



Toronto Optimists History-Newsletter

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

The Toronto Optimists History website celebrates:

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

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



ISSUE 12 October 2023

In this issue

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



- 5 **FEATURE ARTICLE**
Les Compagnons
- 15 *"From Toronto...
The Optimists!"*
Chapters 23 and 24
- 30 **Some Scores**
30: scores from 1973
43: scores from 1974
- 44 **Spotlight:**
The Bandettes
- 49 **Remembering Mr Baggs**
*Many people, including
Sadie Mau-Mau*
- 60 **Who Would Have Known?**
*Doug MacKenzie looks
back at 1961*
- 71 **Ontario Drum Corps
Reunion**
- 72 **The Last Page**

PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

Contribute to your newsletter

Send your suggestions, stories or articles to Bob: toronto_optimist@rogers.com

We publish four issues each year. New issues are posted mid-month, in January, April, July and October

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



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30: scores from 1973
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- 44 Spotlight:
The Bandettes
- 49 Remembering Mr Baggs
Many people, including
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Reunion
- 72 The Last Page

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- 2 Be a contributor
- 3 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website
- 5 FEATURE ARTICLE
Les Compagnons
- 15 "From Toronto... The Optimists!"
Chapters 23 and 24
- 30 Some Scores
30: scores from 1973
43: scores from 1974
- 44 Spotlight:
The Bandettes
- 49 Remembering Mr Baggs
Many people, including
Sadie Mau-Mau
- 60 Who Would Have Known?
Doug MacKenzie looks
back at 1961
- 71 Ontario Drum Corps
Reunion
- 72 The Last Page

11. July 2023

12. October 2023

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ISS APR 2022

In this issue

- 2 Be a contributor
- 3 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website
- 5 FEATURE ARTICLE
Les Compagnons
- 15 "From Toronto... The Optimists!"
Chapters 23 and 24
- 30 Some Scores
30: scores from 1973
43: scores from 1974
- 44 Spotlight:
The Bandettes
- 49 Remembering Mr Baggs
Many people, including
Sadie Mau-Mau
- 60 Who Would Have Known?
Doug MacKenzie looks
back at 1961
- 71 Ontario Drum Corps
Reunion
- 72 The Last Page

6. April 2022

7. July 2022

8. October 2022

9. January 2023

10. April 2023

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ISS JAN 2021

In this issue

- 2 Be a contributor
- 3 What's new on the Toronto Optimists History website
- 5 FEATURE ARTICLE
Les Compagnons
- 15 "From Toronto... The Optimists!"
Chapters 23 and 24
- 30 Some Scores
30: scores from 1973
43: scores from 1974
- 44 Spotlight:
The Bandettes
- 49 Remembering Mr Baggs
Many people, including
Sadie Mau-Mau
- 60 Who Would Have Known?
Doug MacKenzie looks
back at 1961
- 71 Ontario Drum Corps
Reunion
- 72 The Last Page

1. January 2021

2. April 2021

3. July 2021

4. October 2021

5. January 2022



WEBSITE ADDITIONS

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



Northstar (US Open, Marion, Ohio, 1978)

WEBSITE UPDATE: What's NEW on TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

REGULARLY UPDATE THE Photo Gallery with photos from the competitive years. This usually happens about twice each week; however, this schedule sometimes slips, depending on what's happening in my life. While the focus of the site is the Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Optimists, we also include photos of other corps, mostly from Ontario, that competed during the old days. This page includes a photo of K-W Northstar as well as one of Toronto Optimists' Guard in 1960, both of which I recently added to the Photo Gallery. In addition to photos, I have added a couple of old issues of Green Capsule Comments. By the way, the Score File for the Toronto Optimists has been updated to include scores for two contests in May, 1961 and two in August, 1961: a May contest in Phillipsburg, NJ, the 1961 Preview of Champions in Jersey City, the New-York Canadians plus a contest in Titusville, PA.

There's already a wealth of information on the main website, so it's difficult to know what to add. If you have suggestions for new material that will improve the website, please let us know.



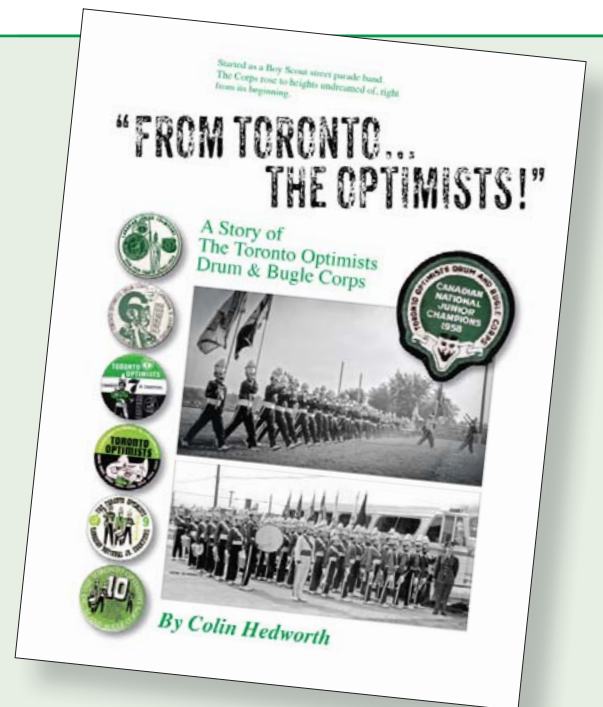
Toronto Optimists' Colour Guard (1960)

In our next newsletter: Chapters 25 and 26

The next issue of the Newsletter (January, 2024) will include Chapters 25 and 26 from Colin Hedworth's book "From Toronto... The Optimists!".

IN CHAPTER 25, Colin talks about 1975, the Toronto Optimists' final year in competition. In a few short years DCI had, in effect, taken over the world of drum corps. Small competitive corps had become a relic of the past and, unless the Optimists could find more members, they, too, would become a relic. Optimists' new Corps Director, Doug MacKenzie, did an excellent job in moving the corps from 1974's 34th place at DCI to 16th place. While the quality of the corps had improved, they were unable to recruit enough new members to match the top DCI corps.

AFTER THE 1974 season, De La Salle had merged with the Etobicoke Crusaders to form the Etobicoke-Oakland Crusaders. In January of 1976, the Optimists took a similar route, merging with the Seneca Princemen. **Chapter 26** deals with the first year in competition for this newly created corps, the Seneca Optimists.



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

Les Compagnons

by Robert Doyle, Jean Dignard
and Paul Laplante

AROUND 1952, at the Embrun High School, Paul Bourgie played a note on a bugle that had been purchased from LaSalle Academy by Mr. Royal Comtois, the school's principal. That single note led to the formation of Les Compagnons Drum & Bugle Corps and over 25 years of rousing music, resounding drums and dazzling colours.

Paul Bourgie was a student at Embrun high school that year. He was unaware that this seemingly insignificant experience would affect the rest of his life. He was embarking on an adventure in which he would be heavily involved for over twenty years, sparking an interest that persists to this day.

This was the beginning of a bugle band, attached to the school's military cadets. Initially, band membership was small, with 12-15 bugles plus three drummers. The musical repertoire consisted mainly of various military marches. Paul Bourgie took his position as

corps commandant seriously. The band was under the musical direction of Maurice Legault and won several awards for the best bugle corps. The band's performances consisted mainly of parades and the famous end-of-year inspection. Initially, only students at the high school could be members of the drum corps.

In September 1965, Paul Bourgie, now a teacher at the high school, and Fernand Lortie, who was now the school principal, began discussing the fate



Maurice Legault conducts Les Compagnons (Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1970)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Les Compagnons (continued)

of the bugle corps. The band's musical director, Maurice Legault, felt a need for change. He said that he was no longer prepared to continue teaching only a valveless bugle corps; however, he would be very interested in creating a modern drum and bugle corps. This was the actual beginning of the Compagnons. Paul Bourgie accepted the leadership of the corps for a period of five years.

Gervais Music provided the Compagnons with over 50 uniforms, drums, Whaley-Royce GD horns and flags. The first practice was in October 1965, with Maurice Legault in charge of brass and Marcel Mathurin in charge of drums. Over 100 students had registered, with more than 60 candidates for drums and over 40 for brass. From these candidates, the corps chose 23 brass, nine drums and nine members for the colour guard. This was a good size for a new corps.

THE COMPAGNONS' first public performance was in March, 1966 with a concert at the Embrun arena. In May, 1966, at Pointe-Gatineau QC, the corps entered their first competition. During its first year of competitions and parades, they won two first place prizes as well as many trophies for the various sections of the corps.

In 1967, Canada's Centennial year, the corps increased its strength to 30 brass, 8 drums and 12 colour guard. Uniforms underwent some changes, including a forage cap which replaced the garrison hat. The colour guard received new uniforms, which featured a shako and blouses with colours that were the reverse to the rest of the corps. On the competition field, Les Compagnons once again won several trophies and prizes. They took part in several parades and entered the National Championship in Ottawa. They were finalists in the Junior "B" class.



Les Compagnons (1968)

In 1968, the corps continued to progress and grow. Not only did they keep most of its members, but they found new recruits. This situation helped the corps members to advance their skills by handling more challenging music and drill routines. Esprit de corps and camaraderie were the order of the day, and the group lived up to its name, forging friendships that endure to this day. It was also in 1968 that Maurice Legault, who had just ended his association with the LaSalle Cadets, accepted the position of Drum Major for the Compagnons. Paul Bourgie had previously held this position.

In 1969, Les Compagnons dominated the Central Canada Circuit, winning a record 6 first places and two second places, competing in 10 contests. Of these 10 competitions, they won the best bugle line award 8 times. The corps' soloists, Gilbert Sigouin and Marcel Ménard on soprano, and François Dignard on baritone, were also beginning to stand out. The corps' repertoire included "Born Free", "Don't Sleep in the Subway", "Oye Negra", a concert of "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head", and "More" to close the show. A first member, Robert Doyle, arrived from Ottawa, and the movement went from strength to strength until eight years later when the corps moved to Ottawa.



Les Compagnons (1970)



Compagnons (Ontario Championships, 1970)

In 1970, after an unprecedented recruitment campaign, Les Compagnons had grown to 40 brass, 17 drums and 26 colour guard. The repertoire included Stevie Wonder's "For Once in my Life", Simon and Garfunkel's "Sounds of Silence" and Tom Jones' "It's Not Unusual". The concert was a medley of songs from "West Side Story". They completed their show with "Seattle", "L'important c'est la rose" and "On my way".

Out of 12 contests, the corps won eight! This included best drum major, best bugle line, and best colour guard at the Canadian Central Circuit championship. That year, they placed second at the Ontario provincial championships. Their star was on the rise! Disappointing results at the National Championships overshadowed what had been an exceptional year. Unfortunately, there was a difference of over nine points between the two judges marking execution drums. Still, it was a successful year that allowed corps members to dream of future accomplishments.

After the annual inspection in June, the group broke all ties with the Royal Canadian Army Cadets;



Les Compagnons (PowWow, Kingston, NY, 1971)

however, they kept RCAC insignia on the uniform caps. Also, the corps adopted a logo designed by Paul Bourgie, and used this logo on their letterhead and envelopes.

The repertoire for 1971 included an even wider variety of music. Tunes varied between classical and modern styles. These included “Grieg’s March”, Paul Desmond’s “Take Five”, “Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony”, “Le rêve passe” (a march) and Frank Sinatra’s “My Way”. These numbers highlighted the versatility of the corps’ musicians.

Denis Provost took over as drum major and Michel Monette and Terry Kirkpatrick arrived from LaSalle Cadets to teach percussion. In another first,

Les Compagnons entered contests in the United States. This allowed them to measure themselves against some of the world’s best groups. For example, the corps’ first competition of the year was in Fairlawn, New Jersey. At this contest, they competed against two drum corps powerhouses, the Garfield Cadets and the Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights.



Les Compagnons

Also in 1971, the Compagnons hosted “Fantaisie musicale ‘71” at Lansdowne Park. This contest included De La Salle “Oaklands”, LaSalle Cadets and the Toronto Optimists. The event would leave a lasting impression on the Ottawa drum corps scene. At Nationals in Toronto, Les Compagnons entered



Les Compagnons (Ontario Place, 1971)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Les Compagnons (continued)

the Junior “A” category, battling it out with Les Chatelaines de Laval and Scarborough Firefighters. The corps finished just nine points behind the Cadets LaSalle. At the individual championships, the corps’ soloists successfully competed against the country’s best.

FOR 1972, Les Compagnons played a medley of French music: “Suite Bergamasque” (Clair de Lune), “La Marseillaise”, “Comme Ci”, “Sous le ciel de Paris”, “French Can-Can”, “La Mer”, the “French National March”, “Auprès De Ma Blonde”, “En Passant Par La Lorraine”, “Mademoiselle de Paris”, “Valentine”, “Hymne à l’Amour”, as well as current English hit songs “I Gotta Be Me”, “Mission Impossible”, “Promises, Promises” and “My Way”. The program proved a big hit with audiences. Unfortunately, it was a challenge to grow the corps. Many senior members had started leaving Embrun to study at university. The demands of university meant that many of them would not be coming back. Also, being competitive required more travel and more frequent, longer rehearsals and this caused many of the younger members to leave. The Central Canada Circuit was no longer



Les Compagnons (Birchmount Stadium, 1977)

in existence, so Les Compagnons had to make more frequent trips to the United States and the Toronto area to compete. A slight change in uniform occurred in 1972, with a shako and white plume replacing the police cap with RCAC insignia.

A massive departure of original members occurred in 1973, as they reached the mandatory retirement



Les Compagnons (1977)



Les Compagnons (1978)

age of 21. The only ones who remained were Jean-Robert Brisson, Gilbert Sigouin and Ernest Provost. Each of them had found a balance between post-secondary studies and a part-time job with attendance at rehearsals. Raymond Laplante, who was too old to remain a playing member, became drum major. Pierre Saint-Jean, formerly with LaSalle, became the colour guard instructor and, eventually, a DCI and DCA judge.

To replenish the ranks of musicians, the young

girls who had been recruited for the colour guard the previous year were asked to become musicians. Almost all of them agreed to do. An ever-growing number of recruits from Ottawa and surrounding towns helped the corps to grow. In the end, the group was slightly larger than in 1972, enabling them to put on a full show and continue competing, mainly in Ontario and the northern United States.

By 1974, the corps was, once again, growing. It took part in even more competitions and parades.



Les Compagnons (1978)

Michel Monette continued to teach percussion. Jean Leblanc, the renowned soloist with the LaSalle Cadets, became the corps' brass instructor. Maurice Legault continued to create the musical arrangements and act as corps director, while Pierre Saint-Jean wrote the drill.

In 1975, Les Compagnons presented the following repertoire: "Alouette", "C'est Magnifique" and "French Can-Can", "A Barnum & Bailey Circus", "Big Spender", "Hall of the Mountain King", "Chump Change" and "When Johnny Comes Marching Home".

