was time to take the band in a different direction or cease operations. Ernie Wesson, Cos Capone, Werner Nuss, Mike Delaney and Bill Parker showed just what could be done.

## The Drum Corps

FROM THE DEMISE of the great band evolved the drum and bugle corps in the fall of 1957. Once again, new instruments were required, and within two weeks \$7,000 was raised through sales of magazine subscriptions. New uniforms would take a little longer, so they entered the field of competition in 1958 with an interim uniform, retaining the cap and blue pants from the old uniforms (now with a red stripe instead of gold). The new part was a silver satin blouse with red cummerbund and red gloves. That first corps consisted of 22 horns, a nine-piece percussion section, five glocks and a four-man color party. In

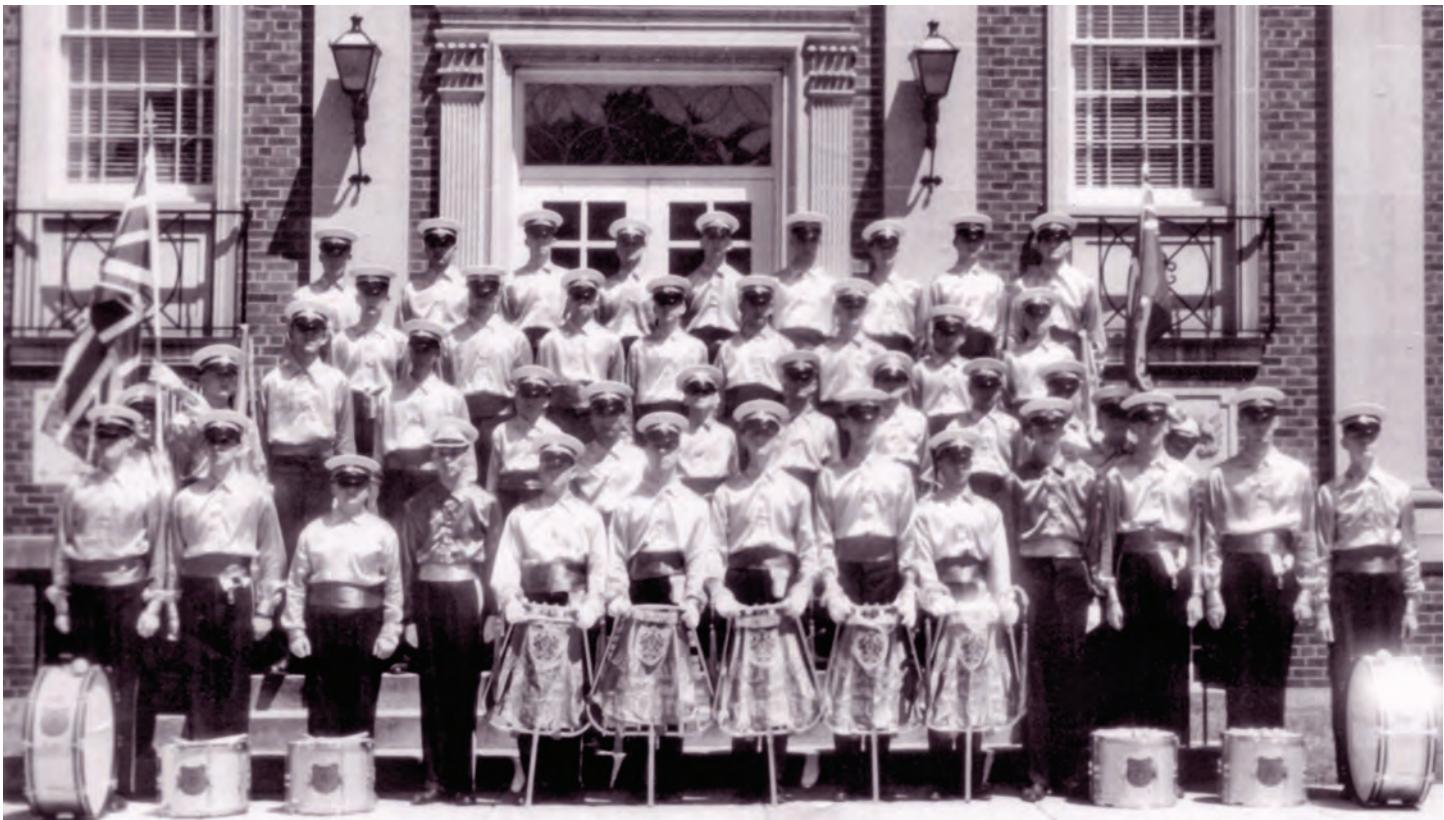


*De La Salle Drum Corps' original uniforms and the band crest on the drums*



*De La Salle (Nationals, Galt, 1958)*

## FEATURE ARTICLE: De La Salle “Oaklands” Drum Corps (continued)



*De La Salle Drum Corps in front of the school (1958)*

a show of typical Del confidence, they skipped the lower competition classes and went head-to-head with the best. In their first M&M competition on June 21, 1958, at East York Stadium, they placed second, three points behind Scout House, the reigning Canadian champions. They placed third at the Nationals that year behind Optimists and Scout House. In 1959, they took to the field with 24 horns, a nine-piece percussion section and eight in the guard (including the color party). The glocks were finally retired after two decades.

In 1960, they appeared in new white uniforms with green and red trim and a full-length red cape. The cape, which primarily served to keep the uniform clean, was only worn in parades, off the field and on the starting line. Removing the capes before the opening gun would become part of the show. The 1960 corps consisted of 32 horns, a 10-piece

percussion section and 13 in the color guard. That year they won the Ontario Championship and placed second at the Nationals. They held that position for the next five years, although in



*First photo shoot of Del in their new, white uniforms (June, 1960)*

## FEATURE ARTICLE: De La Salle “Oaklands” Drum Corps (continued)

1961 they gave Optimists a real scare. Here is how the season wrapped up: on August 11 Optimists won the NY-Can Championship by 0.4 over Del; two weeks later at the CNE Championship, Del won by 1.3; on September 9 at the National Prelims, Del won by 2.4; in the Finals, Del actually won, but was assessed a 3/10 penalty by the Chief Judge during inspection for a flag pole height; as a result, Del lost the Nationals by 1/20, but won four of the six captions; two weeks later at the Grape Festival, Del again won - this time by more than two points.

**N**EW CADET STYLE uniforms were introduced in 1966, with only the red capes being retained. Despite major changes, including all new instructors, 66 and 67 proved to be difficult years and Del dropped to third place at the Nationals for the first time since 1959. It is always convenient to look back on an unsuccessful season and claim it was a rebuilding year, which was true to an extent, especially in 1967, but credit is also due to the quality of the competition. Cadets Lasalle of Ottawa made tremendous strides to knock Del from its perennial spot. The remarkable thing about Del between 1958 and 1966 is that being a school activity, they drew their personnel almost entirely from within the high school. So, even while working from a smaller resource pool than

other corps, they continued to remain competitive throughout this period. Although they always had a few outsiders, it was generally believed you had to be a Del student to be a member, so many who would have joined Del in an instant never tried and the corps never recruited. However, the end of the 1966 season was a watershed. With the demise of York Lions and Golden Monarchs, those still serious about the activity were looking for a new home and there were really only two choices - Del or The Optimists. There had been other years when the corps had to deal with a large influx of new members, but never on a scale like this and certainly never so many outsiders. That first migration from York Lions, Golden Monarchs and Michael Power Knights in the fall of 66 was the beginning of a trend that would ultimately play a part in Del's demise.

The 1967 season started with fireworks and great expectations. On New Year's Eve, De La Salle led a massive parade up University Avenue to the Ontario Legislature to celebrate the beginning of Canada's centennial year. From the balcony of the Legislature, three sopranos played the Royal Salute as the Vice-Regal party arrived. But despite everyone's best effort on the field, the corps fell short again that year. Although placing ahead of



*De La Salle (CNE, Toronto, 1960)*

## FEATURE ARTICLE: De La Salle “Oaklands” Drum Corps (continued)

Cadets Lasalle at the Dream, they finished third behind Lasalle at the Nationals three weeks later. There were, however, signs of great possibilities. In the fall of 1967, two new instructors joined Dave Parker, the drill instructor – Terry McKolskey on horns and Harry Clark on drums and it turned out to be the perfect mix. The 1968 Del was a very different animal – aggressive, daring, talented and experienced – and served notice from the beginning of the season that they would no longer settle for being the bridesmaid. That point was made very clear July 6 in Brantford. The result: Del 77.1, Optimists 76.0, Lasalle 73.6, Scarborough Firefighters 55.4.

Canadian drum corps would never be the same – and neither would De La Salle. Although having made brief trips into the United States since the early 1960s, it wasn’t until 1968 that they began making extensive visits. Beginning that year, they started doing an annual tour of the Midwest and then the East Coast. The opportunity to compete regularly against the best American corps contributed greatly to their improvement and later success. It may even have paid some immediate dividends, because 1968 turned out to be Del’s greatest season since becoming a drum corps, with victory after victory over its arch-rival,

including the Ontario Championship. As the season progressed, so did the Optimists, getting closer with every show. At the Nationals, in the only contest that really mattered, Del again experienced the bitter taste of defeat by less than a point. After all, it’s not often a corps wins every caption but one and still loses a championship. That one caption was a hard to believe two points on drums. It was a heartbreakingly way to end the season, but rather than being demoralized, the corps was inspired.

The Optimists no longer intimidated them and they immediately began working toward making the next year a complete success. The greatest improvement was in attitude. With new found confidence and a total commitment to each other, Del 1969 came together as never before. From the very first contest to the very last, they got their revenge on the Optimists. The season wasn’t without stress, however. Once again, Optimists closed the gap as the summer progressed. More than one person was no doubt thinking, “Not again!” But Del remained composed and confident. In an ironic twist, De La Salle won the 1969 Nationals by the same margin they had lost by in 1961 – one-twentieth of a point. For Del, there was no turning back, with a repeat championship in 1970.



*De La Salle in their cadet uniforms (Batavia, 1969)*

## FEATURE ARTICLE: De La Salle “Oaklands” Drum Corps (continued)

Even before the 1971 season started there was growing dis-satisfaction within the ranks of how the Canadian Drum Corps Association was being run. As a result Optimists, De La Salle, London Midlanders, and Les Compagnons d’Embrun left the Association. There were now two competing organizations – CDCA and the new Canadian Open National Commission. On Sunday, August 29 the Canadian National Invitational Championship was held in which six major Junior Corps competed, and what many consider to be the real National Championship for 1971. De La Salle won with ease; 4.2 over Optimists, 7.25 over Lasalle, the soon-to-be CDCA National Champs and 10.55 over Firefighters, the recently crowned CDCA Ontario Champs. They also placed third at the U.S. Open that year.