The core group of players assembled in 1973 had matured and could handle more demanding musical arrangements and choreographic moves. Michel Renaud, who had played soprano, enrolled at McGill University's Faculty of Music. He became a music instructor and penned some of the corps' musical arrangements.



Les Compagnons (1978)

By 1976, most of the corps' members were from Ottawa or Montreal, with only a few living in Embrun. Thanks to Michel Parent, there were almost as many members from the Montreal area. Michel had left Les Boucliers de Saint-Laurent, to instruct Les Compagnons and some of his musicians followed. As a result, the Compagnons officially moved from their birthplace to the Ottawa Boys' Club on McArthur Street. The corps organized one



Les Compagnons (1978)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Les Compagnons (continued)

of the country's biggest competitions, the Canadian Capital Open. The contest, held at Lansdowne Park, included several upstate NY and Toronto area corps. Included in the lineup were the Oakland Crusaders and Seneca Optimists.

In 1977, Les Compagnons won the Class "B" National Championship. Repertoire that year included: "And the Angels Sing", "Chump Change", "Eli's Coming" and "Magic To Do". The choreography was written by Gary Czapinski, show designer for the Santa Clara Vanguard, DCI champions in 1973 and 1974. Michel Parent was the choreography instructor, assisted by Mark Decloux, who had arrived from the Seneca Optimists. Membership rose to over 90 members, and the corps was now travelling by coach to competitions, just like "the big boys". Les Compagnons also hosted the Ontario Provincial Championship at Lansdowne Park.

LES COMPAGNONS won the 1978 Class "A" at the Nationals. The corps' repertoire included: "Coronation of Boris Gudonov", "Sing, Sing,

Sing", "Eli's Coming" and "Firebird Suite". Gary Czapinski still did the show design for Les Compagnons. The colour guard attended a symposium with Seneca Optimists instructors; these consultations were most beneficial, as the Compagnons guard frequently won the "best guard" award. Many people considered 1978 to be Les Compagnons' most successful year. It also marked the first time the group toured the United States for ten consecutive days.

1979, however, marked another turning point in Les Compagnons' history. Several members aged out and some instructors left, leaving the corps with about 45 members. The uncertainty of the corps' place within the new DCI circuit contributed to the pervasive feeling of uncertainty. This year, the corps only performed in exhibition, under the leadership of a new drum major and a new colour captain. The repertoire that year was "Birdland", "Sing, Sing, Sing", "Eli's Coming", "Copa Cabana" and "Somewhere in the Night". This was a challenging year and Les Compagnons did not take part in the National Championship. In order to ensure a supply



Les Compagnons (1971)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Les Compagnons (continued)

of members, management created a feeder corps, Les Compagnons Cadets. Sadly, the feeder corps did not survive very long.

Unfortunately, the efforts made in 1979 failed to produce the desired results in terms of recruitment and longevity of Les Compagnons. In 1980, the corps tried again to organize, with even fewer

members than in 1979. Many Canadian and American corps were falling as a result of the crushing financial and membership demands of the DCI circuit.

The Compagnons lasted a few more years, before finally disbanding in 1982. It was the end of a glorious adventure that had lasted almost 20 years.



Les Compagnons (Ontario Championships, 1970)



Les Compagnons (1978)



Les Compagnons (1978)

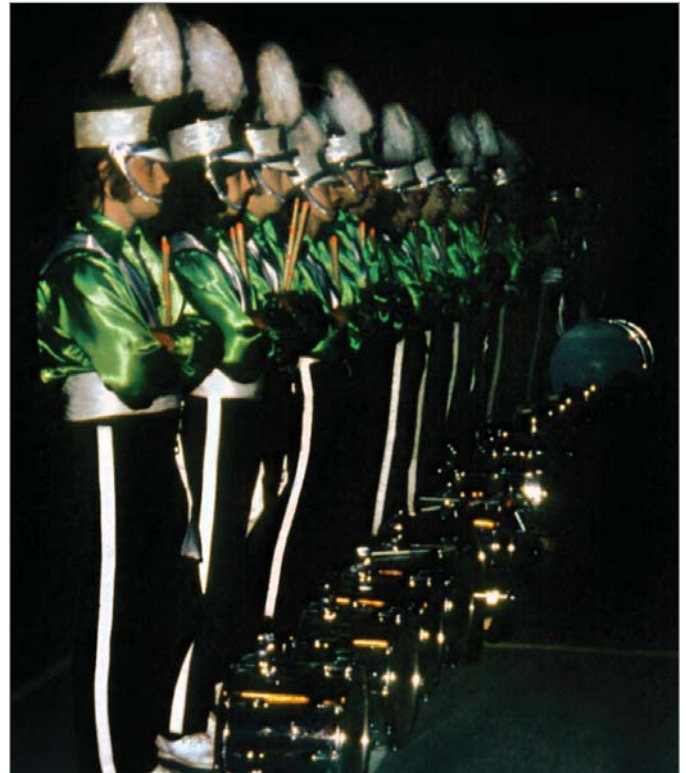


Les Compagnons (1968)

Chapter 23: 1973 – What Now

“What now?”, of course, meant trying to carry on where the previous year left off. This would by no means be easy, as the results of the last show revealed. Also, between now and the next clash, much lay in between. What had never ceased since its beginning, still chugged along. Green Capsule Comments still reported all the news. No doubt, it was full of last year’s outcome, tempered with cautious looks into future events. Always, though, optimistic. Some new names had appeared in its publication, though the eternal Don Daber was still editor.

Advertising	Ken Fossey
Layout Design	Don Daber
Photography	Don Daber Dennis Mori
Artwork, Cartoons	Paul McCusker Don Daber
Type	Don Daber
Assembly & Mailing	Jr. Corps Members
Plates	Vic Score
Printing	Ted Baker E&M Litho



Optimists’ Drums (1973)

Now that Mr. Daber was no longer Corps Director, he had more time for subsidiary activities. Among these was the availability of booster material, most of which he had originated.

Some of the items available were:

T-shirts: official Corps, crest in front, in green	\$2.00
Boys LG	\$1.75
1972 Record	\$200
Number “12” Buttons – 3” size	\$0.75
Decal, in green, black, white	\$0.25
Pennant, white on green 6” x 18”	0.50
G.C.C.	25¢ each, \$2.50 per subscription
Optimist Pens	\$1.00



These prices are, seen from today, incredible. All this activity, G.C.C. and booster material, had been going on for a long time, all requiring time and effort.

News and Changes

From the end of 1972 into 1973, another change took place. George Wright, who had been director for most of the previous year, stepped down from this position due to business pressures. As noted in previous cases, one's job must come first. So now, the ship was without a rudder. That is, until Don Daber, once again, stepped into the breach. He again became the Corps Director, after an absence of only one year. Due to this, he relinquished his position as Vice-President of the York-Toronto Optimist Club. They had held a dinner meeting on November 2nd that was poorly attended. This was due to a change of date given late notice. At a board meeting on November 22, 1972, Don Daber became the Corps Director for 1973, his tenth year at it. He had been with the Optimist Drum Corps since 1960, longer than anyone else, even Al Baggs. Along the way, he had spread his largesse, generosity, and talent to many other Corps and aspects of Drum Corps, both in Canada and the USA. This would eventually be recognized.

Rex Martin moved up in the club ranks to become a vice-president. He had already been involved. Now, he was responsible for communications, publicity, dinner meetings, speakers and Sgt. at Arms. A big job, but the club felt he was up to it. He was!



Don Daber with Terry Hovell
who is wearing a Utica Yankees button (1973)

Doug MacKenzie, former soloist of earlier note, and his crew ran a successful dance in November. The Ladies Auxiliary provided the excellent food. A “Barbados” draw was held. This was possibly a result of Ted Baker, of the Cadets staff, having a connection with a travel agent. The winner, Mrs. R., had elected for the cash portion only. This left a paid trip, which was auctioned off later.

December 3, 1972 saw a bowling night organized by Mr. and Mrs. Ken Burrage of the Junior Corps Booster Club. The Corps, during the day, had attended the Grey Cup Parade in Hamilton. All units had to pay a fee to enter, and International Acceptance Corporation, the company of Mr. Greg Tierney, sponsored the Optimists. The Optimist Lancers had also participated, being sponsored by Miles Laboratories. It was always good publicity to be televised nationally.

At the next club meeting, on December 7, 1972, attendance was much better due to a news bulletin by Rex Martin, and calls from a telephone committee. Doug MacKenzie purchased the still valid “Barbados” trip, for one Don Gill, for \$325. Later in the month he donated his rec room for a club Christmas Party. This man had nerve.

During late December, the club began taking delivery of new horns, purchased by them. They were proving to be a stalwart organization. What was needed, however, were new members, as the Corps itself was looking for new executive staff.



Toronto Optimists (1973)

Club meetings continued, with many gimmicks thrown in to alleviate boredom. January 4, 1973 saw a small turnout with lots of laughs. One main objective was to look for new ideas and variety to keep the meetings interesting.

One factor that helped was holding meetings at restaurants, or similar places, where one could partake heartily of the fare. Business, though, was never forgotten, as the meetings often ended with the ringing reminder of “get one’s dues in – Now!”

These dues went directly to the club, who used them in any manner necessary to support the Corps. In fact, nearly all recreational events were fund raisers. Of course some funds were sent to the Optimists International and the Ontario Chapter. They were, after all, a charter member.

Prior to this, an 11th Annual Awards Dinner had been held at St. Simons Hall in West Hill, a suburb of Toronto. The Board of Directors of the Optimist Club of York-Toronto was present. The President was now Bill Stevenson. Also in attendance were the executive and staff of the Junior Corps and the directors of the Lancers and the Cadets. Al Baggs was the Master of Ceremonies. The Ladies Auxiliary provided and cooked the food, as well as paying for the hall. This was done using proceeds from a rummage sale.

Featured speaker was Al Tierney, past President of the club, former Assistant Director of the Corps, former Director of the Cadets. He had left the Optimist organization and was now Business Manager for the St. John’s Girls’ Drum Corps of Brantford, Ontario. His company had moved from Toronto to Brantford.

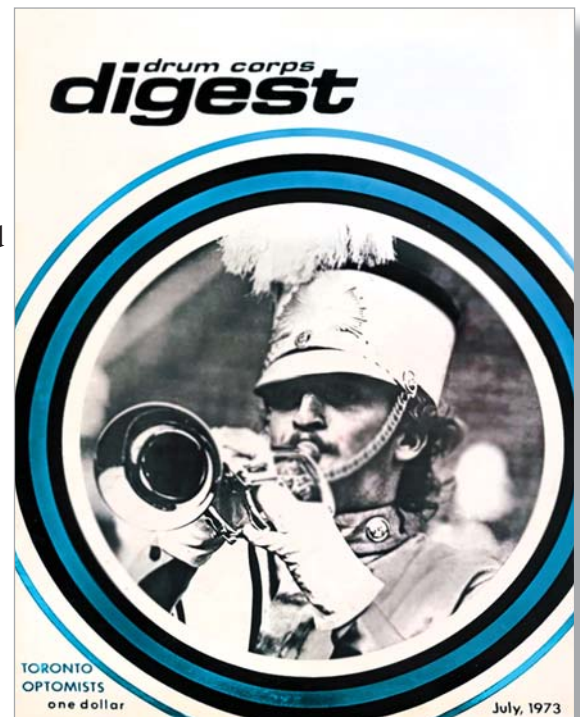
Corps rings were given out, and this was where Don Daber officially became Corps Director again, as George Wright stepped down. George would stay as part of a fund raising committee, a less demanding position. All marching members were issued membership certificates.

Rookie of the year was Corrie Branton, one of the original Optimist’s Guard. Corpsman of the year was one Peter Byrne, a man with a future. The Corps had worked hard in 1972, but was made aware that it now was committed to make vision ‘73 a reality.

Vision ‘73 was the title under which the coming year was to be approached. Only half humorously. Had the 1958 Corps been asked to honour such a title, they would have thought it meant new glasses.



Some corps members (1973)



Peter Byrne on the cover of Drum Corps Digest and, yes, they misspelled the corps’ name

Al Tierney

We must give some more coverage to Al Tierney, who had accomplishments to his credit that belied the term of his involvement. He first became involved in 1966 when, with two sons in the Optimists, his interest was kindled. He proceeded to drive a station wagon for the Corps and help out in the equipment department. Then he was placed in charge of the new Cadets, which at the time consisted of 15 buglers and 10 drummers. He ran the first Guard Show in the City of Toronto, and shortly after became Assistant Director of the Junior Corps, under Don Daber.



Al Tierney

In the fall of 1967, the Cadets were raised to the status of a Parade Corps. Al was the organizer and first director of this. With a grant of \$1,000 from the Downtown Optimist Club, at the time still the sponsor, plus dues and a fund-raising program, things got moving. Within nine months, this unit was uniformed and equipped with instruments. Enough for ninety boys. When he moved to Brantford, the Cadets were turned over to his brother Greg. He had been the right hand man all along. Still retaining the position of Assistant Director to the Junior Corps, he became Canadian editor of Drum Corps News “Chief Bailer” for the C.D.C.A. and served two years as President of “A Junior C”.

Late in 1969, Don Daber retired as Corps Director for the first time, and Al became the interim Director. When the original sponsor quit, they gave the Corps a year’s notice, in order to decide what to do. It was under Al that a steering committee was formed, from which emerged the new York-Toronto Optimist Club. Forty members of the executive, and parents, constituted this first club, with Al Tierney being elected as Charter President. He resigned as Corps Director, and the position reverted to Don Daber. He got no rest. Actually, the first step of the new club was to start the Lancers, with \$500 from the club and a further \$500 from the Cadets. Later that spring, the club took over the Cadets and, in September, the Junior Corps. Al remained as President of the club until September 1971 when he was succeeded by Bill Stevenson. When Al had to move to the Brantford area, he still remained a member of both the club and the Board of Directors. Even then, he became the first (temporary) Commissioner of Drum Corps in Canada and was appointed to the Board of Directors of the C.D.C.A.. On top of this, he became Director of “Information Drum Corps”, the official newsletter of the C.D.C.A. Phew! Quite a record! We shall, believe it or not, see him again.

The Optimist Cadets were very active, with trips here, visits there, etc. Bob Davidson was the drill instructor, as he had been in the past. A uniform committee was established to look at designs and material, and people for sewing them. One change was that of allowing girls in. After all, the Junior



Optimist Cadets (Nationals, CNE, 1973)

Corps had them. In fact, their entire guard now consisted of girls, so successful were they. The Cadets now had an “Optimiss” guard. The manager was Mrs. Stevenson, who raised the total from six to twenty-four.

On the other side of the city, the Lancers were trying to get a circuit guard going but were not getting much support. They needed a “Vision ‘73”. They were doing parade work, winning some, and they were directed to aim for the Junior Corps after their time as Lancers was over.

The Ladies Auxiliary never ceased to make its presence felt. This was a new one, formed on October 22, 1972. They had run the club’s victory dance for that year, and the rummage sale. This was under Jeanette Arsenault, and the proceeds financed the banquet. Dorothy Kane handled the banquet, probably with capable assistance. They had many things planned for 1973, including catering a Monte Carlo Night, selling coffee and sandwiches at Corps Guard competitions, catering the “Wearing of the Green” dance in March as well as Bridge and Euchre parties. Later, they made uniform bags and cummerbunds. Leading in this was one Helen Fossey, but there were others whose names must remain obscure. This has happened before. All involved were worth their weight in gold, because without them all these events would not have taken place. Maybe the Corps itself would have ceased without the extra funds that these endeavours either brought in or saved.



Optimists' Rifles (Borough of York Stadium, 1973)

As a result of a rules meeting held in Chicago, people could now play through their twenty-first year. This meant that, if you were not twenty-one by September 1st, you could play throughout the following year. Also introduced was the use of hand held cassettes by judges, which allowed ongoing comments by G.E. judges. Just a couple of things settled at this meeting, which was much too extensive to be covered here.

A new frill, a popularity poll of the East and Canada, done by Drum Corps World, showed De La Salle ranked sixth and the Optimists eleventh.

A Guard Show in Peterborough saw the Optimists Guard triumph. First place with 83.05 points. The Optimist Circuit Guard came second at the Optimist International Guard Championship. This was the last circuit guard contest for the Optimiss this year.



Members of the Lancers, Cadets and Junior Corps

The Lancers did well in the 1973 individuals, placing four members in the finals. They had assistance from Ric Brown, for one to two hours a night for a week. Ric was the son of the director, Dick Brown. Dick was an I.B.M. technician and had four children associated with Drum Corps. The Optimist Drum Corps, of course. He had been in Drum Corps for twenty years, with the Scouts, Midtowners, Golden Monarchs, Optimists, and Lancers. Starting the Lancers because a Corps was needed in the west-end, he was an asset to whomever he was with.

The off the line number this year was to be from Le Coq d'Or by Rimsky Korsakov. In using this, the Optimists were leading a change toward the extensive use of classical music in Corps repertoires. Also, towards music that, if not over the heads of the Corps playing it, was often over the heads of the fans listening to it.

It finally happened. Two people in the Corps got married. Larry and Cheryl Blandford were the first but not the last.



Dick Brown, Al Tierney and Cliff Billington

The Ladies Auxiliary endeavours had all been successful and, to-date, they had contributed \$300 to the Junior Corps to be used as they saw fit. Two ladies, Mrs. Noble and Mrs. Rhodes, were grandmothers. New uniform bags for the girls were to cost them \$2.00 each, with them supplying the zippers.

Another clever scheme for money raising was the saving of Dominion store tapes. It was possible to get a colour TV if there were enough of them. The TV could then be raffled off. These tapes were to be given to Doreen Botterweg. Botterweg! A name that meant a lot and should have been mentioned before. Evert and Doreen Botterweg were the kind of people every Corps should have.

Responsible for one member of their household in the Corps, they became responsible for much of the Corps and its activities. Doreen, along with others, was a stalwart member of the Ladies Auxiliary. Evert's specialty became the equipment department. The Optimists had long had an equipment department, run well by good people. Under Evert Botterweg, as the Corps grew in size, the department kept pace in capacity and appropriate organization. A strapping ex-Dutch naval officer, he applied his abilities and built the Optimist equipment department into one of the best in North America. Possibly the best. This was verified by the offers from other top Corps, with commensurate salary, to go and organize the same for them. He knew all the ropes, and things only went wrong if his directions were ignored.



Doreen and Evert Botterweg

Doreen and Evert Botterweg! Two of many people who gave of themselves to help the Corps.

The Contest Season

Most of this chapter, so far, has concerned subsidiary activities, somewhat neglected in other chapters. There is more but we shall go on.

June Contests

June 2nd saw an early contest and a surprising one. It was surprising because of the low scores and the placings. Everything was up in the air again. At Lansdowne Park, in Ottawa, the results were:

- 1st La Salle Cadets
- 2nd Optimists
- 3rd De La Salle
- 4th 4th Brigade

This went on all month. Low scores, but the placings changed.

June 3rd

- 1st La Salle
- 2nd De La Salle
- 3rd Optimists

June 9th

- 1st De La Salle
- 2nd La Salle
- 3rd Optimists



De La Salle

Etobicoke Crusaders upset the Seneca Princemen

June 16th

- 1st La Salle
- 2nd Optimists
- 3rd De La Salle
- 6th Peterborough Krescendos

The Optimists had not won any of these but had improved their overall score by three points. They had defeated De La Salle by 3.9 at the last show. These scores were a reflection of last year when all had been close, or even very close, but higher overall. On it went!



LaSalle Cadets (Ajax, 1973)

June 17th

- | | |
|-----|-------------|
| 1st | La Salle |
| 2nd | Optimists |
| 3rd | De La Salle |

At least, now, the scores were a bit higher.

June 23rd and 24th saw the Corps in the United States, in Bowling Green, Kentucky and Marion, Ohio. This was a pre-tour, a good one for this Corps, with a second and a first, in spite of the equipment truck breaking down.

Off to the Midwest

The real tour took place from June 28th to July 7th. Three buses took one hundred and sixteen people on this trip. Corps themselves were not that size yet, and this entourage included Corps members, executive, instructors, equipment department, chaperones, plus mothers and fathers. Above all, it was the longest tour and trip to-date.

The corps went by the way of Sudbury and Sault Ste Marie, to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, getting there despite a flat tire, fuel and battery problems, navigation, etc. Positions were pre-drawn, so the business managers' meeting was about judging et al. The Optimist show was called, patented, “show-after an epic odyssey”.

With a score of 64.45, two tenths behind De La Salle, fourth place was not bad. Ten points ahead, in first, was Santa Clara Vanguard, a California powerhouse. The rest of the next day was spent learning drill changes.

On to Ford Du Lac, Wisconsin.

The changes had improved things, but a 4.7 penalty assured them second place. Three points of this setback were levied for not attending the afternoon street parade, most unusual for this Corps.

East Troy, Wisconsin

After winning a parade prize of \$100, the Corps won the contest with a score of 69.70.

These contests were good. Not the soul-destroying defeats against the mid-west giants, but against Corps of similar calibre. Also, they had not yet run into any really serious problems. Pleasant! But, some people got into beer.

Some locals stole equipment from a corps bus. Local police at 3:00 am apprehended them. At 6:00 a.m. came a tornado, followed by a rainstorm. As already stated no serious problems on this trip.

Then the tenor of the tour changed. Milwaukee had all the big names from the Midwest, West, and Canada. Although De La Salle made the field, the Optimists sat this one out in the stands.



Mike Arsenault, Toronto Optimists Drum Major (1973)

Racine, Wisconsin, the next day

Big names again. Many people, on the strength of their performance, thought Optimists would place third. A jam-packed stadium, with an enthusiastic crowd, saw the Optimists place fifth with 61.50. Nearly twenty points behind the first place Casper Troopers.

This was the end of the tour, contest-wise. Maybe fortunately. It had been reasonably successful. Even so, the bugles held a three hour rehearsal.

The new tour manager, Mr. Donaldson, had phoned ahead to arrange billets, showers, rehearsal area, etc., in Ishpeming, Michigan. As a result, things worked out very well there. Doing a field show exhibition, they were asked to do it again. The Optimists presentation was nearly always liked, anywhere, even if they did not win.

Friday offered a night off and Saturday saw the Corps do one parade in Ishpeming and one in another town. Playing almost continuously, the reception from the crowd was terrific.

After that working holiday, it was back to “Home Sweet Home”. And more challenges.



Toronto Optimists (Ajax, 1973)

Toronto – Hamilton – Brantford

Toronto

De La Salle had not been idle, winning M&M, Drums and G.E., they took their fourth win of the season.

The results:

1st	De La Salle	71.80
2nd	La Salle Cadets	71.55
3rd	Optimists	68.60

Etobicoke Crusaders and Seneca Princemen were sixth and seventh, respectively. The Optimists did well on general effect, but execution scores were marginal. It was mid-season.



Toronto Optimists (1973)

Hamilton

Next night – same problem.

1st	La Salle	73.45
2nd	De La Salle	73.05
3rd	Optimists	72.00

Again, execution left something to be desired.

Brantford

Except for La Salle Cadets, all the Corps from the previous show were in attendance. After a long hot parade, the Optimists finally overcame the jinx that had seen them winless in Canada this year.

1st	Optimists	75.45
2nd	De La Salle	75.25
3rd	Seneca Princemen	66.00



LaSalle Cadets (1973)

Tour Two

A good preparation for tour two, that now began. This would be Batavia, N.Y. on August 9th, Marion, Ohio on August 10th and 11th, with Windsor, Ontario on August 12th.

Batavia

For the Optimists, this would be the worst weekend of the year. The absence of Don Daber was sorely felt on the first part of the tour. They scored poorly in Batavia and the US Open in Marion, with nothing to show for it but \$900 worth of ruined plumes.

They were late on the line in Batavia, a mortal sin in Drum Corps. They needed an Ivor Bramley. When they were ready to go there came a thunderstorm. Thus, the ruined plumes. The affair restarted 45 minutes later. The corps put on one of the most driving shows of the year but execution suffered, thus, last place. This Corps did not have the consistency of previous versions.



Toronto Optimists (1973)

Marion, Ohio

Reflecting this, at Marion, they put on one of the worse shows of the year. Even though, they made the finals. They backed in. Someone must have been even worse. The Saturday finals saw the Corps finish their show, but all the rest were rained out. Doing it again on Sunday, they showed no great improvement. They did not stay for retreat, having to get to Windsor, Ontario, for another contest. Somebody stayed to get the results.



Toronto Optimists (US Open, Marion, OH, 1973)

Windsor

All the Corps here had been at Marion, but the Optimists were the only ones, of this group, who had made the finals at that show. Winning this show, then, was no great surprise. Before the show, the scores from Marion were read out. This gave cause for concern.

De La Salle had placed second, with a score of 78.25. The Optimists had placed eleventh, with 65.70. Thirteen points behind De La Salle, and only three weeks to Nationals.

Much work was needed!

Drugs, Resignations and Expulsions

Worse was to come. After the rehearsal following the Windsor show, the Director and Music Director handed in resignations. The Corps seemed ready to be folded. After another rehearsal, and an all evening meeting, six members were expelled. Another twelve were cited for less harsh disciplinary measures. The continent-wide plague of drug use had finally caught up with the Optimists. Nothing in the entire history of the Corps had ever caused such an upheaval. Drugs had always been banned from the Corps. The rule had been laid down in May, at camp. It was stated that the executive would resign if this rule was broken. It was. Resignations came. Why should they, or anyone, risk their freedom. It was illegal and still is. Those in charge would have got some backlash had the authorities been aware of this.



Toronto Optimists (1973)

The people doing it were old enough to know this. Somehow, the breach was papered over, resolved, and the Corps continued. But, it was a serious internal matter that may have had an influence on events later on.

Titusville

A week later, in Titusville, the Corps performed, minus eight members. These members stood on the finish line as punishment for the trouble of the week before. A valiant effort, by a diminished unit, gave them second place to Auburn Purple Lancers. The crowd was still wonderful to this Corps. It is a wonder they did not adopt them. All the rumours around said that the Optimists had folded. This show proved that untrue. They had just sagged for awhile.

On to Nationals

One week to go and one more contest before Nationals.

For this Corps, after the prelims, things could not have looked worse. They had lost the night before in Etobicoke. Aside from this, the Optimist mystique was still evident. Everyone was looking to see what they would do.

“Don’t count the Optimists out until Nationals retreat” was an unspoken thought on many minds. In the finals, the Corps took the spotlight and glitter from all the others. They put on their best show of the year. Spirited and driving.

What one Corps can do so can another. De La Salle also “turned on” as did La Salle. Thus, the outcome.

De La Salle would have been undisputed champions but for 2.9 in penalties. They had been here before. La Salle Cadets took 0.3 in penalties. These blunders produced a situation never before seen at a Canadian Nationals, maybe anywhere.



LaSalle Cadets (Nationals prelims, CNE, 1973)

Two Corps tied for first place. Yes, there would be two legitimate champions for 1973. De La Salle and La Salle Cadets. Each scored 79.60.

Second was the Optimists, with a score of 79.0, only six tenths off the top. Had the upheavals during the year contributed to this? Probably. Consistency had suffered. It was unfortunate, but not disastrous.

Seneca Princemen were next in line, but on this night were outclassed, scoring 71.25.


Thus did the 1973 Nationals conclude. It was a strange end to an unusual year.

For La Salle Cadets, this was the first “true” Nationals victory. They had won it in 1971, but during a period of dissension, when De La Salle and the Optimists were not present. Still, it this was their second Nationals title.

This was number three for De La Salle; others were in 1969 and 1970.

For the Optimists, it was the fourth defeat in five years. It was, now, really, for them, an ordinary year. Nobody again, it seemed, would dominate things as they had once done. This fact gives added lustre to that fading era.

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Green Capsule Comments

I Don't Believe It, Dept:

NATIONALS: 79.0, 79.6, 79.6

TORONTO, SEPTEMBER 2nd: Well, in the continuing programme of making corps more exciting at the Nationals for all you fans, it took a lot of effort to top last year's cliff-hanger, but we did it!!! (You'll remember last year, when .15 separated the 3 finalists!) Yes, this year we actually not only brought the three top scores close, we actually managed to tie THE TOP TWO CORPS. This took very considerable effort but we pulled it off without even delaying the contest too long. How can we top this next year, you ask? We're not sure, but we will be working on it. We also understand a special trophy could be presented, engraved ——"the Audrey Burns Trophy, For Making Nationals Retraets More Exciting" (Jr. "A" Division and Jr. "B" Division) The trophy could be in the form of a large coin. —The CdCa Executive.





Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE, 1973)



Montage showing the 1973 Toronto Optimists



Toronto Optimists (1973)



Toronto Optimists (1973)



Toronto Optimists (Toronto, 1973)



Toronto Optimists (US Open, Marion, Ohio, 1973)

A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of 1973 progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Ottawa (June 16)	Ajax (June 16)	Oshkosh WI (June 29)	Hamilton (July 21)	US Open (Aug 11)	Canadian Nationals (Sept 2)
Toronto Optimists	53.90	62.40	64.45	71.70	65.70	79.00
De La Salle	51.25	58.50	67.75	73.05	78.25	79.60
LaSalle Cadets	60.10	63.45		73.45		79.60
Seneca Princemen					63.75	71.25
Anaheim Kingsmen					80.30	
Des Plaines Vanguard					68.75	
Racine Kilties			74.75		74.15	
Santa Clara Vanguard			77.60			

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

Chapter 24: 1974

Late in 1973, December 7th, 8th, and 9th to be exact, the C.D.C.A. / C.U.A. held Symposium 2 in Toronto. The imposing title was an update of what, at one time, was the Canadian Drum Corps Convention. It served the same purpose.

John Robins was now the President of the C.D.C.A. Part of the activities during this weekend was the awarding of plaques for outstanding service and dedication to Canadian Drum Corps.