Having established themselves as the premier Canadian corps, Del was invited to join DCI. In fact, being the only founding member not based in the United States, they put the “I” in DCI. The 1972 season brought significant changes in staff and membership. More and more corps were falling by the wayside and the premier corps were like a magnet, drawing members from those that died as well as those that remained. Although still not deliberately recruiting, Del didn’t turn people away either. At this point, there were members traveling

hundreds of miles every week just to get to rehearsals. Del placed 16th at the first DCI in 1972, missing Finals, but so did some other great corps like Madison and Garfield. The Optimists recovered by the end of 1972 to edge out Del by one-tenth at the Nationals. Del was back on top in 1973, but sharing the title with Cadets Lasalle. Unfortunately, Lasalle folded almost immediately after.

That year, for the first time in Del history, females joined the corps (21 years before they were allowed to enroll at the school). When it was decided to introduce a female guard, signs were posted at the various girls schools in Toronto. Within days all the spots were filled. Del finished second at the U.S. Open that year and just missed out on the DCI Finals in 13th spot by a point, but ahead of Phantom Regiment, Cavaliers, Garfield, Des Plaines Vanguard, Boston Crusaders and others. Del did not attend the 1974 Nationals due to a dispute with

the association once again. This was unfortunate, as it turned out, because it was to be the last year competing under the De La Salle name. They were in a class of their own that year, placing fourth at the U.S. Open, sixth in DCI Prelims and seventh in finals, and they would have walked away with another Canadian title. So Seneca Princemen (the former Scarborough Firefighters), that



De La Salle (1969)

## FEATURE ARTICLE: De La Salle “Oaklands” Drum Corps (continued)

Del had beaten by more than 15 points all season, won their only Canadian Championship over Optimists and Etobicoke Crusaders. With the end of that season came the end of an era. The school, no longer able to cover escalating costs of operating such a competitive activity, especially with more and more non-student involvement, withdrew its support.

Although the name De La Salle Oaklands was never again announced on the starting line, the corps itself continued to exist. The members voted to stay together regardless and began investigating a number of options. With the trend toward even larger corps, a merger seemed to be the best solution and a perfect fit was found with Etobicoke Crusaders. There had always been a relationship, going back to the Michael Power days, and a number of ex-Del members were currently managing and instructing Crusaders. And so, with a great deal of sadness, but an eye on the future, the entire corps moved to Etobicoke. They could have just as easily joined Etobicoke Crusaders, but it showed tremendous respect for the school and its history (not to mention retaining their DCI standing) to have at least retained part of the name and so Oakland Crusaders was born. The result was massive: 167 members.



*Del's guard wearing their capes (Grape Festival, 1960)*



*Dan Moloney, John McAlpine and Paul Ferri are on the left (1963)*



*De La Salle's first year with girls (1973)*

## FEATURE ARTICLE: De La Salle “Oaklands” Drum Corps (continued)

After the 1974 season De La Salle “Oaklands” merged with the Etobicoke Crusaders to create the Etobicoke Oakland Crusaders. They finished in 6th place at DCI in 1975.

**Below are a few photos of the 1975 Etobicoke Oakland Crusaders.**

(They were extracted from a low-res video of the Oakland Crusaders competing in the 1975 DCI finals).





### THE BARRIS BEAT

# Drums And Bugles Sound On Lakefront

By Alex Barris

One evening last week, I heard the unmistakable sound of bugles in the vicinity of the lake-front and, acting on that time-honored children's custom of chasing any and all parades, I discovered 40 boys blowing and beating their hearts out on the field in front of the Toronto Harbor Commission building.

The 40 young men (or most of them) were wearing green wind-breakers and I had to get fairly close to them before I could make out the lettering: "The Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps".

By this time, I had almost been run down by them. These boys don't just play - they also march around, sometimes in some manoeuvres tricky enough to look like a full-fledged army band. On television, it would probably called choreography, but no one would dare use so fancy a word around these fellows.

There were other spectators, a few of them also in Optimist jackets, so I asked one of them if he could fill me in on the whole business. He referred me to a man named

Don Daber, who is the publicist for the Toronto Optimists Drum Corps. And was HE well armed with background information! He had a satchel full of literature.

This group, I learned, was the Optimists junior drum and bugle corps, but the service club also supports a senior group and a bantam. The boys in the junior group must be under 21. When they reach that age, if they're still interested, they move up to the seniors.

These boys turn out for practice two evenings a week and most weekends - unless they're on the road. During the summer, they appear in a number of shows, often competitions against other similar bands, from which they raise money that is turned back to the Optimist Club for its service work. (The club, of course, provides the money to keep the drum and bugle corps in existence).

Many of the boys can't read music, but some of them are schooled well enough to teach the arrangements to the others. And you should hear some of the arrangements! They aren't the trite old routines you may associate with drum and bugle corps

but bright, interestingly orchestrated pieces (including, inevitably, I suppose, "A Cockeyed Optimist" and played with enough precision and bite to make Stan Kenton's brassy outbursts seem puny by comparison.

The Optimists Juniors were practicing on this particular evening, for a trip to Rome, New York, where they were to compete against a number of U.S. corps for the Eastern State Championship. The Optimists won it in 1959, but lost it in 1960.

This Saturday, July 15, at 8 p.m. they will be at East York Stadium competing for the Canadian Junior Championship. And, if any of the other corps sound and look as good as this one, it should make for a fairly lively and entertaining program.

During the summer, they'll make other appearances: At Niagara Falls on Sunday, July 18; at Windsor on July 30; at Rochester, N.Y., on Aug. 12; at the CNE on Aug. 26; and at Waterloo and St. Catharines during September.

If you're around, have a listen. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised. I know I was.

## GOLDEN-GREEN COMPASS AWARD PRESENTATION

Toronto waterfront,  
Sunday, June 25th  
(GCC)

An impressive afternoon award ceremony was the scene on the field at the waterfront docks under cloudy skies here as the Toronto Optimists presented their Golden-Green Compass Award. The Award was presented by the Corps' Drill Instructor, Doug McPhail to Mr. Bern Beer, Co-Director of the Corps, in recognition of his outstanding services in directing the Corps' bus 30 miles along the wrong route during a recent trip to Phillipsburg, New Jersey.



L: Doug McPhail with Bern and his Golden-Green compass around his neck. (1961)

## The Corps song

IN 1961 the corps held a contest to choose a corps song (the winner received a corps jacket).

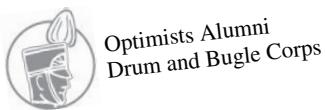
Finalists included entries from Glenn Copp, Joe Gianna, Karl Bossert, Anon A. Moose and Glen Durish. As corps members know, the contest was won by Glen Durish.

What most people do not know is that some of Glen's words in the first stanza were changed slightly. The original words were: "On, March on, Our battles not yet won, We'll march 'till setting suns And sing, the coming dawn; Defeat shall never come, march on!!!".

### Optimists Corps Song

To the Tune of "Meadowlands"

Lyrics by: Glen Durish



Optimists Alumni  
Drum and Bugle Corps

*Vocal*

*mf*

On March on, our bat - tles not yet won, We'll

March and sing, de - feat shall ne - ver come. March on.

*% p*

Pride of our na - tion cham - pi - ons in com - pe - ti - tion  
Col - our and splen - dour on - ly add to our en - dev - our

To Coda

Arms swing-ing bug - les ring-ing drums re - sound - ing legs lift - ed high come swift - ly  
March - ing and mus - ic done in glor - ious fash - ion Pride and per - fec - tion is our

pound - ing u - pon the ground. The Op - tim - ists by name, The

*D.S. al Coda*

Green Ma - chine by fame pas - sion Op - tim - ists Drum Corps of

*ff*

we sing we will march on for - ev - er

**Illustrated is the music with the revised text in the first verse:**

**On March on, our battles not yet won, We'll march and sing, defeat shall never come. March on.**



## **Chapter 9: Hangin’ In There**

Looking back over the past three years, there was much in which to take pride, including three consecutive National Championships and a host of other assorted titles as well as flags won and civic receptions given. This all added up to a fine record. We no longer had any problems thinking of ourselves as champions. After our first National title, this had been the case, but now it was almost second nature. We were, though, encouraged not to appear arrogant or superior.

Our hungry rivals were not that far behind us. We were the Corps to beat in Canada. Our presence at a contest added spice. There was always the chance that we could be beaten, breaking a chain of victories that was beginning to border on local invincibility. No doubt some of our people thought along these lines. There had been setbacks, of course, as we were still learning this business. Experience proved to be a great teacher. If, along the way, there had been one step backwards, it was usually followed by three steps forward.

Thus had been laid the foundations of a tradition. If you joined the Optimists now, it was expected that you would maintain existing standards and adhere to them as they improved. This could be a tall order for someone new, and it was now harder for somebody totally inexperienced to come in and make it. It did happen, but it was harder now, and the Corps, as it got better, was getting further away from its original purpose.

There were no immediate signs that the coming year would be any different from the others. When practices began again in the late fall, things were upbeat and optimistic. The only negative aspect of the situation was the thirteen gaps left by the group that had departed at the end of last season. Out of a total of about fifty members, this is a fairly large number. However, there were more than enough replacements available, so no one was too worried. Worried? Yes. Because we had won so consistently, it was now serious business if anything seemed to threaten this streak. This is one price of success, and it has parallels in other fields of endeavour, such as business, sports, and even National interests.

Of the new recruits, many had come from the Bantam Corps, which was now proving its worth beyond estimate. Often called the “Peanut Squad”, those who came from it were familiar with the basics of a Drum Corps. All could march and play with some degree of skill, and they were fitted into appropriate places in the line. The drum line, out of a total of nine, needed four new members. Other deficiencies were mostly in the horn line, with a few in the guard. Our two drum majors of the previous year were now replaced by one, Al Morrison who was previously a soprano soloist. During the early winter months, and later, other people left, for various reasons, not many, but enough to bring the total number of departures to about twenty. This was close to fifty percent of the Corps. More perceptive people began to realize that the coming year might prove more difficult than previously imagined.



Bantam Optimists

## **“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 9. (continued)**

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When the various sections had been roughly arranged, and the music taught, it quickly became apparent that the new people would not find it easy to reach the standards of the others. It became incumbent upon the older members to help the new ones in every capacity. They did, and the novices responded with good spirit and utmost cooperation. This attitude was to bear fruit and resound greatly to the credit of the new members.