Recipients of these honours included Don Daber, Al Tierney and Dick Brown. A special award was given to Al Baggs, former Chief Judge of the C.J.A. These were only part of the awards ceremony. All these men had, at one time in their careers, been connected with the Optimists Drum Corps.

Mr. Robins then announced that the Board of Directors of the C.D.C.A. had, this year, created a special award. It was to be given to the person who, during the past year, had contributed the most to Canadian Drum Corps. The first recipient was none other than Don Daber, the grand factotum of Canadian Drum Corps. This announcement drew a long, standing ovation from those in attendance. All were aware of Don's extraordinary contribution to their favourite pastime, if not knowing much about his personal history.



Dick Brown presents trophy to Maurice Legault of LaSalle Cadets (1966)

Don Daber

Don was originally from Kirkland Lake, Ontario, hundreds of miles north of Toronto. No Drum Corps existed there in his youth, and probably not today. This is a remote area, with wicked winters. Don showed a talent for art in school, even winning prizes. He furthered his ambitions by moving to Toronto to attend the Ontario College of Art. After graduating, he became a successful commercial Artist. Drum Corps were still unknown to him, until he visited friends in Kitchener, Ontario. He was given a ticket to a Scout House Spring Show. Don was enthralled with what he saw, as were most people who saw Scout House in their prime. Thinking he would like to do something in this field, he approached both Scout House and De La Salle, neither of whom were interested. Indeed, it was thought by one of them that he was a spy. What Don envisaged was a freelance article about



Don Daber

Drum Corps with which he hoped to interest one of the Toronto papers. This was just the sort of thing Drum Corps could have used. Publicity, other than for contests, was virtually non-existent. Unfortunately, this idea drew a blank. It was while still looking that he stumbled across the Optimists. The Optimists welcomed him and Don was soon in, going on bus trips and scribbling notes like mad. He was about thirty-six years old then. To endure trips with a bunch of rowdy, often uncouth, uneducated, and insensitive kids was just the beginning of his drum corps career. It would turn into an almost lifelong dedication to this activity, culminating in this award. The award was for the year just past but Don could have received one for every year he was in it.

Don started with the Optimists in 1960 and, just three years later, he was their director. He functioned in this role for nine years, before stepping down; however, when it became necessary, he again picked it up the reins. Throughout all those years, his work and influence affected not only the Optimists, but the whole Drum Corps movement. In Canada and the USA, artwork and photography were his most recognizable trademarks. But his influence did not stop there. He held positions in the C.D.C.A. and O.D.C.A. helping any Drum Corps that he could. His name became synonymous with Drum Corps, especially Canadian Drum Corps. All Corps publications knew him as his artwork and photos graced many of their pages.



Don Daber and Jim Law (1997)

The scene became “If you want to know anything, phone Daber”. I could go on indefinitely but he, most of all, would insist that I stop, modest fellow that he is. Let’s just say that Don was one of those people who gave far more than he got, never asking for anything in return. The mark he left on Drum Corps, all of them but especially the Optimists, is ineradicable. Without people like him, Drum Corps, or any endeavour, would be far worse off. Don is still plying his trade, still toiling for various and sundry causes while being an indispensable source of information for this humble scribe. The award he received could not have gone to a worthier recipient.

Back to Symposium 1974

Still at the Symposium, another award made its debut that night. This award was picked by, donated by, and presented by the Canadian Judges Association. It was to be an annual award, presented to the Corps that had made the most improvement. The first winner was none other than the Optimist Lancers of Etobicoke.

Formed in 1969, the Lancers had won the Junior “C” standstill class in 1972, Junior “C” M&M class in 1973, and had entered Junior “B” for 1974. This award was a tribute to Dick Brown and company, who had done such a good job.



Optimist Lancers (North Tonawanda, 1974)

A Toronto Colour Guard Contest saw the Optimist Guard in third place, albeit with a nine point penalty. This denied them second.

Facing the Optimists this coming year was a De La Salle that had retained its management, its instructional staff and ninety percent of last year's Corps. They would be a formidable force. In the west, the young Corps, the Etobicoke Crusaders, were doing well. Under director Bob Duggan, they had 43 bugles, 21 drums, and 30 in their colour guard. Promising!



Toronto Optimists Colour Guard (1974)

The Optimists had equipment for sale, 18 Imperial G-F bugles, Baritones, Contras, Sopranos. An ad said “phone Evert Botterweg”. As well as being a superb equipment manager, he was also a salesman.

A guard show in Kitchener saw the Optimist Guard fifth in a field of twelve. They, along with others, kept plugging away.

Senior-wise, Les Diplomates de Quebec were alive and well; however, the Syracuse Brigadiers were gone. Was it lack of interest? Syracuse had been one of the finest Senior Drum Corps, ever. They had, at one time or another, beaten everybody. It was from them that Eric Burton first learned some of the ropes of colour guard operation, helping the Optimists get off the ground.

La Salle Cadets, who had toyed with the idea of going senior, decided to remain junior. They would not have found it any easier, maybe even harder. It could have had something to do with their previously noted, unavoidable use of overage people.

At the 1974 Canadian Individual and Small Group Championship, no one Corps dominated the proceedings. Medals were spread around evenly.

Adding spice to the La Salle Cadets decision to remain as juniors this year, Etobicoke Crusaders decided to become Junior “A” for 1974.

More fun ahead!



Etobicoke Crusaders (1974)

Other News

South of the border, two fine Corps, St. Lucys and Blessed Sacrament, both from Newark, N. J., left the scene forever. Of all the top Corps that used to wallop the Optimists in that region, only Garfield remained. Most of us thought Blessed Sacrament would go on forever. The OPEC gas crisis and an unfulfilled deal for horns finished them off. If the sheiks only knew what they had helped bring about, maybe they would have relented. “Sac” had been admired by all.

Locally, the Shriners contest was now defunct, the last contest having been held in 1972. Even though it had always made money overage problems brought hassles and disqualifications that made it seem too much trouble.

The Corps had cut their own throat.

Partially compensating for this would

be the “Canadian Classic” on June 22nd and D.C.I. North on August 11th.

The Optimists had become an Optimist Club organization in 1955 and this year celebrated the 20th anniversary of that connection. Since then, they had won 14 National titles over 17 years.

Most of the music for this year was new, with arrangements by Ray Roussel. Percussion still by Ron Kaiser, drill with Bill Kane. Drum Major was Mike Arsenault and Guard Captain Cheryl Blandford. Another two corps members, Gord Parrott on drums and Cathy Collins in the guard, tied the knot. They were wished well.

The Ladies Auxiliary, still tireless in their efforts, were out to raise money for new guard shakos. This was only one of numerous endeavours under way. They were able to give \$250 towards shakos and rifle slings.

The twelfth Annual Awards Banquet had been held in November of 1973. The special guest speaker was Barry Bell, music director through the “glory years”, 1958 through 1968. The Corps had changed since then but still clung to the same feelings and ideals. It still had that “Inner Optimist Feeling” of respect for self and the Corps. This would help ensure the survival of the Corps in the future. When it becomes diluted, we see something else.



Toronto Optimists (1974)



L-R: Barb Cardwell and Cathy Parrott

All the usual awards were made for what was considered a disappointing, but enlightening year. Despite all the pitfalls, the Corps had made it through, everyone learning from their mistakes.

The Guard Nationals were held in Kitchener, Ontario, on April 28th. After an up and down season, the Optimists placed third, a two-point penalty denying them second. The Majestics walked away from all others, taking first.

The Optimists were ready to field 100 members with more than 40 bugles, 30 on percussion and a guard of 30. Such numbers were now necessary. When considering that in 1958 an entire Corps numbered between 40 and 50, one can see the changes that had occurred.



Toronto Optimists (1974)

The Optimist Cadets were just beginning to pick up steam again. At the end of 1970, most had left to join the Junior “A” Corps. They lost so many that they had to revert from Junior “C” status to a parade Corps. Now, they were preparing to re-enter the Junior “C” Division. With 38 bugles, 32 drums, and 20 in the guard, they were large enough for this. They now also had a Cadet Booster Club, established by parents and friends just four months previously.

The Optimist Lancers, in its fifth year of operation, now had over 100 people from 10 to 19 years of age. They were a going concern.

Now, as far as the Corps season itself was concerned, the year in review goes something like this. Really!

The winter was long and tedious. The horn line attendance fell from forty to between nine and fifteen. This, fatal for some Corps, was not new to this Corps. It always happened in the early days, with interest picking up later. However, it must have seemed bad to this Corps, not being aware of the early days. Perceiving their backs being to the wall, girls were recruited from the guard. People were brought in off the street. Thus, did girls become part of the main Corps, much to its benefit. The others sound as if a press gang was in operation.



Toronto Optimists (1974)

All this resulted in the Corps pulling out of its first scheduled contest, at Porter Stadium. They were not ready. Next was Ajax, June 15th. Still feeling themselves not ready, they could not pull out of this one. If you do that too many times you will not get invited anywhere. The pullout, by the way, was the third one known in its history, so they were not noted for this, rather for reliability.

Contest Season

Ajax

However, at Ajax, their feelings were confirmed, by the scores.

1st	De La Salle	67.50
2nd	Seneca Princemen	60.45
3rd	Optimists	56.25
4th	Etobicoke Crusaders	51.55

A low third place.

Due to this, goals were reset for the next show, the Canadian Classic, on June 22nd. Now the goal was to try to catch the Princemen. This was accomplished, due to drum scores, but they slipped another two points behind De La Salle. In first place was the Madison Scouts, ten points above Del. With Del in second, and the Optimists a distant third, it did not look good.



(L-R): Tami Fisher and Loretta Moore

Quebec

In Quebec, at St. Jerome and Verdun, two victories were recorded. At each, the Etobicoke Crusaders were the closest competitor, in second by only one point. For a new Junior “A” Corps, they were doing well.

Things did improve, for a while. Everything clicked at Seneca College when the Optimists placed only seven from De La Salle, but four and eight ahead of Seneca Princemen and Etobicoke Crusaders, respectively. After this blip, surprisingly, the Corps was given a two-week vacation. Rehearsals were optional. They were held, and were bad, with fifteen to twenty bugles. Later, rehearsals began to shape up, but not fast enough.

Guelph, July 20th

1st	De La Salle	77.90
2nd	Optimists	67.50
3rd	Seneca	64.20

There was no stopping De La Salle. They were now, and had been for years, beating the Optimists by greater margins than when the shoe was on the other foot. Much greater. Years before, even though the Optimists nearly always won, the scores were much closer. This state of affairs continued. In a way, it was a tribute to those who stuck it out.

DCI North, August 11

At the D.C.I. North Show, August 11th, Toronto, things got worse.

1st	Santa Clara Vanguard	85.80
3rd	De La Salle	77.40
7th	Optimists	64.80
8th	Crusaders	63.70
10th	Seneca	59.70

Even further behind De La Salle, just fending off the Crusaders, with Seneca coming up!

What helped this situation develop was that, although the Corps had pulled together, some people had left, leaving only 32 horns.



Toronto Optimists (1974)

Rehearsals had gone well all week with Gary “Chops” Czapinski, working the show. He was to figure greatly in the future. One of the rare times this Corps had brought in outside talent. Talent he had, and knowledge. In a way the Corps was too “up” for this show, too “hyper”. The performance was uncontrolled, resulting in poor execution.

Ithaca, NY: D.C.I. again. This time, the championships. After a fine, uniformed rehearsal something was still lacking, but the Corps had its feet firmly planted in reality. They did not expect to make the finals and did not. Also, with an improved show, they did not expect to place 34th, which is what happened. De La Salle scored an 84 in the prelims, now being virtually untouchable in Canada. The Optimists score was 64.0.

Titusville: The yearly jaunt to Titusville was next, where things definitely took a turn for the better. They were ready for a fight, off the field, with the local greasers, but it did not happen this year. In the past it had. Placing third, eleven points up on the Etobicoke Crusaders, it revived spirits in time for Nationals weekend. Hope springs eternal, etc., etc. There was additional reason for optimism.

De La Salle would not be in it this year, due to a failure to comply with C.D.C.A. dictates regarding the use of overage people and releases. This did not mean they were using them, just not toeing the C.D.C.A. line in this respect. This left the door open for a number of Corps to claim the title, the Optimists being one of them.



Toronto Optimists (1974)

Before this, there was a contest in London, Ontario. A feeling of confidence was evident, even though two entrants, Etobicoke Crusaders and Seneca Princemen, had been working for weeks with instructors from De La Salle. This is a common tactic but, here, probably designed to ensure that the Optimists would not win the Nationals. It did not affect London. The drum line played well, but the horns made errors that had not been heard for months. Regardless, the Optimists won this one by three points, further bolstering confidence.



Toronto Optimists (CNE, 1974)

Nationals' Weekend

Back in Toronto, the Nationals weekend was heralded by pouring rain that would plague the contest. This aside, it was the first time in many years, perhaps since 1966, that the Optimists were not considered as underdogs. They were expected to win this one! And they, themselves, expected to. Regardless of the year past, any year, this Corps always without fail turned on for the National, as, usually, did everybody else.

De La Salle, who would not be there, showed their calibre by qualifying for D.C.I. finals. They were in the top 12 in the world. This does not detract from the drama that took place back at the CNE in Toronto.

After stopping at the Shrine to change and warm up, the “Green Machine” headed for CNE Stadium. Once again, due to lack of facts, we must dispense with the prelims and go straight into the finals. For some reason, the rain was not allowed to interfere with the show. No delays were allowed, as sometimes happens. Maybe it seemed as if it would be endless. Stadiums, crowds, and judges cannot be conjured up in a moment so on it went.

The Optimists did their entire show in the rain, “turning it on” as was expected. Despite their still diminished size, the crowd loved them.



Their two dogged rivals on this night were the Seneca Princeton and the Etobicoke Crusaders. Where La Salle Cadets were is a mystery¹. The Seneca Princemen did the finest show that a writer for Drum Corps America Magazine had ever seen them perform. They, also, turned on. New bodies had been added to their Corps, which

¹ LaSalle had folded at the end of 1973 and were no longer competing.

was cheered lustily by all the De La Salle fans present. Negatively, they booed everybody else. It was not hard to determine their hopes for the outcome. To show the extent of the rain, a “Drum Majors only” retreat was arranged.

At the first show, in Ajax, the Optimists had lost to Seneca. With a score of 71.55, the season ended as it began, with another loss to Seneca. For the first time in their history, they claimed a National title, with a score of 74.8, thereby, making their own fans and those of De La Salle happy.

And the Optimists? Despite putting on their best show of the year weather and size had proved obstacles that could not be overcome. Indeed, they only managed to claim second place by 0.85 over the Etobicoke Crusaders. No matter,

what had happened could not be changed, was now history. Next year would come soon enough! The Seneca Princemen were the Canadian National Junior Drum and Bugle Corps Champions for 1974. Congratulations to them.

In preparation for next year, things quickly got going, on September 11th to be exact. A meeting of the entire Corps took place at Runnymede Collegiate. A new executive and changes in instructors were announced.

Replacing Don Daber as Director would be Doug MacKenzie. A former soloist, he would now be in charge. Bernie White would continue as Treasurer. Evert Botterweg would continue as Equipment Manager. His wife, Doreen, would serve another year as head of the female staff.

Don Daber, not to be forgotten, reverted to Publicity and Public Relations Director. He was still responsible for G.C.C., and an aim this year was to bring it out more regularly.

Terry McKolskey was back with his original Corps, as the bugle instructor. In the interim, he had become a member of the Canadian Judges Association (C.J.A.), as well as a member of the D.C.I. Judges Chapter. As bugle instructor for the Optimists, he would have assistance from Kevin Martin and Peter Byrne, a five-year marching member. For Mr. Kaiser, this would be his fourteenth year with the Corps, eclipsed only by Don Daber.



Seneca Princemen (1974)



Toronto Optimists (CNE, 1974)

Greg Oxenham and Jack Roberts would handle drill. 1974 was the first year on drill for Greg, while Jack was returning after an absence. During this he had become a C.J.A. judge.

The design of the 1975 field show would be left to Gary “Chops” Czapinski. His experience included work with Santa Clara Vanguard, Madison Scouts, and other Midwest Corps. Good recommendations. Gary’s cohort, Marie Kas, would work with the colour guard as a consultant.

Joe Gianna, who had been Executive Director of the Corps for 1974, became the new President of the sponsoring club. Whether he had been with the Corps all the time is unknown. If he had, this would make him the longest serving member. He went all the way back to the Danforth Crusaders.



Gary “Chops” Czapinski. and Marie Kas

The Optimist Booster Club had a similar meeting on September 27th. It was the booster club that would be responsible for this year’s banquet, assisted by the Legion Ladies.

The Optimist Club of York-Toronto had a meeting on November 5th. Thirteen members were in attendance, along with three guests, Len Perrin, Doug Yarker and Peter Shore, all of whom were ex-marching members. The Club had received a letter from the Optimist Lancers informing them that they were no longer part of the Optimist Club of York-Toronto. The Club wished them well. This was the final act of a murky affair. Years before the Lancers had booked a trip to Calgary. The Optimist organization, for their own reasons, did not approve but the Lancers went anyway. As of then, they had become independent. This letter was a severance of the last link. From the west-end of the city, they would remain western oriented.



Toronto Optimists (1974)

Many more similar events were slated for the future. There were so many facets to the Corps and its subsidiary factions that they have become too numerous to list. Maybe even cumbersome. It leads one to wonder how earlier versions of the Corps ever survived.

It looked as if the Corps of 1975 would be the biggest ever fielded. After what was considered a disastrous year, the membership certainly had not suffered.

The corps banquet, the 13th, was held on November 2, 1974, at a Legion Hall. Hosted by the Optimist Club, the meal and facilities were provided by the Booster Club. At the head table, thirty-eight guests were seated. Included were all of the executive and instructors for both the 1974 and 1975 Corps, as well as representatives of the York-Optimist Club, the Booster Club and the executive of the Cadets.



L-R: Craig Hall and Ken Mulgrew

All Awards were given out and the usual customs observed. With this affair, the year was over. The arrangements were in place for the coming year. It just remained to see what it would bring.



Toronto Optimists (1974)



Toronto Optimists (Borough of York Stadium, 1974)



Toronto Optimists (CNE, 1974)



Toronto Optimists (CNE, 1974)

A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of 1974 progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Ajax (June 12)	Toronto (June 22)	Toledo (Aug 4)	DCI North Toronto (Aug 11)	DCI prelims Ithaca (Aug 16)	Canadian Nationals Toronto (Sept 2)
Toronto Optimists	56.20	52.45	63.45	64.80	64.60	71.55
De La Salle	67.45	66.90	76.95	77.40	84.00	
Seneca Princemen	60.45	51.05	63.30	59.70		74.80
Etobicoke Crusaders	51.55	45.40	62.20	63.70		70.70
Anaheim Kingsmen			82.75		86.85	
Cavaliers			75.20	75.20	81.65	
Garfield		63.45			75.15	
Madison Scouts		76.50	82.45		87.75	
Santa Clara Vanguard				85.80	86.60	

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

The Bandettes Drum & Bugle Corps

TH BANDETTES, formed in 1963, was an all-girl junior marching and maneuvering corps based in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

Because they were closer to Grand Rapids than Toronto, the corps regularly competed in DCM (Drum Corps Michigan), and accepted members from the United States. For several years, the corps included visiting girl marchers from the Philippines.

In 1982, the Bandettes began competing at DCI in Class II and III. Their highest finish was seventh in Class A-60 in 1988. In 2003, the 32-member corps took 25th place in Division II/III prelims. The 2004 finish was 13th in Division III Prelims, performing “Dancing on the Water.”

Mary Wilson, the corps director, has been associated with the Bandettes for their entire existence. She was the original Majorette for the Sault Ste Marie Legion Band and from there she formed the Band colour guard that grew into the drum corps, hence the name Bandettes.

SPOTLIGHT



Mary Wilson, founder of The Bandettes (2023)



Bandettes (1977)

Spotlight: on the Bandettes Drum Corps (continued)



Bandettes (Sudbury, 1974)



Bandettes (1977)

Spotlight: on the Bandettes Drum Corps (continued)



Bandettes



Bandettes



Bandettes

Spotlight: on the Bandettes Drum Corps (continued)



Bandettes

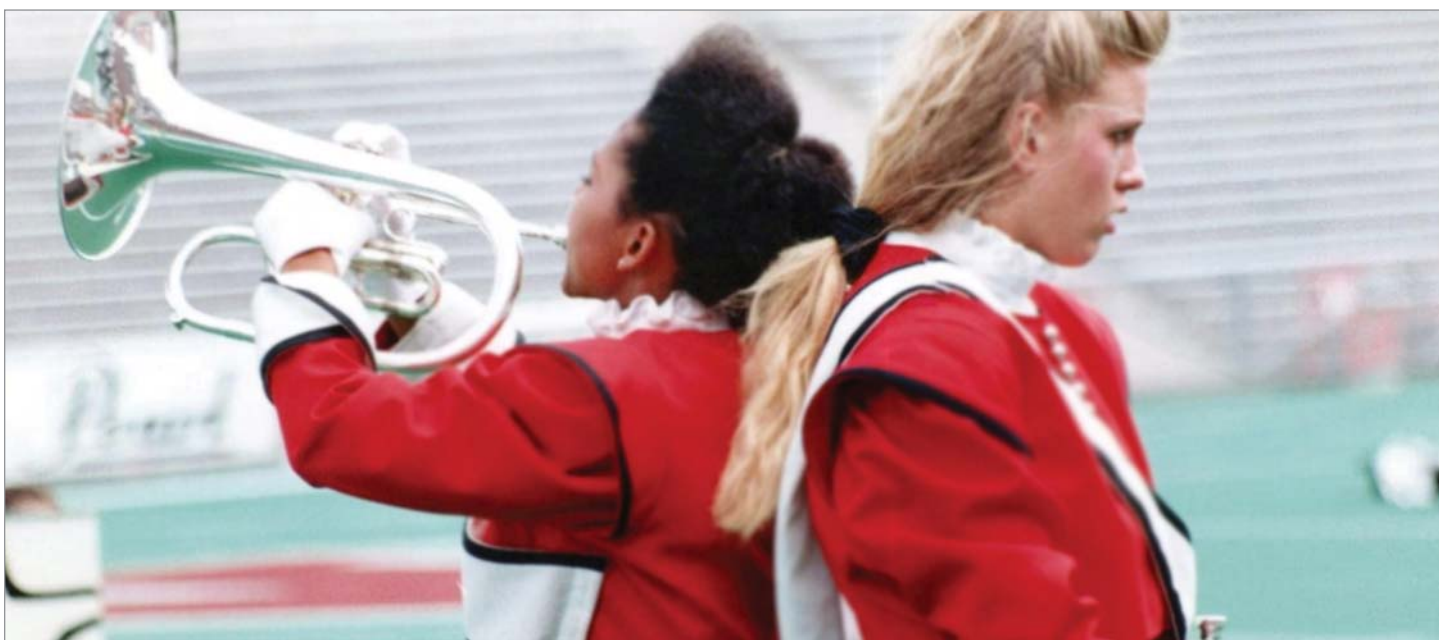


Bandettes

Spotlight: on the Bandettes Drum Corps (continued)



Bandettes (Drum Corps Midwest Championships , 2004)



Bandettes

Mr. Alan William Baggs

Source information came from Al Tierney, Jim Patten, Phil Hennings, Green Capsule Comments plus an obituary by Dan Smith that was published in the Toronto Star.

MR. AL BAGGS was singularly responsible for the existence of the band that ultimately became the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps.

The band started as the Band of the 18th Toronto Boy Scout Troop, founded by Mr. Bud Parker. Mr. Baggs worked with the Boy Scouts as the District Commissioner in Charge of Badges. It was in this role that he first connected with the band.

By 1955, band members were getting older and they would soon have to leave the scouting activity. Mr Baggs wanted to keep the band intact; however, that required a sponsor. Bud Parker and Al Baggs discussed various options before deciding that service clubs might be their best choice. Mr Baggs approached the Downtown Toronto Optimist Club; however, the club was not interested and rejected the proposal. Instead of being discouraged, Mr. Baggs arranged a second meeting with the Club members, asking them to reconsider their decision. This time, he was successful. In honour of their sponsor, he named the new band the Optimists Drum Corps (commonly called Opti-Corps).

When Bud Parker moved out of the city, Mr. Baggs assumed leadership of the Band. He guided it through two championship seasons as “Opti-Corps”. In 1956, they won the Canadian Novice and, in 1957, the Junior “B” Championships.

It was Al Baggs who had the vision, the organizational skills, and the determination that created the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. Having won the Junior “B” Championship, Mr. Baggs set his sights higher. For the 1958 season, the band would compete in the Junior “A” class, the top-tier of Canadian drum corps. And they would compete under a new name, the Toronto Optimists.

His three-year goal was to defeat the reigning champion, Preston Scout House, and win the Canadian Championship. To help achieve this, he hired two experienced instructors, Barry Bell and Lorne Ferrazzutti. Barry and Lorne had been working with another Junior “A” corps, the Danforth Tech Crusaders. They, too, wanted to defeat Scout House; however, the school did not support this goal. The fit was perfect and the Toronto Optimists achieved this goal in their very first year!



Mr. Baggs (Falconer, 1960)



Lorne Ferrazzutti, Eric Burton (drill instructor) and Mr Baggs (1958)

Remembering Mr Baggs (continued)

Mr. Baggs remained as Corps Commander / Director through the 1962 season. During this time, the corps won five consecutive National Championships. So, who was this man?

Corps members called him “Daddy Baggs” and they, sometimes, chaffed at the discipline he urged them to embrace. Still, hundreds of Toronto boys owe, at least part of their adult success, to Alan William Baggs.

Al had been an accountant at the Globe & Mail newspaper and, later, office manager with Kendall Oil. He was best known for decades of work with youth, particularly as a driving force behind the popularity of drum and bugle corps in the city of Toronto.

Al devoted his spare time to community service, including the Optimist Club of Toronto. He was a lifetime member of Optimist International. Al and his wife, Gladys, had no children of their own; however, he raised a generation of young boys, beginning with the less-than-favoured kids of the Davenport and Dovercourt neighbourhoods. “Al took those kids when they were in knee pants and gave them something to do” said Philip Tachauer, a longtime friend and one of the drum majors of Opti-Corps. “He got them to recognize the value of discipline, to work toward a goal for themselves. Hundreds of kids went through Al’s projects. Some of those young lads are big wheels now, and you have to wonder where they would all be today without his leadership.”

“The funny thing was, Al couldn’t play a note of music himself,” Tachauer said, “but he was an incredible organizer and he was the guy who raised the money and arranged the tours all over North America for these boys.”

Al played a prominent role in the establishment of the Canadian Judges Association and was Chief Judge and administrator until 1966. In 1962, he became a judge in the All-American Judges Association.

Several years ago, a bursary was established in Mr. Baggs name, to be given to hard-of-hearing youngsters. Despite his lifetime belief in music as a positive influence on young people, he had poor hearing himself and in later years wore a hearing aid.

Al Baggs’ contribution to the drum and bugle corps activity was recognized in 1980 by the Canadian Drum Corps Association who presented him with the Founders Award. In 1986, the Ontario Drum Corps Association elected him as an Honorary Member.

In 1983, a group of former members of the Optimists organized a reunion and a banquet. The purpose was to honour Mr Baggs and to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Optimists’ first Junior “A” championship. Mr. Baggs and his wife Gladys were the honoured guests. Some 400 former members expressed their appreciation for the dedication to excellence represented by their years in the drum corps activity, authored by Alan William Baggs.



Robert Stanfield, Leader of the Opposition, and Mr Baggs standing for National Anthem (Nationals, CNE, 1972)



Mr Baggs" Judge's Crest

Mr. Al Baggs *(by Sadie Mau-Mau from GCC, Vol 2, #3)*

Suave, to say the least, is the charming figure so boldly portrayed on the cover of this issue of Green Capsule Comments.



Mr Baggs (1965)

REMEMBER QUITE VIVIDLY my first impression of Mr. Baggs some years ago. I thought to myself, “now there’s a charming chap — flashing smile, twinkling eyes, not to mention the prematurely grey hair. Although, as I say, I have known Mr. Baggs for a little while, I must say that he is one of these people that you can never quite figure out. He very often growls and snarls quite ferociously, and often gives the impression that he means it, however, you suddenly become aware of that little moustache quivering at the corners, and you know darn well that his bark is much worse than his bite. Oh, he’ll deny this to the very end, but I know Mr. Baggs, I know!!

THE SCOUT DAYS: Naturally, Mr. Baggs was born in Toronto — where else? However, he was whisked away from our fair city at a very tender age by unthinking parents — whisked away westward to a place called Winnipeg. During his stay in Winnipeg, he went through the agonies of teething, learning to walk, etc. and at the mature age of five he once again returned to Toronto. However, either rents were extremely high in Toronto at that time, or very hard to pay, because then came a move to Detroit, and from there to Windsor. Of course, this moving took a little time but meanwhile he became the youngest warranted Scout Master in Canada. When he wasn’t tying knots or rubbing sticks together, he drew a weekly pay cheque from The Dominion Bank. Lucky for us there came a move back to Toronto where Mr. Baggs decided to give the T. Eaton Company a helping hand, all the while continuing his activity with The Boy Scouts as District Badge Examiner.

OUTDOOR SPORTS: It seems that our Mr. Baggs has been a sports enthusiast from way back (not too far back, I might add). He had a great liking for archery. Skill must also be mentioned, for several Championships were bestowed upon Al “Robin Hood” Baggs for his efforts. While winning archery championships, he was also an ardent fisherman and also extremely interested in conservation.