The three lines were set up so that a rookie was always between two pros in a squad, or a pro was in the middle of two new members. By this method, it was hoped to stabilize things, with the older members bolstering and assisting the younger. As it turned out, it worked quite well, producing the best possible results that could be expected under the circumstances. Progress was slower than usual, reflecting the numerous new, less experienced members.

As a Corps, every department was still in the process of learning this intricate business of Drum Corps. Errors and miscalculations were real possibilities.

The first evidence of this was the choice of a new off-the-line number, to replace the excellent “Meadowlands” of the previous year. It had been suggested that we should play the tune “Cockeyed Optimist”, mainly, I suppose, because the title contained the word “Optimist”. It was one of the lesser-known songs from the musical



*Bill Thorne, Joe Gianna and Ted Shaw (Rochester, 1960)*



*Toronto Optimists (Rome, NY, 1961)*

## **“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 9. (continued)**

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“South Pacific” and, oddly enough, a throwback to the original policy, now discarded, of “happy” type music. For all its spirited lilt, it was not really the knock ‘em dead kind of song that an introductory number should be. “Meadowlands” was re-inserted as the second number in the repertoire.

Along with this was the introduction of a dual melody number, “I Hear Music/Just in Love”, that would have challenged an experienced Corps. With our many new people, this proved to be an unfortunate choice that did not become apparent until much later. By that time, it was too late to change, and we never did master its complexities when it was combined with drill formations.

To cap these not bad, but less than perfect selections, the concert was retained in its entirety for another year. This would be the fourth year for “In the Mood”, and the third for “Serenade from the Student Prince”. New arrangements and added gimmicks could only do so much to make these trademark numbers appear fresh.

So, the musical show as a mixture of old and new, a not uncommon situation in Corps affairs. Of course, it was all new to the rookies, who had to learn it all. Most of these people were very young and, although they had some skill with their instruments, none of them had ever done marching and maneuvering before. Also, the music they were expected to play turned out to be over their heads. It was a long time before this was recognized, and by then it was too late to make curative changes. The measures taken, later on, in an attempt to remedy these miscalculations read like a litany of desperation.

Strangely enough, but not acted upon, was the fact that although we tried to convince ourselves that we had a world beater, no one really believed it. Corps policy had always brought success in the past, so on we pushed determined to do the best we could.

As usual, rumours were flying, the most ominous to us being the reports that De La Salle’s drum line this year would be a match for anyone. We had always been aware that if they could improve this caption, we would have problems. With growing awareness of our potential weakness in other departments this year, this was a most disconcerting rumour.

Also, as usual, although the Corps itself was the centerpiece of activity, there were a lot of related things occurring around it, affecting its operation and future.



*De La Salle’s drumline (CNE, Toronto)*

## Changes in the Canadian Judges Association

One of the most relevant of these was the resignation of one Alf Smith from the position of Chief Judge of the Canadian Judges Association. This was due to business pressures and normally would have been no more pertinent to us than to any other Corps. What made it different this time was that the new Chief Judge was none other than Al Baggs, who, of course, was our Corps Director.

Mr. Baggs had been a qualified Canadian General Effect M&M Judge for some time. Marching and maneuvering was an important aspect of Drum Corps performances in those days and he was experienced in both facets of it, general effect and execution. This, though, was not the prime reason for his election to this important post.

To get the job, it was necessary to be elected by the other judges, and Al Baggs had been popularly elected on the strength of his abilities as an administrator. Because of this added responsibility, he resigned his position on the Board of Directors of the New York/Canadian Association. He was now Chief Judge as well as Director of the Optimists, a situation that was fraught with pitfalls. One of his judges, Mr. Vince Macciocchi, was later a chief judge himself. When asked if Al Baggs was a competent, able, chief judge, four words sufficed. “No doubt about it!” Later, we shall see many repercussions that resulted from this.

All this upheaval took place in January of 1961, and in February the Canadian Bugle and Trumpet Band Association became the Canadian Drum Corps Association. It was about time! It had been voted on January 15, but did not become official until put into the charter in February.

The responsibilities of Don Daber now increased as his influence began to expand. He was already the Public Relations



Bernie Beer and Mr Baggs (Falconer, NY)



Toronto Optimists (Rosedale, 1961)

Manager for the Optimists, and now assumed the same duties for the Canadian Drum Corps Association. On top of this he was the editor of his creation “Green Capsule Comments”, which was shortly to increase in size to nine pages. This periodical was rapidly becoming well known, both inside and outside the Corps. Contributions were solicited from inside and outside, along with those that, by now, were regular columns. One of the contributions, written by Mr. Baggs, was an explanation of each one of the flags now carried by the Corps. This is worth looking at, as they had all been acquired during the first three years of its existence. There were ten altogether. Quite an impressive list, made more so by the fact that each and every one of them had a meaning and purpose.

## **Flags carried by the Toronto Optimists**

### **The Canadian Ensign**

Used as National Colours before the adoption, in 1965, of the current Maple Leaf flag

### **The Union Jack**

Used in parades, not contests, to represent the traditions of the British Commonwealth

### **The American Flag**

Carried in the US and Canada as a mark of courtesy to the United States. It also indicated the international aspect of the Optimist Club

### **The Optimist International Flag**

The flag of the Optimist Club, our sponsor

### **The Ontario Flag**

It carried the emblem of the Province of Ontario

### **The Corps Flag**

Designed by Barry Bell, it carried the Corps crest.

### **The Canadian Junior Championship Flag**

An original, designed by an anonymous Optimists Corps member, it had been presented to the Corps by the Opti-Mrs organization. The Canadian Drum Corps Association officially adopted the flag, and winners in all three classes would be presented with this flag in the future

### **The New York/Canadian Association Championship Flag**

Presented annually to the title winners

### **The City of Toronto Flag**

Presented by Mayor Nathan Phillips as a civic reception for winning the 1958 Nationals.

### **The St. Lawrence Seaway Flag**

Given to the Corps, to carry the emblem of the Port of Toronto to cities in Canada and the US

## **"From Toronto... The Optimists!" by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 9. (continued)**

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For the Corps itself, activity began quite early. Again, we performed at the Ice Follies, on January 30, at Maple Leaf Gardens, and on February 28 participated in a standstill contest. This was in Rochester, New York, and was a senior versus junior affair, with us being the only Junior Corps involved. The Optimists were not very good that night, placing third, although the Senior Corps were of a good calibre. There was more reason for our mediocre performance than the early date. It was a sign of the Corps being down this year and an indication of some rough times ahead; however, we were not miserable about it, never being too serious. We were, though, full of admiration for the Garfield Cadets who put on superb exhibition. They were right back up to their old form, maybe even better.



*Optimists at the Ice Follies (Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto, 1961)*

There was a prolific writer for Drum Corps World named Bob Mannhardt who had liked our corps from the beginning. His columns reflected this, though he would not hesitate to criticize if he thought events warranted it. He had done this when we pulled out of the 1959 Grape Festival. Regardless, the admiration was mutual, and at this show he was pulled into the dressing room and made an honorary member of the Corps. On this occasion, we also had the "Drum Head Draw". The old bass drum heads were raffled off and the money raised used to buy new ones. The old ones were well decorated and showed our three national titles. That standstill contest, by the way, was probably one of the last of its kind. By this, I mean that the format of Senior Corps going against Junior Corps was on its way out. We had not been invited back to Falconer, New York, this year, because Senior Corps would not compete against us. Whether this was because they did not like the idea of possibly losing to juniors, or just did not think it a good concept, is not known. Probably a bit of both; whatever, it would occur again but increasingly rarely as time went by.

In the previous chapter, the intensity of involvement between the Optimists and Jesters was remarked upon. It had reached such a pitch that this year it was necessary to make an official announcement that, "There was no official connection between the Jesters and the Optimists". Hopefully, that put paid to any detrimental rumours that had been floating around.



*Bob Mannhardt of Drum Corps News becomes an honorary member of the Toronto Optimists (Rochester, February, 1961)*

## **“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 9. (continued)**

Other, more positive developments saw the Optimists Alumni Association now operating. Formed the previous year, they began to exert an influence in and around the Corps. One of them, Ed Nanni, had been writing “The Optimists” column in Drum Corps World for some time, having taken it over from Harry Clark. Harry was (as was Ed Nanni) from the original Optimist Trumpet Band.

We were still practising at the Jarvis Street school on weekday evenings, in the aromatic school gym. One night, before practice, when sitting in the Atlanta Restaurant across the road, Don Daber walked in bursting with enthusiasm. He was a fountain of ideas, which maybe explained unofficial nickname of “Crazy Daber”. This night, when he sat down, he unfolded a scheme for raising money by selling Planters Peanuts. Going into detail, with facts and figures, it seemed a very plausible idea. He had made a mistake in his financial calculations, which I was foolish enough to point out. This qualified me to be treasurer, and I was appointed on the spot. Right then and there the “Nut Committee” was formed, consisting of:

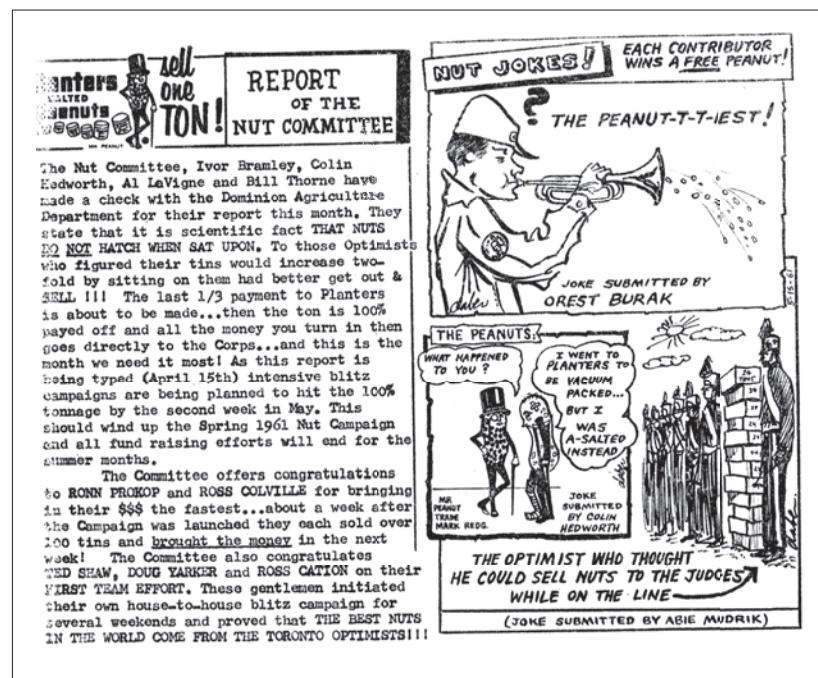
Ivor Bramley	Chairman
Colin Hedworth	Treasurer
Al Lavigne	Transportation

As our sales motto we adopted the phrase: “The best nuts in the world come from the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps”. The double meanings in this slogan were more than imaginary, but, thus armed and fortified, we set out to try our hands at door to door salesmanship.

The method adopted was for those willing to participate, and there were more than a few, to meet at a certain, different, location on sales nights. This would usually be one night a week. Having met at an agreed spot, each would load up with peanuts, the tinned variety, and then spread out to blitz the area. It worked quite well and sales moved along briskly. It was still very cold, and, except for one time, only inclement weather deterred us from our mission. The one time exception was the evening that we visited the Borough of Leaside, near Leaside High School. The “Jungle Kings” had for years used this school as a practice spot. People who lived in the vicinity were well acquainted with Drum Corps, having had to endure many occasions when one was rehearsing in their backyard. As soon as “Drum Corps” was mentioned, doors were slammed, cutting into a string of uncomplimentary epithets. After a few incidents like this, it was decided to abandon that night’s work. We understood, and a few nights later were out again, somewhere else. The whole campaign produced quite good results, a total of over \$800 being raised. Not much by today’s inflated



*Ed Nanni (1961)*



standards, but a considerable help to the small Corps budget of those days. The only negative aspect of the whole thing was the prodding necessary to get people to bring in their money. One dollar here, two there, five somewhere else. It all added up, until finally the treasurer, fed up with the pleading and cajoling, paid the last \$100 owing for nuts sold. The account was closed. Altogether it was a successful and satisfying affair.

This year, the Prudhommes Convention was again held, and Mr. Baggs officially represented us. He conducted a clinic for managers and sponsors, as well as, in his new position of Chief Judge, chaired a question and answer session involving himself and seven other judges. As with everything he undertook, he did nothing by halves, which helps explain the positions he held.

## Trafalgar

And now begins a story within a story. Around this time, one Sunday afternoon, Ronn Prokop mentioned that he was instructing a Corps in Oakville, Ontario. He had been going out there for some time teaching drums, along with his friend Mel Dey, one of our better horn players. Well, all of us were interested in any Corps happenings in those days, so a bunch of us climbed into cars and headed out to see just what was going on. Among this curious crew was the often mentioned Ivor Bramley. Ivor was one of the most energetic Corps members around, sometimes almost a bit of a loose canon. He had, unlike this year, been in the colour guard, and his nature had seen him become very involved in instructing it, under the tutelage of Eric Burton. This year, he had been instructing the Optimists guard but gave this up to become a bass drummer.

However, that day, when we arrived in Oakville, he found the ideal outlet for his energies. A colour guard and a Corps were practising, seemingly with no direction or leadership. This was the Trafalgar Police Band mentioned in the previous chapter. They were a Junior "B" Corps and had never risen above second place.



*Trafalgar Patrolmen (1961)*

## **“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 9. (continued)**

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Never one to miss an opportunity, Ivor summed up the situation at a glance, and, after a few preliminary disputes, virtually took over this fledgling unit. They needed someone like him as much as he needed an outlet for his ambitions.

Within weeks, this Corps was transformed from a somewhat lethargic band into an ambitious, purposeful Drum Corps that was going places. It was a marriage made in heaven that would eventually involve many Optimists members.

More trivia concerning the Corps, and Drum Corps in general, was the fact that Brother Eugene, the moderator of De La Salle, was relieved of his post. This did not really concern us, being the internal affair of De La Salle. What they did on the field was what concerned us. Brother Xavier, who was to become very familiar to us, staying with Del for many years, replaced the good brother.

During the early months of 1961, we put on an inside concert at St. Andrews church on Bloor St. East, in Toronto. This affair was well attended by parents, other relatives, and, of course, by rivals. Word was around that we were not up to par this year, and the wolves were hanging around, smelling blood. However, that night they were disappointed as we put on a commendable performance. We were not ready for the greased banister yet. It was plain that anyone who wished to usurp our position would have to really fight for it. This year would bear this out and make it quite plain that the spirit of this Corps, so often mentioned in this story, was more than sawdust.

Let the battle begin.



Ivor Bramley



Toronto Optimists (Rochester, February, 1961)

## **Chapter 10: 1961 – The Challenge**

Inevitably, of course, the season came upon us. We were not very concerned. After all, we were the Optimists, and, having survived other misfortunes, we were confident that we could accept and manage any more that came our way. This attitude, presumptuous as it may seem, was a major factor in getting us through the year ahead, which unknown to us contained many nerve-wracking moments.

Before all this, there was another Silver Ring Dance. These rings were attractive, silver in colour with a green crest. They became a mark of seniority for those who had them.

This was in April, and we were more heavily into outdoor rehearsals, although our first Canadian contest was to be an indoor, standstill affair. Held at Leaside Arena, and featuring most of the local Corps and out of town rivals, it was a harbinger of things to come.



*Toronto Optimists drum line (Windsor, 1961)*

Although throughout this story only the Optimists, De La Salle, Grantham, and Scout House have been mentioned, there were other good Drum Corps around. The Midtowners, St. Mary's, and Leaside were three of them, and they were at this contest, putting on fine competitive performances.

Prior to this show, the Optimists and De La Salle drum lines had begun their own separate rivalry, as distinct from the two Corps themselves.

The individuals in these lines were familiar with each other, and it was a friendly though intense rivalry.

Some members?

Optimists Snare      Prokop, Williams, Kruklis

Optimists Tenor      Burak, Bignell, Hedworth

De La Salle Snare      Mosley, Jacko, Voytek

De La Salle Tenor      Kelly, Newman, Altilia

The rumours of the improvement of Del's drum line proved to be well founded. Reports from individuals who had attended some of their rehearsals confirmed the fact that our hitherto large spread in drumming scores would not be easy to maintain. This had come about largely due to a young man named Paul Mosley. He had come up through the De La Salle school organization, as did all of their personnel. Upon joining the Corps, he saw what was needed and proceeded to put it into effect. The results of his efforts and those of his colleagues would become evident during the competition season.



*Paul Mosley, De La Salle, in centre*

## Leaside Show

Everybody was eager to see how things would turn out and even more interest was created when a fifteen dollar wager was made between the drums of Optimists and those of Del, whichever topped the caption, won the money.

Held on May 14, at Leaside Arena, it was packed with spectators, such was the interest. It was strictly a standstill affair of seven to nine minutes duration, which accounted for the ensuing high scores.

When the last note had sounded and the dust had settled, we were still unbeaten in all Canadian shows since 1958, although by a very slim margin. A final difference of 1.475 over Del, and 1.775 over Grantham was a close shave and no doubt a great incentive to our competitors.

Included in this score was a win in the drum caption by the Optimists line, but only by a margin of two tenths. We collected the fifteen dollars but were forced to realize that things would not be so easy this year.

We had been invited, yet again, to the Preview of Champions in Jersey City. This time, we were a bit apprehensive, aware that the early date combined with our less than perfect condition could lead to a major debacle. However, Mr. Baggs did not pull us out of this one and away we went, determined to do or die.

After two weeks of long, hard practices, we climbed aboard the bus on a Friday and took off once more for the lion’s den.



*Toronto Optimists (Leaside Gardens, 1961)*



*De La Salle (Leaside Gardens, 1961)*

## Phillipsburg and the Preview

First on the agenda was a contest in Phillipsburg, NJ, where again we ran into Blessed Sacrament. Mr. Baggs had made sure that he was present on this trip, lending moral support when he knew it would be needed. His presence was always reassuring and instilled confidence, a quality that was not in abundance at this time.

Our fears were confirmed. Under the intense but fair scrutiny of the Mid-Atlantic Judges Association, the Golden Knights to the tune of thirteen points bested us. To paraphrase modern lingo, we were back to square minus one. All the hard won gains of the past had evaporated, and we no longer took the liberty of comparing ourselves with the best. This state of affairs would change, but talk about coming down to earth.

The next day, after a parade in Hoboken, New Jersey, where we were now an annual favourite, it was into the “Big House”, Roosevelt Stadium. Needless to say, our position remained as it had in the past, last place, far out of contention for any honours. The surest indication of our condition was the

crowd reaction. American crowds, always generous when merited even if the scores were not always high, were also good judges, especially this one. The polite applause that followed our performance was a far cry from the tumultuous standing ovations of previous years. So it was.

Back to Canada and regular rehearsals. Score sheets were minutely analysed and the conclusions acted upon. Improvement comes slowly and the Canadian Drum Corps season was short, so time was of the essence. The drum line, realizing that its local dominance was threatened, put in a lot of extra time. Those who were new this year, Bramley, Burak, Bignell, and Kruklis never complained and proved themselves more than worthy. Their abilities with their instruments gradually improved to the point where they eventually reached the necessary level of proficiency. Among all the new people, some would, in the space of the year, surpass those of long standing. If this attitude had not prevailed, this Corps would have gone down the drain in short order.



*Toronto Optimists (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1961)*



*Orest Burak, Colin Hedworth and Dave Bignell (1961)*

In June of this year, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry Drum Corps sponsored a Senior International Contest in Hamilton, Ontario. We had been invited to appear as the exhibition Corps, which gave us an opportunity to display our full M&M show to an audience before having to compete with it, in Canada. The more shows we did the better, as each one gave the new people more experience. Although Al Baggs was now the Chief Judge, he served at this show as a G.E. M&M Judge. The sponsoring Corps, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, were soon to follow in the footsteps of others. Severing their links with the army, they became the Hamilton Viscounts. This was just another step in a continuing trend.

## **Ontario Junior Drum and Bugle Corps Championships**

Coming up soon was the annual Ontario Junior Drum and Bugle Corps Championships. We had never entered this contest before, the reason being that the Optimist Club had always been the sponsors. This year, the Marching Ambassadors had taken over full responsibility for this affair, thus enabling us to become a contestant. It now became a true Ontario Championship.

It was our first full field show against local rivals, so interest among both fans and members was at a peak. All the top Junior Corps in Ontario were in attendance, and the results showed how things were shaping up for the year. Some Corps, who had earlier showed promise, were seen to be slipping when a full field show was required. A summary of the scores demonstrates the scene as it stood.

1st	The Optimists	80.690
2nd	De La Salle	78.625
3rd	Grantham	71.920
4th	Midtowners	70.690
5th	Scout House	68.010
6th	St. Mary's	58.760

So we had won our first Ontario title and were still perched at the top of the heap. The margin was about where we had left off the previous year. Marching and maneuvering and drums had done the trick for us, along with general effect, which was very close; however we lost Field Bugles by a sizable margin.