Remembering Mr. Baggs *(from Jim Patten)*

THOSE OF US who were involved in the inception of the Scout Bands the Davenport Trumpet Band, Opti-Corps, and the Toronto Optimist Drum and Bugle corps were well aware of the presence of Mr. Baggs as our Director and Leader. It was mainly him that kept those groups on a steady course throughout the entire evolutionary process. His approach to teamwork, ethics, and discipline instilled in us a strong sense of accomplishment on our march to the top.



Jim Patten and Al Baggs (1953)

Remembering Mr Baggs (continued)

He was a caring and considerate leader, willing to lend a hand to those of us who needed it. In 1953, when our Scout Band was arranging its first trip to the Waterloo music festival, I had a problem finding a temporary replacement for my part-time job. I could not travel to Waterloo with the group until later in the day. Our Scout Master and leader, Mr. Parker, mentioned this to his friend Mr. Baggs, who was just getting involved with the band. He, too, had a job obligation for Saturday morning. Mr. Baggs and his wife, Gladys, went out of their way to pick me up. They took me with them to the festival in time for the street parade. This was an example of how he encouraged and took all of us under his wing.

Mr. Baggs was also a keen negotiator. The original application for sponsorship of our band was submitted, and rejected, by the Downtown Toronto Optimist Club. It was Mr. Baggs who convinced the club, at a special meeting on September 28th 1955, that sponsoring our band was a worthwhile cause. With a positive vote, our affiliation with the Optimist Club began. Mr. and Mrs. Baggs went on to be members of the Downtown Optimist Club for many years.

Mr. Baggs was affectionately known as “Daddy” Baggs to most of the old boys. He was a potent influence on the Junior “A” corps, guiding them to many Canadian championships. At the 25th reunion of the corps, the organizing committee recognized Mr. Baggs for his selfless leadership. After paying all expenses, a couple of thousand dollars remained. The organizing committee presented this money to the Downtown Toronto Optimist Club in his name.

A Man with a Purpose *(to help others)*

by Phil and Betty Hennings

IT WAS BACK in the 1950's when I first met Mr Baggs. I was a kid in Boy Scouts and needed to pass some tests to receive my King's Scout Badge. The man I needed to see was Mr Alan W. Baggs, Commissioner for Badges, in the Oakwood District of Toronto. He had been in Scouting for some time. Little did I know I would see much more of him in the future.

I soon discovered that he was someone who wanted nothing but the correct answer. Mr Baggs was a strict man and, when it came to doing a job, there was only one way, the right way. Our Scout Master, Mr Parker, had started the 18th Scout Band and, later, the 157th Band. Since our band was in the Oakwood District, Mr Parker and Mr Baggs knew each other.



Gladys and Al Baggs (Falconer, 1960)



Bud and Alice Parker with Gladys and Al Baggs

Remembering Mr Baggs (continued)

By 1955, many of our band members were approaching an age when they would have to leave scouting. Mr Baggs and Mr Parker started looking for a sponsor, to keep the band intact. Mr Parker's job got more stressful and required more of his attention, leaving Mr Baggs to find a sponsor. They discussed various ideas, including Service Clubs like the Lions, Kiwanis and Optimist. In late 1955, Mr Baggs met with the Optimist Club, asking them to sponsor the band. Unfortunately, they declined his proposal. Mr Baggs, never one to give up, tried a second time. This time, he succeeded; however, Mr Parker's work required him to move out of the city, leaving Mr Baggs in full control of the new Optimist Corps.

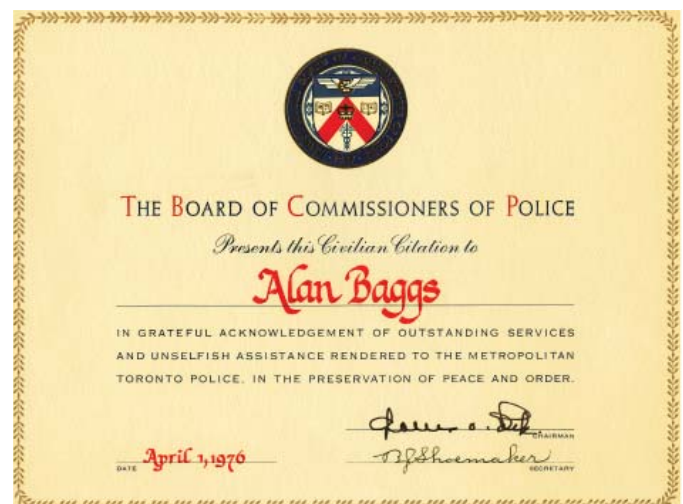


Mr Baggs with some members of Opti-Corps (1957)

In recognition of their sponsor, the band became known as Opti-Corps. With Mr Baggs at the helm, they won the 1956 Canadian Novice Championship. In 1957, the band moved up a level to Junior "B" and, once again, won the Championship.

Mr Baggs was a hard worker and wanted this Drum Corps to be competitive against the best corps. In late 1957, he moved the Corps into Junior "A", the top competitive tier. To help out, he brought on board two new instructors, Barry Bell on horns and Lorne Ferrazzutti on Drums. Both men had knowledge of, and experience in, drum corps. This was the beginning of Toronto Optimists. In doing this, Mr Baggs had started a new area for the Optimist Clubs in Ontario and a new era for Drum Corps in Canada. Success seemed to follow Mr Baggs and this new corps was no exception. They made drum corps history, winning the Canadian Championship, not only in its first year, but for eleven consecutive years!

Mr Baggs had several hobbies before getting involved in Drum Corps. He enjoyed making fishing lures and won awards at fishing tournaments. Archery was another of his hobbies. He taught archery to many Boy Scouts and was an instructor for the Toronto Archery Club. Helping young people was what he enjoyed. He instructed many of us in the Scout Troop and our parents bought us bows. Our parents liked Mr and Mrs Baggs. Some, including my parents, became wonderful friends. My Mother became President of the Ladies Auxiliary for the Troop. These Ladies even



Civilian Citation awarded to Mr Baggs

Remembering Mr Baggs (continued)

made us new scarves to wear at the Waterloo Band Festival in the early 1950's.

If you needed advice, Mr Baggs was always there. He was like a dad you could trust. The name "Daddy" Baggs seemed to follow him in his life. In 1976, he received a Civilian Citation from the Metropolitan Toronto Police regarding a Dominion Store robbery. In 1988, the Ontario Government's Ministry of Citizenship presented him with a Volunteer Service Award for his many years of work with young people.



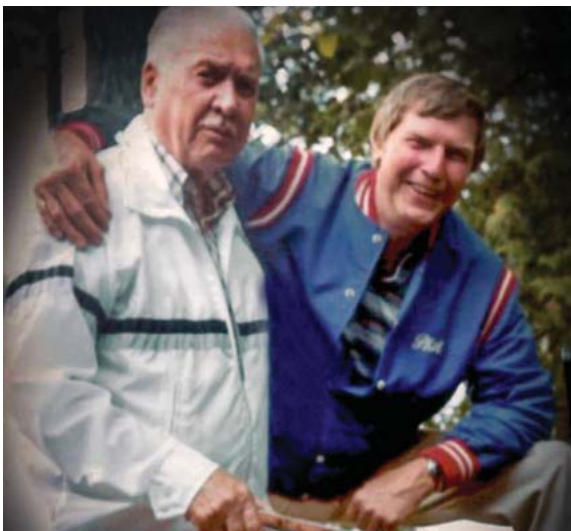
L to R: Jim Patten, Warren Mills and Al Baggs on the bus (Falconer, 1960)

Many young families knew him from the beginning of the Corps, and he kept in touch with them. My family and I regularly visited Mr and Mrs Baggs at their home. They stayed at our cottage many times and were always interested in how our family was doing. Both of them loved the history of the US South and we frequently discussed their trips to South Carolina. They were involved in the Downtown Optimist Club activities and regularly dressed up for the Club's annual masquerade party.

Mr Baggs came across as a stern man; however, he was not that way. He helped others to fulfill their dreams. Mr And Mrs Baggs were always together, whatever they were doing. It was an honour to have known them.

Like many of our friends, they too have gone. As time goes on and our health declines, we pass on and leave behind fond memories, but the feelings that we have never fill the void that is left.

Friends are hard to find. Good Friends harder to forget.



Mr Baggs and Phil at Phil and Betty's cottage



Mr Baggs, Betty Hennings and Gladys Baggs at Phil and Betty's cottage

Recollections of Mr. Baggs

by Doug MacKenzie

AT ONE EARLY drill session in 1960, I was surprised to see Brother Eugene in attendance talking with Mr. Baggs†, our Director. He was pointing in my direction, and Mr. Baggs was nodding. It wasn't long before I was called out of the line. Brother Eugene told Baggs I had joined Del and had a Del horn. He was there to collect his horn and me. I explained that the horn was from the Optimists, and although I had talked about joining Del with Brother, I never had. I believe that Del's horns at that time may have had their name (De La Salle) on the bell. I pleaded my case, and with a closer examination of my "Whaley Royce" horn and my protestation, the case was closed. This was back in the day when membership was governed by the release rule, making it almost impossible to move from one organization to another without a written release granted in October, the free month.



Barry Bell and Mr. Baggs (Windsor, 1960)

I think we were in Waterloo for the 1961 Nationals.

We had performed poorly in the prelims, and many of the guys were upset. There was a cork bulletin board in our dressing room, and one of the guys went up and hit it. Fortunately or otherwise, there was no backing behind the board, so his hand went through it. Another guy followed suit, and then another. Wanting to be one of the guys, I hit the board, putting my hand through it as well.

By the time we left, the bulletin board was ruined. Well, a couple of weeks went by, and of course, the property reported the incident, and the Corps was contacted about payment for the damage done. Mr. Baggs admonished the evildoers and asked them to give themselves up. We all did. When it came to me, I was scared s---less; he looked down at me and said in a serious and ominous voice, "I'm very disappointed in you, Douglas". That hurt more than my share of the reparations, which amounted to the lofty sum of fifteen cents. I had let "Daddy Baggs" down.



Mr Baggs, on the bus to Falconer (1960)

Mr Baggs

by Mike Thys

TO A NAÏVE 15 year old who was totally in awe of the fact that I was now a member of the corps, Mr. Baggs seemed to me to be like a commanding officer, looking over the troops – not one to approach unless spoken to. His militaristic bearing and serious demeanor conveyed the message that he was in charge and would be setting the rules of good behaviour that we would follow! We would work hard and would not dare disappoint him. He was the Corps Director, and our fates in the corps depended on his approval.

When I joined the corps in 1961 I was issued a Conn French Horn. It was the only one in the section, the others being a collection of makes such as Imperial, Getzen, Olds, and who knows what else. The Conn had a good sound, but it was a very light horn, due to the very thin brass used in its construction. I could see that it had already done very severe duty since the rolled rim at the bell had begun to separate from the bell. During the years that I had it the separation only got worse, and I had to be very careful not to crumple the thin bell while polishing the horn before every show.



Vern Johansson and Mr Baggs (Nationals, 1966)

My strongest memory of Mr. Baggs is from the summer of 1964, when he was no longer the director, but the Optimist Club Representative. It was at a drill rehearsal at Keating Field, and while returning to the starting line for yet another run-through, Barry Bell called me over to the sideline where he was standing with Mr. Baggs. With trepidation I approached. What trouble could I have gotten into that would warrant a summons to those two? When I arrived, I was told to show the condition of my horn. I feared that I would be blamed for its pathetic state. It turned out that Barry was making a case that the Optimist Club should purchase new instruments for the horn line. Mr. Baggs had a look of serious thoughtful consideration, while I must have shown immense relief.

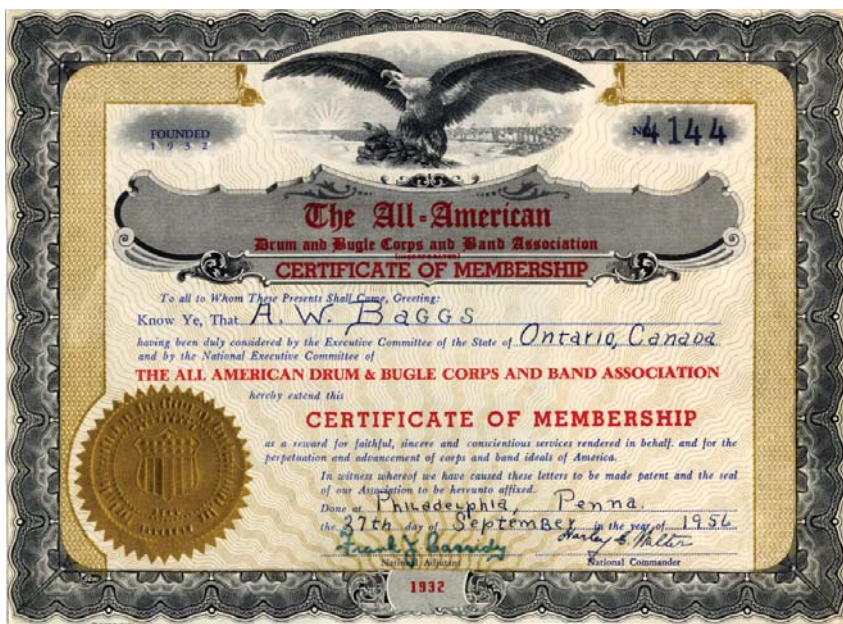
Mr. Baggs obviously did work his magic at the club because at a rehearsal during the winter of '64 - '65 a complete matched set of brand new chromed Imperial horns from Whaley Royce showed up. It really must have taken magic because the corps was just a minor part of the Club's support of youth activities, and we had received new uniforms just two years earlier.

I believe that all marching members held him in high regard. We felt an obligation to heed his wishes, to respect his demands and to uphold his high standards of behaviour. If any one of us had reason to address him it was always "Mr.", never "Al" or "Daddy".

Remembering Mr Baggs (continued)



Mr Baggs in his All-American Judges uniform



Mr Baggs membership certificate for the All-American Judges Association



Mr Baggs with the Chief Judges of the New York & Michigan chapters of the All-American Association (1965)
(L- R: Al Tevels, New York; Mr. Baggs; Col. G. Cutler, Michigan)

Remembering Mr Baggs (continued)

I don't recall ever having a personal conversation with Mr. Baggs during my three years in the Corps. (he was the boss, I was just a grunt in the line.) As we were proceeding single file under the stadium to the starting line at the '62 Nationals, he and Mrs. Baggs were standing there applauding and encouraging us. As I passed them he shouted, "go get 'em Mel." I said to myself 'holy shit, he knows my name". — Mel Dey

Mr Baggs was the member of the Optimist Club of downtown Toronto responsible for promoting the idea that they should sponsor the Corps. If it wasn't for him The Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps would not have come to fruition. He was a very dedicated, influential and supportive individual, loved by all and feared by some. He was responsible for getting Jimmy McConkey a job when he became our Drum Major. Mrs. Baggs was everybody's mother and we all appreciated both of them. — Joe Gianna



Bernie Beer and Al Baggs (Falconer, 1960)

I first met Al Baggs at Toronto Optimists' first rehearsal at Jarvis Vocational School. We were a new corps and Mr. Baggs was the Corps Commander. He gave a speech regarding his plans for new uniforms, new horns, new instructors, new music, etc. He also expressed a desire to beat Scout House in three years. After that speech, I knew that he had great management and motivational skills.