*Toronto Optimists (Windsor, 1961)*

De La Salle had a very pleasing show that became, as they improved, to be classed as “electrifying”, and it was at this show that considerable booing was heard due to the results. We had been booed before and would be again when the crowd disagreed with a judge’s decision. Also, we were now sometimes booed just because of who we were. There is a streak in human nature, often admirable, that becomes palled with constant success. It then associates itself with the underdog. Long having ceased to be underdogs, at least in Canada, we were now sometimes the recipients of this phenomenon. Its most obvious sign was scattered booing when we appeared, or when our name was announced. This attitude could often be reversed if a performance was excellent, which was harder to do this year.

Anyway, at least we now knew where we stood in relation to our competitors.

## Within the corps

Other things were now happening around the Corps.

Eric Burton, who was one of the original instructors, left the Corps and moved to Rochester, New York. He had many friends there, and Rochester, at that time, was almost as much a hive of Drum Corps activity as was New Jersey. He was the first of our instructors to leave behind a legacy of hard work and good colour guards. Ivor Bramley, who had been instructing the guard temporarily, had become a bass drummer because one was needed. Mike Layton who was already the guard captain, and thus was familiar with its priorities assumed Eric's position. Carrying on where Eric left off, he continued the quality tradition that had been established. This was to prove, among other things, decisive later this year.



*Mike Layton leading the guard (1961)*

As mentioned in the previous chapter Ivor Bramley had, by this time, become thoroughly immersed in the affairs of the Drum Corps in Oakville. Now called the Trafalgar Patrolmen, they figure in this story because their activity attracted more than a few members of the Optimists to their rehearsals. They had a lot of good people of their own and just seemed to need a spark to get them moving. This had been provided by Ivor. Five members of the Optimists were now involved in instructing, writing, and arranging for them. These included Ronn Prokop, Ivor Bramley, Robin Weatherstone and Al Morrison. Robin, who lived in Oakville, was another former Scout House man.

Along with the contributions of their own capable people, they were really beginning to make progress. Optimist involvement, all unofficial, would sometimes see as many as twenty or more people in attendance at their practices. Quite a few friendships developed out of this, and, coincidentally, much wild and riotous partying. This Corps, Trafalgar, had an attractive female colour guard, so it is not surprising that four marriages eventually ensued from these circumstances.

The four couples were:

Len Perrin and Nancy Roy

Mel Dey and Judy Gasson

Chuck Clutterbuck and Pat Folland

Peter Burton and Shirley Anne Brown

It was a good Corps relationship but got so intense that the Optimist management felt it necessary to comment on it. They hoped, they said, that this development would not interfere with the operations of the Optimists themselves. They were assured that it would not. The only adverse things that developed were rumours that the

## **“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 10. (continued)**

Trafalgar guard was being used to try out things before being adopted by the Optimist colour guard. Whether this was true or not, both Corps benefited from this association, as later events would bear out.

First organized in 1960, and being somewhat less than a cohesive group, this year the Ladies Auxiliary really began to come into its own. Mrs. Nonie McKolskey-Bear, a prime initiator of this bunch, was titular head of it. She considered herself to be just one among many, nearly all of whom were ladies who had a son in the Corps. (We had no girls in those days).

Organizing a Christmas Dance and the previously mention Silver Ring Dance were just the first of their accomplishments. Along with this, they raised money that was contributed towards the purchase of practice flags for the colour guard. Any excess was put into a Corps fund. From this were bought gift parcels that were given to any Corps member who became ill or were hospitalized. They added a veneer of civilized amenities that had previously been lacking.

All the items dreamed up by Don Daber, pennants, buttons, crests, etc., were now displayed openly at shows on a booster table. The ladies set this up at all events, selling what they could to raise money. They even took it to the Quebec Winter Carnival, the following year, a long trip. Often in attendance during long hours of rehearsal, they provided sandwiches for the Corps to consume, and even streetcar fare for kids who did not have the means to get to practice. Their services, at first a welcome addition, became almost indispensable and seldom did the Corps do anything without their participation. The Ladies Auxiliary, many times over, earned the gratitude of the Optimists.

Green Capsule Comments, the Corps periodical produced by Don Daber, now contained many regular columns, some written under mysterious pseudonyms. Sadie MAU MAU, the Magnet, and the Winner, were some of them, and an issue this year contained a letter from a Tom Kelly. He just happened to be the guard captain of De La Salle, and it was a fair and open comment on the De La Salle – Optimist rivalry. This was timely because this year was to see that rivalry reach one of its peaks. There was, of course, rivalry with other local Corps, but, on the field, it was Del who were uppermost in our minds. More than likely, the same situation in reverse existed in their camp.



*Glen Durish receives gift at Christmas party*



*Toronto Optimists pennant (1961)*

## **“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 10. (continued)**

Things were tightening up and heading for a climax. Again we went to Rochester, New York, and again successfully defended our New York/Canadian Championship title. The challenges were increasing all around as the Corps strove to maintain its standing. It was not easy, but the results of our efforts revealed themselves at Rome, New York, later on. This show had always seemed to be a good one for us and served to indicate any progress that had been made. This year was no different. There were usually only one or two Canadian Junior Corps in this contest, the others being American Corps of good calibre. We were only three points out of first place, which was taken by the Garfield Cadets. Second was Blessed Sacrament, in one of their rare losses. They had defeated us by thirteen points at the beginning of the season, and so we could measure our progress by this result. Progress had assuredly been made but would it be enough for continued success back in Canada. Only time would tell.

Although we had not won this contest, we were very pleased with the results, which were actually better than we expected.

When we did win a competition, anywhere, we had adopted the practice of parading from the contest field to the dressing room. This was done playing at full volume and usually occurred anywhere from 11:00 to midnight. Nobody ever thought to ask local residents, many no doubt being rudely awakened, what they thought of this habit.

Now, after Rome, it was back to Canada to face the challenges of restless competitors.

Not everything was nail-biting competition. In Windsor, Ontario, there was the Emancipation Day parade, a gala affair usually concluding with exhibitions by the participating Drum Corps.



*De La Salle and Optimists on retreat (New York /Canadians, Rochester, NY, 1961)*



*Neil Ibitson, Al LaVigne, Garfield?, Garfield?, Ross Colville and Robin Weatherstone from Optimists with guys from Garfield (Rome, NY, 1961)*

What was helping the Corps to survive this year, still in first place, was the fact that for the first time we had a full-time drill instructor. Doug McPhail had come through the ranks of the Corps, learning the business as he went. The intricate drills he wrote and taught had proven to be adequate and were helping to keep us in contention. The season was drawing to a close, and, although we had been able to remain undefeated in Canada, there were still some stiff contests remaining. Our rivals had smelled blood and were not about to let up. So, when the next competition rolled around interest among fans and Corps alike was at a high. This show would see us defending our Canadian National Exhibition title, which we had held since its inception. We knew it would not be easy and so it turned out.



Doug McPhail and Bernie Beer (1961)

## **CNE**

There was a large crowd for this one, doubtless stimulated by the first meeting of top Junior Corps in Canada for some weeks. We had improved since the start of the season, but our rivals had not been standing still.

The show we put on was, we felt, the best we were capable of at the time. Due to the small size of the stadium and large crowd in attendance, it was not possible for us to watch the other Corps perform. Waiting for the results, we mingled with the crowd around us that were enjoying the exhibition, unaware of the drama unfolding on the little field. Finally, all the Corps trooped out on the field for the retreat ceremony. Tension slowly rose as the announcer ran through the scores, and Corps, from bottom up, until there were only two remaining. Tenths separated the two top positions as the scores, unavailable now, were given first, and then the Corps.

In second place, from Toronto, “The Optimists”. It finally happened! For the first time since mid-1958, we had lost a field show in Canada, to a Canadian Corps. Mixed cheering and booing greeted the result, with first



Optimists and De La Salle awaiting their scores (CNE, Toronto, 1961)

place going, of course, to De La Salle. They had earned it and were jubilant. To cap it all, our drum line was beaten by a very slim margin, by the same Corps, although they dropped down to two snare drums to do it. No matter, a win is a win is a win however you do it. This saying was shortly to be proven again, emphatically.

So we had lost. So what! Nobody dropped dead, and life would go on. It did not take long to sink in, along with the realization that the Canadian Championships were only two weeks away. Here, now, was where the often mentioned Optimists Corps spirit showed its depth. One of our members, much concerned, approached Barry Bell, the chief instructor, and asked if the Corps could practice the rest of the weekend, all of the following weekend, and every weeknight between now and the championships. Although such hours were still unheard

of in those days, consent was given on the condition that the guys would come out. Going back to the corps, this individual (I might as well admit it) announced the proposal, citing the fact that we were in real danger of losing our Canadian title. Nobody said much, just packed up and went home. Not much had to be said.

The next day, everybody showed up for practice. And the next day! And even the next!! Nobody intentionally missed a rehearsal for the next two weeks. It was possible that the loss was a blessing in disguise, as our subsequent activity was to have some effect on events.

The two weeks that we had in which to polish up our show were not wasted. Too late in the year to make major changes in drill or music, little things were attended. Difficult music parts were eliminated or changed, to save a tenth here and there. Likewise with drill patterns. Ivor Bramley, who now had some experience teaching drill, took off his bass drum and concentrated on drilling the drum line. This definitely paid off, as the line was less than perfect in this category. Everybody gave it everything they had for two weeks and, at the end, felt that we could not have done much more than we did. All now was in the hands of fate, and the chips would fall where they would.



*Barry Bell addresses corps after first loss to De La Salle (CNE, Toronto, 1961)*



*De La Salle (Buffalo, 1961)*

## 1961 Nationals

Came the day of judgment and off we went to Waterloo, Ontario, where the 1961 Canadian Champions would be crowned. Considering the situation, things were very light-hearted and no gloom and doom was apparent. This would change.

Many were on hand to see this show, where it was now expected that these Optimists would finally get their comeuppance. Believe it or not, many of us thought this way too.

The preliminaries, held during the day, only served to strengthen this attitude. Again, we put on the best show we thought possible; and, this time, due to stadium layout, we could watch the other Corps.

There was no doubt about it, De La Salle were “electrifying” and pulled out all the stops in their ceaseless quest for victory. They defeated us by a margin of 2.375, winning all captions but drumming. Now all they had to do was repeat at the night finals and there would be a new title holder. Gloom and desperation settled over our dressing room. Was it all to end? A scheduled practice was delayed because nobody had the inclination to do it, let alone not being sure what to do. Anybody observing this scene would have thought the end of the world was at hand. To us, it was.



*De La Salle (Leaside, 1961)*

Then, as so often happens in a crisis, no matter what the occasion or activity, fate intervened in the form of Bernie Beer, the Assistant Corps Director. He administered a tongue-lashing that instilled the spirit necessary for one last stab at snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.

There must have been only about four or five hours before the final showdown, yet, gathering what zeal was left, we went off to do what had to be done. The measures adopted were those of desperation. These entailed yet again taking out any hard bugle parts, replacing them with simpler passages. Actions such as these are risky so close to a show, especially one so important. There was not enough time to rehearse changes until they become second nature. The original parts had been played all year, and the risk was that some would forget the changes and play the old parts. However, that is what was done, and, with some confidence restored by these Band-Aid measures, we prepared for our return to the arena. There was not much to do but wait, and tension subsided, only to build up again as the climax approached.



*Bernie Beer*

## **"From Toronto... The Optimists!" by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 10. (continued)**

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Being the defending champions, we were on last in order of appearance, therefore, being able to relax a bit longer. We did not watch the other Corps perform, for obvious reasons; and then, finally, it was our turn. Trooping out on to the starting line and performing the preliminary ritual of dressing the line, we stood there, waiting for the command to begin.



*Toronto Optimists on the starting line (Nationals, Waterloo, 1961)*

When a Corps is on the line, all the crowd sees is a solid line of faceless, uniformed figures. What is going on inside those uniforms is a different story. Tension ran through the line like an electric current. Some were compelled to express their feelings in muted “side of the mouth” comments, and visible nervous tension was rife. No matter, the clock ticked on and away we went. The long green line took off down the field, and, horrors, it has a big curve in it. Normally supposed to be ruler straight, white-faced instructors and fans deduced that the affair was blown right there; however, it straightened up as training and concentration asserted themselves. From then on, according to eyewitness reports, the drill was as precise as it had ever been seen before. The Corps picked up, and it



*Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Waterloo, 1961)*

became obvious that everybody was giving it everything they had. One thing was certain, this Corps was not going down without a fight.

At the end of the show, we filed off the field, satisfied that we had given it our all, aware that the die was cast. Nothing could be changed now.

## The Retreat

This retreat ceremony, where all the results are announced was probably the most tension packed one that we had endured. More so than when we had first challenged for the championship, because then we had nothing to lose. Although results are supposed to be known only when announced on the field, there had been a leak. Some of our people were aware of the outcome, and, win or lose, were not tense, like everybody else.



*Drum Majors on Retreat (Nationals, Waterloo, 1961)*

After the Junior B and Girls classes were announced, it was the Junior A's turn. Starting from the bottom up, the scores were reeled off, one by one, until only second and first place remained. The crowd and Corps were waiting with undisguised impatience for the last two results.

The scores were given first.

2nd Place, the score was	83.50
1st Place, the score was	83.55

Then, in second place, with a score of 83.50,

From Toronto (both were from Toronto)  
De La Salle!



*Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Waterloo, 1961)*

## **"From Toronto... The Optimists!" by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 10. (continued)**

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We had done it. For the fourth year in a row, we were the Canadian Junior National Champions.

The crowd reaction, though mixed, was decidedly not in our favour. Del had performed brilliantly, but we had also given our most capable effort, enhanced by the striving of the past two weeks. The score sheets would tell the story.

They had won all the general effect captions, but we had come out on top in execution drums and marching and maneuvering. Our drum line, which had really exerted itself during the previous two weeks, along with the drill of the entire Corps, had put these captions back within our grasp. Our bugles, although not winning their caption, were extremely close and had held up their end. The new people had come through, as they had all year, and the last minute changes had been executed well. We had only won by five one hundredths of a point, and one more mistake would have finished us. The scores of drums, bugles, and drill, both execution and general effect, when added up, were very close; however, we would have lost if those were the only things that counted. What tipped the scales in our favour was the colour guard. Our guard had received a one tenth penalty but Del's guard had been penalized for three tenths. Without this, they would have won. The controversy raged from the beginning, and, in some circles, still rages today, over thirty years later.

Protests were immediately lodged with the judges, as they usually are in the case of penalties, if they are decisive. In this case, they were.

They claimed they had been penalized for the varied heights of their people, and the other side claimed it was for uneven flagpole heights. No guard has people all exactly the same height. Flagpole slings have to be adjusted to compensate for this. It never was resolved to the satisfaction of all, even though the judge in question stated he had warned them about it before.

A judge who awards such things is not aware of the rest of the unit he is watching. He concentrates on his specialty and does not know if his judgments have a decisive impact on the overall result, especially one so

controversial. Therefore, when protests are lodged, he is often required to leave the final decision to a higher authority. This happened here, and that higher authority was none other than Al Baggs, the Chief Judge. He was also, of course, still the Corps Director of the Toronto Optimists, so this was akin to pouring kerosene on a fire.

If he had ever foreseen the development of such a conflict of interest, when he accepted the Chief Judge's position, is not known. He was, however, intelligent and must have known that one day it could lead to criticism. This, obviously, was the day. No matter where he came down, he would be exposed to censure. He was between a rock and a hard place.



Toronto Optimists drums (Windsor, 1961)

As it turned out, he opted to support his judge and uphold the penalties. If he had not, one possible side effect could have been a loss of confidence in him by other judges and Corps. This also meant, among other things, that we remained in first place and were still champions. It also meant that any future shows we won where he was presiding would be seen to be influenced by this. This was completely unfounded, as we repeated wins in the United States under totally neutral judges.

The judges were no doubt relieved, and all the Optimist fans were happy, especially the hard line ones. De La Salle was a different story! Who can blame them? To this day, among some people, Al Baggs' name is still greeted with derision, sometimes almost hatred.

Del was a Corps that had given their best, and many felt they should have won, including some of our people. Showing their character, they saluted us on the field and took it like the men that they were. Afterwards, one of their members came over and said, "we threw everything we had at you, and you still won". This was true, and, if we had not, the future of Canadian Junior Corps would not have continued as it did. We knew they would be back, and this sportsmanlike attitude can only be applauded in the face of a result that even we had only dared to hope for.

## **Grape Festival**

After this nail-biting experience, anything else left in the season was a definite anti-climax, and it showed. At the Grape Festival contest in St. Catharines, we lost again to Del, by two full points. This meant that, including the preliminaries at the Nationals, we had lost three out of the four contests in Canada to De La Salle. Had the year been averaged out, things would have been fairly even, but that is not the way things are done. Like the Stanley Cup, or the World Series, people usually only recall who won the championship. We had won it, however close, and callous as it sounds, that was all we cared about. Anything after that was not of great consequence.

Things slowly wound down. Robin Weatherstone, a horn player, and our second ex-Scout House man, took over the writing of our Drum Corps World column from Ed Nanni. As we entered the month of October, the official release month, we again faced the dilemma of people leaving.

October, under the C.D.C.A. rules, was the only month when you could leave a Corps to join another one without any protest or action from the original Corps. Optimist policy was to give anyone a release, anytime they wanted one, no matter what time of the year it was. If somebody did not want to be there both parties are better off. It turned out that this fall we were to lose only five horn players and one drummer.

St. Mary's Drum Corps folded at the end of this year. Some of their horn players came to us and filled out the



*Toronto Optimists (Grape Festival, St. Catharines, 1961)*

## **"From Toronto... The Optimists!" by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 10. (continued)**

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horn line. Among this group were two brothers, Hans and Richard Boehnke. Richard was to eventually have a larger impact than just being a horn player. The vacancy in the drum line was filled by Ron Kaiser who, though having been with the Corps for some time, would not play in it until he could play snare drum.

So without having to abide the same large turnover of the previous year, we could hopefully look forward to better prospects in the year to come. Whatever the future held, there as only one way to sum up the season just past – Phew!



*St Mary's Drum Corps (CNE, Toronto, 1961)*



*Toronto Optimists (Merritton, ON, 1961)*



*Toronto Optimists (Rome, NY, 1961)*



*Toronto Optimists (Buffalo, 1961)*

## Some scores from 1961

### A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of 1961 progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Jersey City (May 28)	Rome, NY (July 8)	Toronto, ON (July 15)	CNE Toronto (Sept 2)	Nationals Galt ON (Sept 9)	Grape Festival (Sept 17)
Toronto Optimists	N O S C O R E S	81.850	80.690	N O S C O R E S	83.55	82.10
De La Salle			78.725		83.50	84.40
Grantham Boys			71.920		76.96	
Midtowners			76.690			74.50
Preston Scout House			68.010			
Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights		83.190				
St. Catherine's Queensmen		82.850				
Garfield Cadets		84.750				
Bracken Cavaliers		78.680				
Irondequoit Statesmen		72.690				
St Mary's (Toronto)		58.760				

These are all of the scores that we have for 1961.

For a list of scores for other years, go to our website:  
<https://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca/>



Toronto Optimists (Windsor, 1961)

# The St. Lawrence Seaway / Port of Toronto flag

by Bob Carell

**I**F YOU HAPPEN to be someone who looks at the images before reading, you might be wondering why the next page contains an advertisement for Molson's beer. Before dealing with that part of the story I think I'll start with some background information.

In April of 1959 the St. Lawrence Seaway was officially opened and the first ships passed through the system. The Seaway, which consists of a mix of navigable waters and canals, was created to enable ocean-going ships to travel from the Atlantic Ocean through the Great Lakes, all the way to the western edge of Lake Superior.

Queen Elizabeth was scheduled to visit Canada in June of 1959 for the official opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Since Toronto is one of the ports on the Seaway system the City decided that they wanted to recognize this with a flag. A contest was jointly sponsored by the Globe & Mail and the City of Toronto to choose a design for the flag. According to Phil Hennings, another sponsor was Molsons' Brewery.

From the 574 entries the contest board decided on a design by Eric Nasmith of Toronto. The design of the symbol includes the City Hall tower, an anchor representing the port, ER on the flag depicting the Royal visit, 1959 (the year the Seaway was opened) and a ship representing the St. Lawrence Seaway. The design won unanimous support from council and was approved without debate.

The plan was to make symbol the central theme of civic decoration. It would line the route the Queen would take when she drove through the city in June. The symbol was widely publicized by the St. Lawrence Seaway Promotional Council which organized the competition.



Don Chisolm (assistant Drum Major), Bob Cook and Phil Hennings (Drum Major) with the Seaway / Port of Toronto flag (Don Mills Plaza, June, 1959)



Closeup of the Seaway symbol  
(from our flag)

## St. Lawrence Seaway Flag (continued)

Having decided on a design, the flag was made and, after a performance at the Don Mills Curling Club, the Optimists were presented with the flag. The photo on the previous page shows Don Chilsom, Bob Cook and Phil Hennings holding the flag.