We immediately started working on our first song that Barry had arranged. The song was "When You're Smiling". Baggs then left the rehearsal, saying that he'd be at the next one to hear the new song. Bugles and drums got together at the end of the practise to play our song. It was rough, but you could hear the talent of our experienced musicians. Barry told the corps to practise at home to get the song down.

At our next rehearsal, Al Baggs was there, waiting to hear the song! The corps formed up in concert formation and Barry conducted. When the first note of the fanfare was played, the sound was spectacular. When we had finished playing, I knew we had something special. I looked over at Baggs and noticed that little smile he had. And we exceeded his expectations, beating Scout House at the Nationals in our very first year! — Lorne Ferrazzutti

Remembering Mr Baggs (continued)



Phil Hennings, Ian Robertson, Bob Owens and Mr Baggs (1960)



Mr Baggs (1966)



Mr Baggs, Harley Marvin Johnson (the Mayor of Merritton) and Roy Lawrence, Drum Major of Opti-Corps (1957)



*A caricature of Mr Baggs
(probably when he worked at Kendal Oil)*

Who Would Have Known?

By: Douglas MacKenzie

WITH THE 1960 Nationals over and our third consecutive Championship, we had one more M&M contest. The sponsor was the Leaside Lions Club and they would hold the contest at Varsity Stadium in Toronto. As a member of the Leaside Jungle Kings and their feeder corps, I had participated in exhibitions at this contest many times. You can see Leaside in the bottom photo, at the back of the field during the retreat.

This was a junior/senior affair, with Optimists competing against De La Salle and the Audubon Bon Bons, an all-girl corps from New Jersey. Audubon, a highly competitive corps, was very well respected in junior corps circles. Optimists won the junior contest, with Audubon second and Del third. On the senior side, the Lt. Norman Prince (Princemen) competed against Guelph Royallaires and Canada's Marching Ambassadors. Our next performance was a street parade and exhibition for the St. Catharine's Grape and Wine Festival. Del placed first, and we were second, with Scout House third. Well, it was only a parade. Who would have known?

The next main event on the Optimists calendar was Rally Night. Rally Night, held on October 18, was the brainchild of Don Daber. The goal was to promote new membership into the Corps. Having

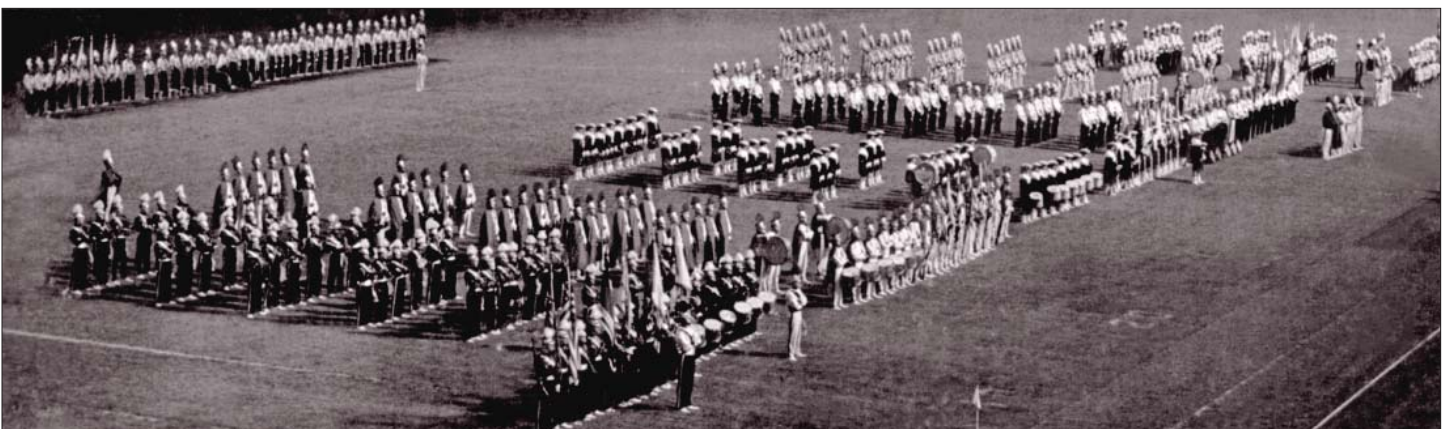
travelled with us through the summer, Daber had become a fixture with the Corps. He was, now, our publicity and public relations manager.

This year, several long-time corps members were leaving because of age or to follow other pursuits. These members, who were the foundation of the 1958 Toronto Optimists, had come through the "Scout Band", "Opti Corps" or The Danforth Crusaders. This would be the largest contingent of members to leave at once, creating a significant void of experience in our ranks.



Ivor Bramley making a point, Toronto Optimists (First Rally Night, 1960)

Rally Night was an enormous success, with several members of the Don Mills Sky Raiders and our own Bantam Corps in attendance. Although the Optimists had become accustomed to getting a few members from other organizations, this year would be different.



Retreat at the 1960 Leaside Lions' Contest



Fred Johnson and Bill Jay (behind Fred) with the Bantams

The Bantam Corps would provide many recruits and significantly contribute talent to the Corps. Fred Johnson was the Director of the Bantams. He was extremely affable and had made significant contributions to The Danforth Crusaders before the merger with Opti Corps. Fred and Bill Jay coordinated the formation and instruction of the Bantams.

Our last contest of the year was a standstill in Buffalo, New York. We were extremely confident we would win because we had beaten two of the competitors before. This would be a junior/senior affair. On the way, we stopped in Hamilton for an exhibition to promote the newly formed Optimist “sponsored” Hamilton Cadets. They would become the Hamilton Conqueror. In Buffalo, The Hilton Crusaders would win the contest; second was



Optimists doing an exhibition for the Hamilton Cadets, soon to be Conqueror. (Hamilton, 1960)

Niagara Militaires, and third was De La Salle. This would be the second time Del had beaten us this month. I remember thinking they were not “real” contests. It was a quiet bus ride back to Toronto. Was this a harbinger of contests yet to come and an omen into 1961? Who would have known?



De La Salle (Buffalo)

In addition to members of the Bantams, Rally Night had brought in several new members from Sky Raiders, three from Columbus and one from Scout House. All were experienced competitors. The Toronto Optimist Corps of 1960 was also mature and experienced. The Bantams, despite their youth and competitive inexperience, would fill out our hornline and would help us maintain our competitiveness into the mid-sixties.

In a letter to the editor of Green Capsule Comments, our Director, Mr. Baggs, wrote the following:

“To the new Corpsman on the line, I would like to say that you have a very great responsibility in carrying on. You are replacing boys that have done a great job in placing THE OPTIMISTS at the top. It is up to you to carry on the tradition that has been established.

To those boys who have retired, I say ‘thanks’ for the tremendous effort. I’m sure that when you attend a contest, perhaps for the first time as a spectator, that you will watch the Optimists with even greater pride, knowing that you helped build the top Junior Corps in Canada.”

Who Would Have Known? (continued)

To this day, Mr. Baggs is respected by those who played in the Corps under his Direction. All members were his boys, and corps members often referred to him as “Daddy” Baggs.

In 1960, the Optimist Club decided that members who had been with the Corps for five years should be honoured for that achievement with a silver ring. The ring would have The Toronto Optimists’ logo (designed by Barry Bell), and those who played in The Danforth Crusaders would be eligible. In 1960, the corps gave 14 rings to deserving members. In 1961, 12 members would be recipients. A special evening, The Victory Dance and Silver Ring Ceremony would take place for this honour. This was the beginning of annual banquets, held to award deserving Corps members for contributing to the organization.



Mr Baggs (1960)



Optimists 5-year ring



Toronto Optimists (Leaside, 1961)



*Doug MacKenzie, Mrs Baggs, and Mr Baggs
(Victory Banquet, 1960)*

WITH SUCH a large turnover, 1961 would be a pivotal year. After a distinguished three-year run, Phil Hennings stepped down as Drum Major, as did Barry Bell. Bell wanted to devote more time to the technicalities of our overall show. Our always reliable soprano soloist and section leader Al (Moe, Blinky) Morrison would be Drum Major for the 1961 campaign. Moe was a no-nonsense Corpsman; he was what this young corps required and would be an outstanding leader during the season.

In early May, we competed in a standstill contest at Leaside Arena. The Optimists came away with a win over De La Salle, by a slim margin of a point and one half. Grantham was third. It tasted sweet after our loss in Buffalo last year.

Our first “real” contest of the year would be in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, on our way to St. Patrick’s Cadets Preview of Champions, in Jersey City. The Corps had grown in size, and we now travelled with one bus and a couple of station wagons. We travelled overnight and arrived in Phillipsburg early Friday morning. A police escort took us to our billet at a hotel (big time) before



Toronto Optimists (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1961)

an afternoon rehearsal. These contests were early in the competitive year, and we had crammed for two weeks to finish our drill. On Friday, May 26, 1961, we competed in our first M&M contest of the year. We didn't do well. The scores were: 1) 88.40 Blessed Sacrament; 2) 84.85 Garfield Cadets; 3) 83.90 St. Catherine's Queensmen; 4) 75.60 Toronto Optimists; 5) 73.25 Belles of St. Mary. Blessed Sacrament beat us by thirteen points, a real eye-opener regarding our competitive readiness.

The next day, we had an early morning rehearsal, dressed for a parade in the afternoon, and then headed to Jersey City and St. Pat's. Arriving at St. Patrick's Parish Hall, the ladies of St. Pat's had a hot beef supper ready for us. During supper, Fr. Gaffney became an honorary member of the Toronto Optimists. The corps presented him with a

goody bag of all Don Daber's promotional material. As in years previous, Fr. Gaffney warned us about the perils of the park. We were mercifully given the night off, and many of us went into NYC with a group of Cadets from Garfield acting as our guides.

The following morning, we were up early for breakfast. The ladies of St. Pats had this down to a science. Like the previous year, breakfast was a small cereal box with milk, sweet rolls, and coffee. Once again, the ladies did a terrific job in looking after us.

On Sunday, May 28, we were to compete in the Preview of Champions. We did a warmup by the Church and loaded the bus. In front of the bus were two motorcycle cops who would escort us to the stadium. Once again, we drove through Jersey City like celebrities. It was a hive of activity as we entered the stadium with junior and senior corps preparing to enter the contest field. To me, this was like Groundhog Day, "which happens to be my birthday." A year ago, I was in awe now, as Yogi Berra would say, It was deja vu all over again. As a seasoned veteran (or "old guy"), I watched the rookies take in the scene just as I had the year before. I hoped that this year's outcome would be different. It was, but not the way I had envisioned it. The scores were: 1) 86.050 Blessed Sacrament; 2) 82.475 Garfield Cadets; 3) 80.400 St. Catherine's Queensmen; 4) 79.550 Bracken Cavaliers; 5) 77.300 Toronto Optimists; 6) 74.500 Boston Crusaders.



Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights (Preview of Champions, Jersey City, 1961)

Who Would Have Known? (continued)

It wasn't what we hoped for, but we picked up three points from the Friday night contest on Sac. I had watched Bracken from the marshalling area and couldn't figure out how they beat us. I was ecstatic that we beat Boston; that wouldn't happen again. In my opinion, they were very good.

Immediately after the contest, we were on our way with another police escort to the City limits and back to Toronto. We arrived in Toronto around six in the morning, exhausted. My routine was back to school at Danforth Tech and then to my part-time job at Wallen's Drug Store on The Danforth. The weekend had been gruelling, and we were not prepared; however, it brought the "old guys" and the rookies closer together. A rookie wasn't considered a bona fide Toronto Optimist until after the Nationals.

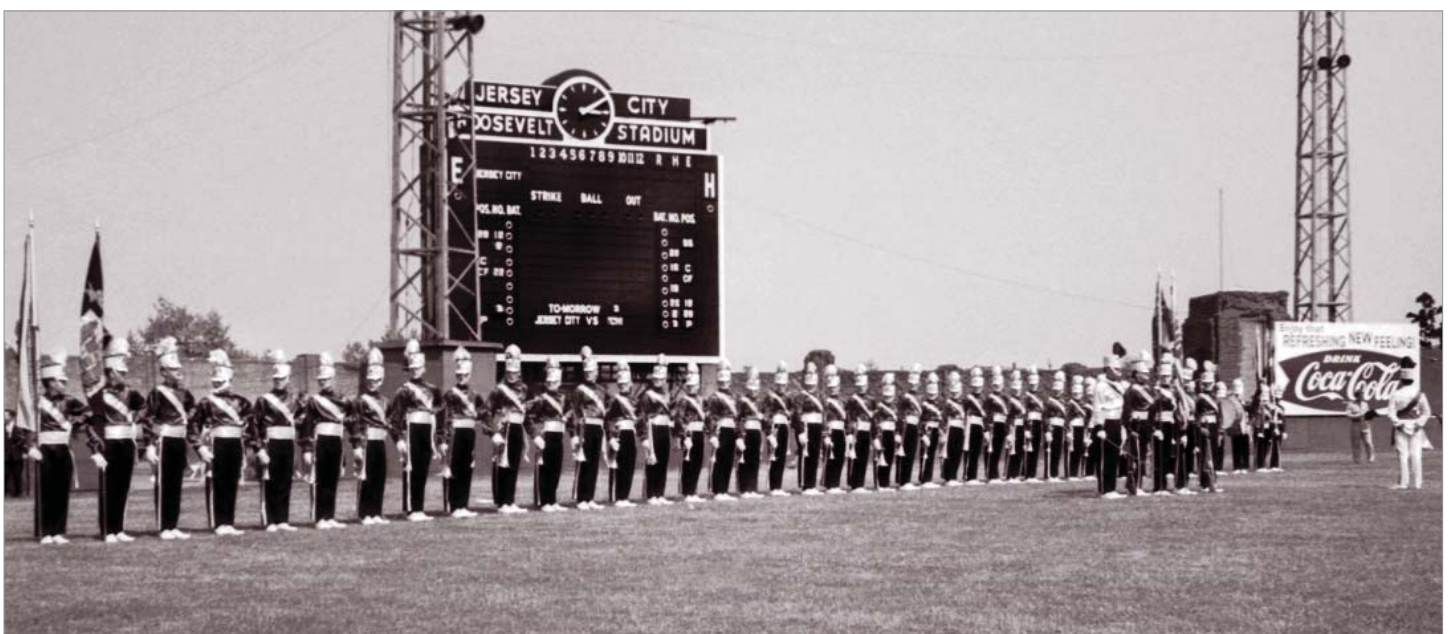
IT WAS nice having guys in the Corps who were close to my age, and quite a few lived nearby. I usually went to rehearsal with Dave Hanks, who lived on Linsmore, around the corner from me. He had an old forty-nine Chevy that had a temperamental carburetor. I'd go around to his house, and we would be off to pick up Colin Hedworth on Bain and, occasionally, John Carey.