Returning to Phil, his memory of Molson's being a sponsor might be correct. If you look at the flag, the Molson's ad and Molson's corporate logo on the upper right of the building, you might see a connection. Molson's logo is a Crown and Anchor

A modified version of the Crown and Anchor that appears in the ad and the corporate logo has been cleverly incorporated into the flag. The crown and anchor, although modified, figure prominently in the Seaway symbol. You can see that the shank



Ad for Molson's Crown & Anchor lager

of the anchor has been replaced with a depiction of Toronto's City Hall Clock Tower while the crown has been called a boat

No one seems to know why the flag was presented to the Toronto Optimists. It is quite possible that The Optimists received the flag because they had established a connection with the city when, in the autumn of 1958, Mayor Nathan Phillips presented the Optimists with the City of Toronto flag.



Eric Nasmith's original design as published in the Toronto Globe & Mail plus a souvenir version



Molson's Brewery (Lakeshore Road, Toronto)

# Rick Robida and his “new” Green Satin Blouse

by Phil Hennings

**I**N THE WORLD of competitive activities, everybody likes a winner (unless they win too much). After the Toronto Optimists had won their first national title in 1958, members of some other corps began arriving, looking for a place in the line. Probably all of them wanted to march in a championship corps, but that was not the only reason. For example, some wanted to improve themselves musically while others wanted to march with their friends. The Optimists had developed a reputation for hard work so prospective members knew that, if accepted, there would be multiple practices per week. Some found this level of commitment to be too demanding and they did not stay.

Many of these lads came from cities that were quite a distance away. While the Optimists benefited from these new members, the corps that they left suffered. One of those corps was the Grantham Police Boys Band in St Catharines, ON.



Gratham Police Boys band with two future Optimists: Dennis Roberts and Rick Robida (Windsor, 1960)

The first to leave St Catharines and join the Optimists were Victor Glowacki and Glen Durish. It was irrelevant that their home was 75 miles away. They had a goal and, no matter the challenges, they made it to rehearsals. Victor frequently stayed at my parents home.

In the ensuing years, many excellent people left the Grantham Boys Police Band to join the Optimists. They were all good, dedicated corps members who wanted to be better and they saw the Optimists as a place where that would happen.

I remember in 1962 as equipment manager in Rome NY handing out our NEW uniforms. Man they looked sharp! Every guy who was handed a uniform looked so proud to be in The Optimists. There were so many great members that went though this Corps. Many years later they still had that love of Drum Corps.



Toronto Optimists first time in their new green blouses (Rome, 1962)

Around 2002 the Optimists started an Alumni Corps. People we hadn't seen for years arrived to join. So many people helped to make this happen - too many to mention. Many people volunteered their time to help manage the Alumni Corps.

I, along with Alumni member Henry Beben, was asked to research different companies that made

## Recollections from Corps members (continued)

uniforms. I was to see if we could get a blouse made that looked like we did in the 60's. I found a company and one was made; however, it did not make us look like we did years ago. A Cadet style tunic was looked into and this one was accepted.

Of the many people who volunteered to help the Corps, one that stood up and was elected President was Rick Robida. Rick begun his drum corps career with Grantham, where he played baritone horn then, in 1962, he joined the Optimists.

In later years Rick played contrabass in both the Optimists Alumni Corps and the Hawthorne



Phil Hennings and Rick Robida (Rochester, 2007)

Caballeros Alumni corps. Unfortunately, health concerns meant that he had to stop playing a horn.

In 2013 Rick had an opportunity to march with the Optimist Alumni Corps as colour guard captain which he did. He wished he could wear a blouse like we had in the 60;s There was the blouse I had made in the beginning that never was used. I made arrangements with him to meet at a Drum Corps show. Maybe he could get it altered, which he did. I must say he looked great, you could see on his face how proud he was to be able to do this last hurrah. I found Rick easy going he loved Drum Corps.

People in Drum Corps are Brothers forever!!



Phil with Sue Robida giving Rick the "new" green satin top.



Rick Robida as Alumni Corps guard captain (Annapolis, 2013)

# **The City of Toronto Flag**

by Bob Carell, Phil Hennings and Glenn Copp

**W**HEN MOST PEOPLE think of the City of Toronto flag they imagine the current version, a stylized outline of Toronto's "new" City Hall on a blue background with a Red maple leaf in the centre. In late 1958 the Toronto Optimists were presented with a much different City of Toronto Flag. This story talks about the 1958 version of the flag.



*Current City of Toronto flag*



*Optimists version of the Toronto Flag*

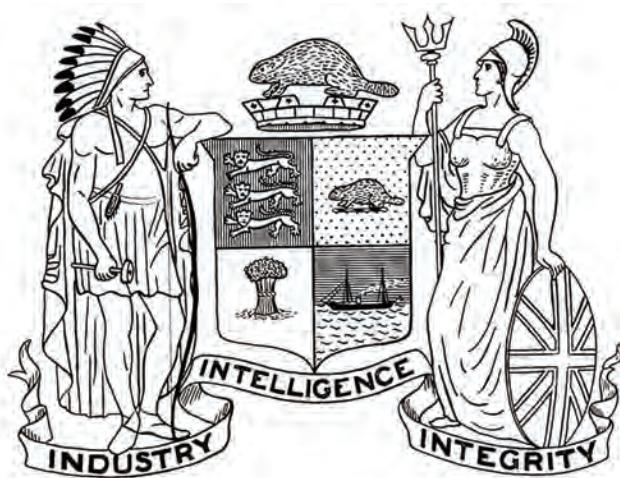
In the Fall of 1958, after winning the Canadian National Trumpet Band Championships, the Toronto Optimists were invited to march up Bay Street to the Old City Hall. There they met the Mayor of Toronto, Nathan Phillips, for whom the new City Hall square is named.

Marching up Bay Street in a parade is an honour that was usually limited to Stanley Cup Hockey Team winners and Football Champions. As a result, it was a great privilege to be honoured in this way.

The Toronto Optimists Executive and the Mayor gave congratulatory speeches after which the mayor presented the corps with The Toronto Flag. To our knowledge the City of Toronto Flag was never given to any other corps. (While we do not have a clear shot of the flag this article contains the best images I have been able to locate.)

Glenn Copp, who had played cymbals with the Toronto Optimists, decided to search for the flag. Unfortunately, Glenn never located the flag; however, in the process of searching for the flag, he discovered some interesting background information. For example, Glenn discovered that Toronto had used two similar Coats of Arms. The version that appeared on the flag used by the Optimists was changed in 1961 but the corps didn't know it. As a result, for many years the Optimists carried an incorrect version of the Toronto flag.

Optimists' version included an Indigenous Warrior wearing a headress. He was looking directly at Britannia. Optimists version showed a beaver on the top right of the shield and a wheat sheaf on the bottom left. In the 1961 version the Indigenous Warrior has two feathers (apparently the headress



*This is a black and white version of the Toronto Coat of Arms that was on our flag.*

## City Of Toronto Flag (continued)



The 1961 version of Toronto's Coat of Arms

was more common in the prairies). Also, the warrior and Britannia are no longer looking directly at each other. In addition, the beaver on the shield was replaced by a white rose (to symbolize York) and the wheat sheaf was replaced by a white cog wheel to indicate Industry and there is a maple leaf in the centre.

### Phil Hennings remembers

THE CITY OF TORONTO flag was carried by the colour guard of the Toronto Optimists to represent Toronto. The flag was the same on both sides. It was black with a gold fringe and in the centre was an embroidered version of the Toronto's Coat of Arms.

As Drum Major, I greeted the Mayor and he presented the Toronto flag to me in a canvas bag. Reporters were asking the Mayor and myself



Optimists arriving at City Hall for flag presentation (1958)

### Arbiters Approve ...

## Toronto's Indian Has His Feathers Plucked

Several handfuls of feathers have been plucked from the head of the Indian on Toronto's coat-of-arms in the interests of authenticity. Until now a brave in the sweeping headdress of a Plains Indian has propped up one side of the coat-of-arms but he has been replaced by a

trim chap with only two feathers—the typical garb of the Mississaugas of this forest region. The wide and drooping feathers of Western Indians were fine on the prairies but highly impractical on the warpath in thick woods.

Thus has an oversight of 127 years ago been corrected and soon Toronto will have letters patent granting it the right to use a new coat-of-arms approved by the College of Heralds in London.

Board of Control yesterday approved a sketch of the new design, one that avoids the heraldic errors of the original coat of arms, which was not registered when Toronto became a city in 1834. A svelte Britannia is shown in a more full-faced pose than in the original, and the other supporter the Indian, is in authentic Mississauga dress. Two quarters of the shield have been changed and a maple

leaf has been introduced in the fesse point or centre of the cross on the shield.

The beaver has been removed from one quarter, since there is already a beaver at the top. It has been replaced with a white rose of York, which Controller Donald Summerville insisted on calling a trillium. The wheat sheaf has been replaced by a

cogwheel, representing the change from an agricultural to an industrial economy.

Earlier this summer it was announced that the Queen had consented to inclusion of the three lions of the Royal arms in one quarter of the shield.

Although at least one expert on heraldry had told City Clerk George Norris that such a request was hopeless, Mayor Nathan Phillips asked External Affairs Minister Howard Green to direct it to London. Sir Michael Adeane, secretary to the Queen, later informed the mayor that permission to retain the Royal arms had been granted.

The fourth quarter of the shield shows a ship, representing the city's role as a port. The hull, figurehead and paddlewheel of the steamer Great Britain, one of the first on the Great Lakes, is depicted. A design submitted by the College of Heralds last year showed the classic

### ... Shorn Civic Arms



Plumed warrior ...



... is almost scalped ...



... by College of Heralds.

Article talking about the City of Toronto changing its Coat of Arms (the *Globe and Mail*, August 26, 1961)

## **City Of Toronto Flag (continued)**

to show them the flag but (very quietly) Mayor Phillips leaned over to me and whispered in my ear, "Don't open the bag, son." Of course, I asked, "Why?" And the mayor said, "There is no flag in the bag! It's still being made!!"

The reporters were very puzzled because all of them wanted to take pictures of the presentation of the flag. I wonder whether they ever learned the reason.

Even though we paraded up Bay Street many times after that 1958 appearance, this is one of my proudest moments with the Corps.

### **More on the history of the Corp's City of Toronto Flag**

*by Glenn Copp*

**W**E HAD BEEN looking at the possibility of replacing or reproducing some of the Corp's original flags. While doing this we came to meet and speak with Mr Ken Spink of what used to be Dominion Regalia. They manufactured most of the original flags.

Ken told us that the idea of the Corp's being presented with and carrying this flag was entirely the product of Al Baggs, our founding director's

rather fertile mind. It seems that when Baggs first approached the Mayor and the City, they were agreeable; however, the City had a problem since it did not have an official flag. Mr. Baggs, the City and Dominion Regalia then undertook the task of designing the first and original flag.

When the Corps and Phil Hennings attended the official presentation, Phil was told by the Mayor not to open the canvas sleeve because the flag had not even yet been made. In fact, the flag had probably not even been designed at that time. The Press were disappointed because they had brought their photographers. As you can see, Toronto Optimists corps director, Mr Baggs, had been instrumental in the creation of the official flag for the City.

Only three such flags were originally made: one for us, one for the City and one which was retained by Dominion. When the City moved into the new City Hall, the City's one and only flag disappeared. Dominion then made a fourth. This was the last to be made. The one that Dominion had has also disappeared in the intervening years. The City presumably still has theirs. So where is our flag?

The next page contains the best images I could find that show Optimists' City of Toronto Flag.

*Continued next page*



*City of Toronto Flag presentation (City Hall, 1958)*

## **City Of Toronto Flag (continued)**

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Toronto Optimists colour guard showing our City of Toronto Flag (Merritton, 1960)



Toronto Optimists and City of Toronto Flag (front, centre, 1961)

### David Johns remembers

I WAS A MEMBER of the Don Mills Sky Raiders in 1959 and 1960. They disbanded in the fall of 1960. That's when my friend Glenn Copp, who was a member of the Optimists, said to me in no uncertain terms "*Join the Optimists*".

While in the Sky Raiders (Junior B) I was aware of the Optimists as the Canadian Junior A Championship corps. I felt I didn't have a chance of becoming a member.

I went to a rehearsal. I can't remember who Glenn introduced me to. The interview probably went something like this:

"Thank you for considering joining". "Thank you". "Have you marched in a Drum Corps before?" "Yes." "What instrument did you play?" "Snare drum". "Can play like them?" The interviewer tilted his head toward the practicing drum line. "Noooooo". "OK, join the others over there in the Colour Guard". I was so happy to be part of this Corps.

The corps practiced indoors through the remainder of the year and into the early spring of 1961 when we went outside. I think, two nights a week. I was familiar with participating in a field show so M&M wasn't new. What was new was the discipline and enthusiasm. Dress right - company fronts... pivots... left and right wheels... about face... present arms... stop whining. Elbows up... check spacing... mark time... knees up... check the diagonals. Don't bend that flagpole... don't loose your Chicago Posts<sup>1</sup>.

I can't remember the location of my first competition. (I checked on the <https://www.torontooptimistshistory.ca> website to find out). It was Friday, May 26 in Philipsburg, New Jersey, competing against one of the best American Corps, Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights. No pressure.

I don't remember anything about the completion. I do remember my dry mouth... my heart pounding... looking out at the empty field - wondering if I lost tenths during inspection by a

judge while standing "on-the-line"... the startling sound of the Timing Judge's starter pistol at the first note of the music... just remember when to step off.

I was nervous but confident throughout our show. We had practiced so many times that I knew the drill by following the music. That's not to say there wasn't a mishap now and then.

On Saturday the corps traveled to Jersey City, New Jersey for the Preview Of Champions held on Sunday, the 26th. Again, were competing against some of the best corps: Chicago Cavaliers,

Blessed Sacrament, Garfield Cadets. I had never seen so many fans. This stadium was used by the professional baseball league and had seating for thousands and there were thousands attending this competition.

Right dress... the drum major takes his position on the field... salutes to the crowd... turns around to face us - lifts one arm above his head... marks time for four... points to us on the fifth count... first note of

of the music... starter pistol sounds... step off.

These Corps were our competition. We were encouraged to watch and learn. We had to know what made them successful. To their credit, the management of the Optimists entered us in as many U.S. competitions as possible. We gradually improved and the competition instilled a determination and commitment I'll always admire.

<sup>1</sup> My flagpole consisted of two parts, each about five feet long. The top portion of bottom pole had a six inch negative flange that the top pole fitted over. There was a single hole through the joining poles. The Chicago Post was a one inch long by 1/4 inch wide devise that held together the two parts. It consisted of two parts: a hollow cylinder, threaded on the inside with a flat cap on one end. The other part was a 3/8 inch long, threaded piece, also with a cap that had a slot for a screw driver. The long post was inserted through hole in the pole and the short piece screwed into it.



David (Merriton, ON, 1961)



### John Van Der Flaes

**October 29, 2021**

**Corps: Toronto Optimists**

John Van der Flaes passed away at the age of 76, on October 29, 2021. He had a heart attack while living with his wife in a retirement community in a resort area south of Manila.

John was a proud and devoted member of the guard in 1965, but home and school demands meant that he could not stay in the corps after that.

He maintained his interest in the Optimists throughout his life.

While working to install and maintain reservations systems for many major national airlines, John travelled extensively, living in places as varied as Vancouver, California, Texas, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Oman, and Hong Kong.



Toronto Optimists (1965)



### Vern Johansson

**January 4, 2022**

**Corps: Bantam Optimists, Toronto Optimists, Optimists Alumni**

Vern began his drum corps career as a drummer in the Bantam Optimists. Later on he explored other instruments. In early 1964 the Bantams folded and Vern, together with most of the Bantam members, moved to the Toronto Optimists. During the 1964 season Andy Henderson was Drum Major while Vern became assistant drum major. Vern skipped the 1965 season to briefly explore a career as a rock musician; however, he returned as Drum Major in 1966, serving all the way through 1970.

Vern was one of the founders of the Optimists Alumni Drum Corps. He served as its first Drum Major from 2002 through 2004. He returned again for the 2008 and 2009 season.

#### **Letter from Vern's family.**

"Dear friends, It is with a tremendous amount of sadness that we announce Vern's passing after a short bout with cancer. He will be greatly missed by his beloved wife of fifty-one years, Jennifer, by his daughter Adrienne, and his son, Brendan. Vern was also beloved 'Grumps', to his grandchildren, Jet and Laurel. He will be greatly missed by his sisters and brother, and of course, by all of his friends.

Vern was a kind, compassionate, hard working, quick witted, uniquely funny, and most importantly, a truly loving man. All of the above attributes (perhaps with the exception of 'loving') contributed to his great success in the world of advertising, where he started as a copy writer, working his way up to Creative Director, where he lent his unique perspective to many successful campaigns for notable brands (Honda, Molson Canadian, the Toronto Blue Jays) during the 80s and 90s.

It was during the 90s that Vern discovered a much easier way to make a living, using his strong voice to voice overs for both television and radio. He told you that Mr. Christie makes good cookies, that Canadian Tire was for more than just tires, and he was both a little ashamed and a little proud that he tried to get you to try McDonald's pizza when they launched that ill-fated endeavour.

After over thirty years living in Etobicoke, Vern and Jennifer moved to the small town of Waterford, ON, where Vern truly embraced small-town living. He took up volunteering and fundraising for local causes, and he discovered a new passion, working in local theatre. From writing and directing short plays for the Waterford Lantern Tour, to acting in a one man show about Mark Twain, Vern loved to perform.

And that love of performing was honed as a teenager when Vern joined his life-long passion, drum corps. As a drummer and then Drum Major for the Toronto Optimists, Vern made many, many memories and

*continued next page*

## WE REMEMBER (continued)

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life-long friends that he always cherished.

Vern was extremely fond of all the dogs his wife Jennifer showed up with over the years, with Tess the Bernese Mountain Dog being his greatest companion. If you are so inclined, please honour Vern by making a donation to your favourite animal charity.

Due to Covid, there will be no funeral, but we are hoping to have a celebration of Vern's life sometime in the spring, at the much loved Shrine on Lakeshore Ave. in Toronto. Vern always said this is where he and Jennifer met, whereas Jennifer says they first met at Porter Stadium. It was one of the few things they disagreed on. Thank you." (Jennifer, Adrienne, and Brendan)

### Here are a few comments from some of those who knew Vern.

*"He will always be remembered as a class individual and a great loss to the Drum Corps community."*  
Rick Allen

*"He was a gentleman and a scholar. Parade Rest, Vern. Your job here is done."* Joel Alleyne

*"One of the kindest, caring people I've ever known. We've lost a true Champion. RIP Vern, you will be truly missed."* Mel Dey

*"One of the classiest gentlemen I have ever known, this is heartbreakin news."* Thom Sacco

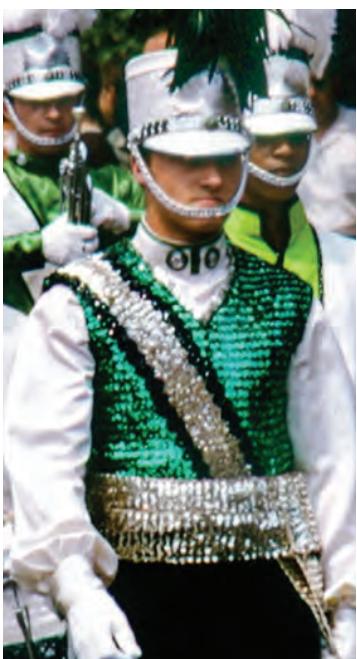
*"He is a great guy , he was always supportive around the corps , and fun to talk to."* Barry Woods

*"I'm very saddened to see this. Vern is one of the funniest men I have ever met. So caring. So giving. It would be hard to meet a nicer guy than him."* Kevin Matthew

*"Vern, you were a fantastic human being. My condolences to all that loved him. Now Vern and my Dad can hang out together again."* Alison Wright



Bantam Optimists (1961)



Toronto Optimists (1967)



Toronto Optimists (1964)



Optimists Alumni (2009)



**Check out the new “Memories of 1961” video on the website**

### **Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter: Staff and contributors**

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

**Photo Credits:** David Johns, Don Daber, Eric McConachie, Peter McCusker.

**Contributions From:** Phil Hennings, Glenn Copp, David Johns and Bob Carell

### **HOW TO REACH US**

**CORRECTIONS:** We tried to get everything right.

If not, please let us know:

[toronto\\_optimist@rogers.com](mailto:toronto_optimist@rogers.com)

Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter  
is published quarterly.

Please submit your material to Bob Carell at:  
[Toronto\\_Optimist@rogers.com](mailto:Toronto_Optimist@rogers.com) in one of the  
following formats:

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

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

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