1949 Chevy

If Hanks wasn't driving, Joe Gianna would pick me up in his blue Vauxhall with Don Reid and John Shearer. Joe lived over at Pape Avenue just off The Danforth about a mile away, so his picking me up meant going out of his way. If you didn't get a ride, you took the streetcar.

You had to carry your horn, drum, shako, uniform, and kit bag on the streetcar to catch the bus for contests because the Corps had no equipment truck. Although most of the guys lived close, school and part-time jobs made it difficult to socialize outside of the Corps. Rehearsals at Jarvis Vocational were spent either in section practice or ensemble. We rehearsed twice a week in the winter, Wednesday night and Sunday mornings. In summer, two nights a week and the weekend if we were not competing. Before Optimists, I would play pickup hockey and



Toronto Optimists (Preview of Champions, Jersey City, 1961)

baseball and ride my bike with my neighbourhood pals. Once in the Corps, it was difficult for me to relate to them. I was on a different planet, travelling to the States and being with older guys. Drum Corps, to me, was the real deal. It's hard to explain to someone who has never marched.

One friend, Billy McKeown, who was the same age as me, had had polio from about six or seven and was confined to a wheelchair;

he loved Drum Corps. His family lived on Coxwell Avenue, close to East York Stadium; they would go to contests at Varsity Stadium and any other

venue in Toronto where the Corps performed. Billy's dad would order records from Stetson D. Richmond and Fleetwood. I'd often go over to keep him company, talk and listen to Corps records. We would listen to Hawthorne, Skyliners, and Hurricanes, mostly senior corps. He had a record of the 1960s Baltimore Yankee Rebels who were one of our favourite corps. We really liked the Rebel's repertoire and The Party's Over their exit number was our favourite tune; we would play it over and over. Who would have known?

We rehearsed at the waterfront on a field in front of the ferry docks. De La Salle practiced on a field close to ours, on the other side of Bay Street. There was a strong rivalry between



the two Corps, but I retained my friendship with Billy Grant. Through him, I became friends with many members of Del, including Paul Kelly, Dan Maloney, Chris McBride and Rob Roy. Mike Delaney, Rick Scanlan and Arthur Ailey were friends from the neighbourhood. Rob Roy and I are friends to this day and talk frequently.

I mentioned earlier that we had a large turnover from the Corps of 1960. One of the odd cases involved our two superb riflemen, Len Perrin, and Ivor Bramley. This dynamic duo were the first to toss their rifles (9.25 lb Lee Enfield 303s) in the air and catch them. They had done this in contests, with fixed bayonets, as early as 1959. In 1961, they decided to muster their musical capabilities by moving to French horn and Bass drum. Both would become excellent musicians as well as outstanding corpsmen. Two flag bearers, Al Miller and Andy Henderson, would take up the vacated positions and excel as riflemen.



The "old" rifles and the "new": Ivor, Len, Al and Andy (1961)

Our next performance would be in exhibition at the Viscount's senior contest in Hamilton. This would allow us to display our full M&M performance before an audience since returning from Jersey almost a month ago. I'm not sure if Archer Epler was at this contest or if it was the year before. However, Archie was one of the premier senior Corps in the States. They had a wonderful horn line, and many of Optimist's arrangements were by the legendary Lee Wolfe, who also wrote for Archie.



Guys from Optimists watching Del practice (Waterfront, 1961)

They played “April in Paris” at this show, and when it came to the shout chorus, the DM shouted in a booming voice heard throughout the stadium, “One More Time.”

With that, the horn line belted out the refrain. This guy was the most magnetic Drum Major I had ever seen. The guy was a show in and of himself. I’d never seen anything like him and was completely captivated by his performance, as was the entire audience. I found out that the DM was a guy named Jimmy McConkey. Who would have known?



Jimmy McConkey leads the Archer-Epler Musketeers (about 1960)

We did an exhibition in Rochester on July 1 for a senior contest. I guess this was to keep us on the field in front of a crowd, or it could have been for needed revenue. The following week, we would be in Rome for a junior contest.

Rome was always a great venue for a contest. As I write this, I can see and smell the local fireman’s BBQ tent with chicken and brats on the grill, and they even sold beer! Toronto the good had nothing like this. Rome was always a big event not only for the Corps but also for the locals. I realized my suspicions regarding Bracken Cavaliers when the



Toronto Optimists (Rome, 1961)

scores were announced: 1) Garfield Cadets 84.750; 2) Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights 83.190; 3) St. Catherine’s Queensmen 82.850; 4) Toronto Optimists 81.850; 5) Bracken Cavaliers 78.680. We were not pleased with our placing, but we had come a long way from Phillipsburg, losing by 13 points to now being within less than 1.5 points of Blessed Sacrament. And we beat Bracken! I’ve always felt biased in judging for local Corps, whether in Jersey, Mass, the Midwest and “perhaps even” Canada. Rome was about as neutral as possible, and we would soon benefit from it. Who would have known?



Neil Ibitson, Al Lavigne, Don Koch (Garfield), Henry Mura (Garfield), Ross Colville & Robin Weatherstone (Rome, 1961)

Our next contest, the first in Canada this season, was at East York Stadium. This contest was sponsored by Canada’s Marching Ambassadors, who took it over from the Toronto Optimist Club. This was within walking distance of my house, and the McKeown family and many friends and relatives of all participants would be in attendance. The stands were packed. Four of the Corps were Toronto-based. We won the show, but our hornline was beaten badly by Del. The Scores: 1) The Optimists 80.690; 2) De La Salle 78.625; 3) Grantham 71.90; 4) Midtowners 70.690; 5) Scout House 68.010; 6) St Mary’s 58.760. I can remember feeling very confident that, despite our losses to Del in the standstills and parade, we would continue to be the better at “real” contests. Who would have known?

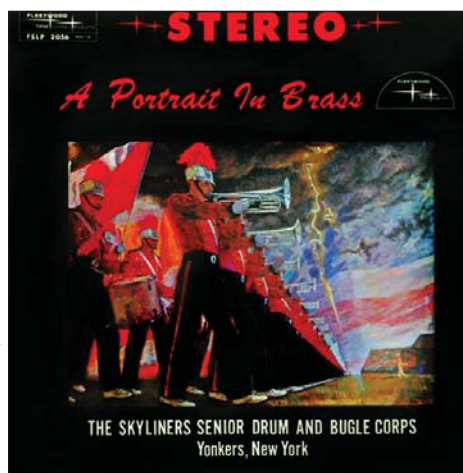


Optimists (NY-Canadians, Aquinas Stadium, Rochester, 1961)

Aquinas Stadium in Rochester. This was the New York Canadian Championships. We had won this before. The crowds are one of the greatest things I can recall; it wasn't unusual to have the stadium almost full on both sides. With the number of corps in the surrounding area, the crowds were as knowledgeable as in Jersey. The second thing about this old forum was the smell of white or red BBQ Brats sold under the stands with beer. The lighting was powered by generators outside the stands that sounded like low-flying aircraft.

We had many successes at Aquinas, and by winning this one, we would three-peat. 1) The Optimists; 81.20 2) De La Salle; 80.80 3) Ridge Culver-Statesmen 75.98 4) Grantham Police Boys Band 74.49. I don't have the Senior scores. My first recollection of being at Aquinas was in 1960.

I remember seeing the New York Skyliners for the first time. They were a powerhouse. When I wax nostalgic about



their performance, I think of the album cover, "A Portrait in Brass". Over the years, the stadium would be a hub for New York and Canadian Corps, including the DCA championships. The venerable old stadium was torn down in 1985.

Off to Titusville, PA, for the Lions Club's Music in Motion Contest. This would be a junior-senior contest. When we arrived in Titusville, we immediately rehearsed, and in the afternoon, we did a standstill for the nuns at the Sisters of St. Joseph's Academy. If this was done to garner favour from above, it didn't work. We were beaten by the Pittsburgh Rockets by almost 5 points. 1) Pittsburgh Rockets 83.444; 2) The Optimists 78.707; 3) Rochester Grey Knights 77.670; 4) 77.150 The Gardner Guards 77.150; 5) The Hamilton Viscounts 75.345. For some reason, we paraded from the contest site back to the YMCA, where we dressed. We may have provoked some of the local yokels by doing this. There would be an ongoing problem between them and us in the ensuing years. Or perhaps it was the result of the local damsel's interest in the boys in green? Who would have known?



Optimists perform for the nuns at St John's Academy

It was time in Toronto for the annual Canadian National Exhibition, a contest we had previously won. I wouldn't say we were Cockeyed Optimists going into this, but we would be when the dust settled. De La Salle had been closing the gap between us as The Optimists had done to Scout House in 1958. We had inklings that Del was good, especially on horns. It had been our drum line that

made the difference in the contests throughout the year. This time, Del's Drum Line beat ours, and with their superior horn line, the inevitable became a reality. "In second place," The Toronto Optimists. I don't recall the aftermath of the retreat other than it was decided that we would rehearse the following day and increase rehearsals through the next two weeks prior to Nationals. Not one person objected. When I got home, the house was empty, and I remember sitting in our living room in the dark, trying to figure out how this could have happened. This, to me, was unfathomable, but the fact remained they were the better, and we had to improve within a two-week window if we wanted to retain "our" title. Who would have known?

We slogged away for the two weeks, making minor changes to our drill and simplifying the horn music wherever possible. The Corps was on a mission and had no intention of losing. Del had an experienced Corps from the beginning of the year. The influx of bantam corps members had gifted us, but that inexperience had shown itself at various times during the year through inconsistent performances.

THE CANADIAN Nationals would be held in Waterloo. "Would it be our Waterloo?" The pressure was on, and we had no intention of rolling over. The results of the prelims were not in our favour.

Del did a terrific show and beat us by 2.375, winning all captions except for drumming. We couldn't comprehend that we were beaten; this could not be happening. We were not feeling optimistic. Our dressing room was one of doom, gloom, and bitching.

As reported by Colin Hedworth in his book "From Toronto... The Optimists": "Then, as so often happens in a crisis, no matter what the occasion or activity, fate intervened in the form of Bern 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."



Bern Beer (Falconer, 1960)

As the defending Champions, we competed last in our division. This gave us time to settle down after the startling outcome of the afternoon; however, it also meant that nerves were at the breaking point. When we got to the starting line, it was like



Optimists and De La Salle on retreat (CNE, Toronto, 1961)

a transformation. The Corps settled down, and you could feel the cohesiveness up and down the line. We were there to win, and that was our only purpose. We got off to a shaky start, but the Corps started to gel, and we did one of our best M&M performances of the year. The drum line came through, and as we passed the stands in review, we felt that we had a chance of retaining “our title.” When on retreat, you could cut the air with a knife. And in third place, The Grantham Police Boys Band 76.950. The competitors and the crowd were tense; it was very quiet when they read out the last two scores. The announcer teased the crowd and the Corps. “The second-place score is 83.50.” “The first-place score is 83.55.” (Point zero-five separates first from second.) And in second place. Pause. From Toronto. Pause. De La Salle! We were in shock, and no one moved a muscle. There was a collective sigh of relief. We had retained the title, winning our fourth Championship. Both boos and cheers rained down from the packed stands. This would not be without controversy.

Back in the day, they held spit and polish inspections before preliminaries, and any Corps could lose a tenth of a point for an infraction such as haircuts, dirty equipment, unkempt uniforms, etc. The inspection judge noticed Del’s flagpole

heights were not uniform and docked them 3/10 of a point. “Supposedly,” they had been warned about this previously. We were docked 1/10 for what I can’t recall. After the scores were announced, the speculation was that this was why Del lost, and Baggs was vilified as the Chief Judge for supposedly fixing the contest’s outcome. In retrospect, many Optimists, including me, were sympathetic to our competitor. No one had ever heard of flagpole height violations, and I’m not sure if it was heard of again. A win is a win; the lost tenths could have been in any caption. We won on execution drums and M&M, Baggs would carry that stigma through his years as a Chief Judge of the Canadian Judges Association and All-American Judge. I believe Baggs was a man of the highest integrity, and I’m sure he was dismayed by the allegations. After all, he was not the inspection judge.

Once again, we headed to St. Catharines for the Grape and Wine Festival. Going into this contest, we were a much more blasé corps, which would show as we lost to Del by two points. How cruel the outcome for Del. We were the National Champions, and they won a contest that many, including me, would not remember. To this day, I’m flummoxed by the outcome of the 1961 Nationals, as are those



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Waterloo, 1961)



Toronto Optimists (St. Catharines, 1961)

of us who competed that day. I can't imagine how the guys in Del felt. This would not be the last time The Optimists would pull the rabbit out of the hat.

We had that magical quality that all champions have, which is to win when defeat seems imminent. Were we better than Del on September 9, 1961? The scores say we were, our name was engraved on the trophy, and that's what will be remembered. In 1969, De La Salle would win their first National Championships by 1/20. It would not be without controversy.

The picture below shows the 1961 Corps in Ottawa. There are no rookies in this photo, only "old guys." we had won our fourth straight Nationals. I would remain with the Corps as a playing member for six more years. Those Nationals were a nail-biter; there would be more to come. Who would have known?

Several Toronto Optimists contributed information to this article: Bob Carell, Don Daber †, Colin Hedworth †, Dave Johns, Vern Reid, and Mike Thys. Also, the 1961 Green Capsule Comments.



Toronto Optimists (Ottawa, 1961)

Ontario Drum Corps Reunion

by Douglas MacKenzie



ON A BEAUTIFUL Saturday morning, September 23, Mike Thys and I ventured over to the wilds of Oakville for the 2023 Ontario Drum Corps Reunion. Firstly, Congratulations to the steering committee that put together a wonderful afternoon and evening. We were entertained by Second Sigs, DOCA, CADRE, and Optimists Alumni, who introduced every player and their past affiliations. Why? Thankfully, no one else did this. There was lots of memorabilia and pictures that were for the taking.

Many in attendance, about 250, wore corps jackets, buttons, etc., from antiquity. “The Toronto Optimists” were represented by none other than Barry Bell, Joe Gianna, and Gord O’Halloran from the original 1958 Corps, Dave Harris, Bill Kane, Doug Roberts, Thom Sacco, Rick Shearer, Mike Thys, and me representing the sixty’s and Larry Blandford, Rick Brown, Mark Decloux, Duncan Green, Brian Hogan, Jim Kane, Shaun McCullough, Peter Price, Steve Ryan, Rob Scott, Dan Martin Shimski, plus Barry and Bernadette Woods, representing seventy to seventy-five. If I left anyone out, chalk it up to brain cramping.

Notable celebs were Joel Alleyne, Del and Oakland Crusaders, and Bill Simmons, York Lions and Majestic Knights, two of the finest Drum Majors of their eras and truly well-respected gentlemen—also Jim Towie and John Jones, who Directed and managed Del and Precious Blood for many years. Seeing old friends from Leaside Lions, Toronto Optimists, and Ambassadors is always great.

The afternoon and evening were an absolute success, as they say in the Bay Bloor radio advertisement. “If you missed it, you missed it.”



Toronto Signals perform for guests at the reunion



Toronto Optimists (1973)

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