



# Toronto Optimists History-Newsletter

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

The Toronto Optimists History website celebrates:

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

Published by Bob Carell. Please direct inquiries to: [Toronto\\_Optimist@rogers.com](mailto:Toronto_Optimist@rogers.com)

A PDF version is available on the website: [www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca](http://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca)



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





### WEBSITE ADDITIONS

We regularly add new material to both the website and Photo Gallery. New photos are added to the gallery about twice each week.



*Grantham (1965)*

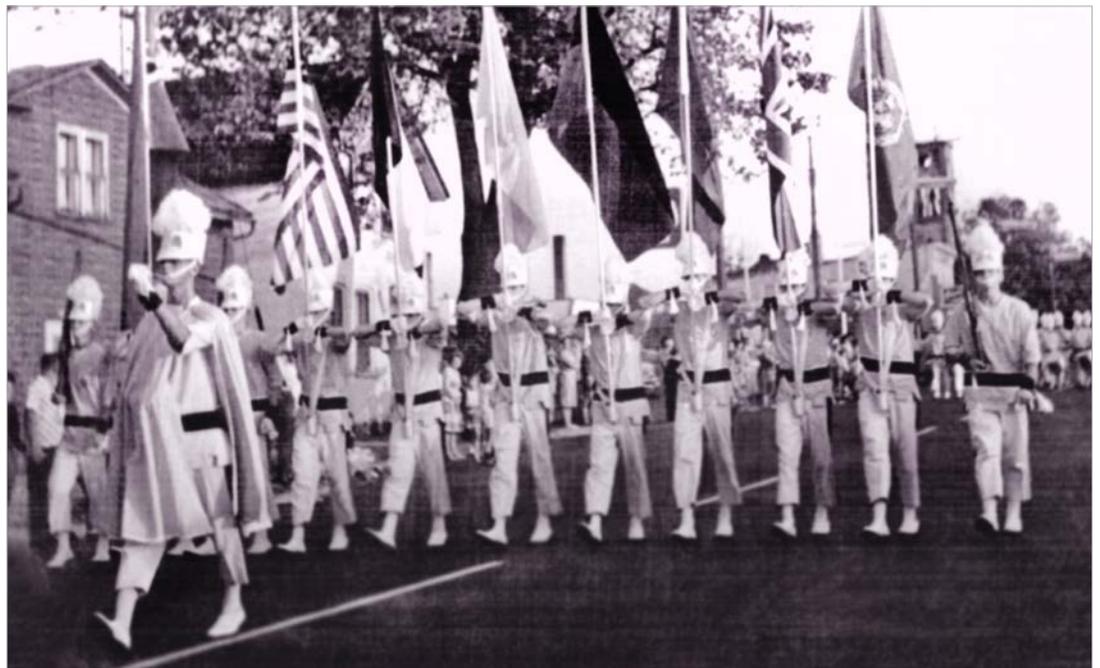
## WEBSITE UPDATE:

### What's **NEW** on TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

I am regularly adding photos from the competitive years to our Photo Gallery. I try to do this about twice each week; however, this schedule sometimes slips, depending on what's happening in my life. Our focus is photos of the Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Optimists; however, we also include photos of other corps, mostly from Ontario, that competed in the old days. In case you haven't noticed, I have recently updated the score file for the Toronto Optimists to include some additional scores from 1966. In addition, I have added a couple of old issues of Green Capsule Comments. This page contains two photos that I recently added to the Photo Gallery.

There's already a wealth of information on the main website, so it's difficult to know what to add. As I scan old issues of GCC, I will post them on the website. Of course, we will post "We Remember" pages whenever we learn that members have passed away.

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



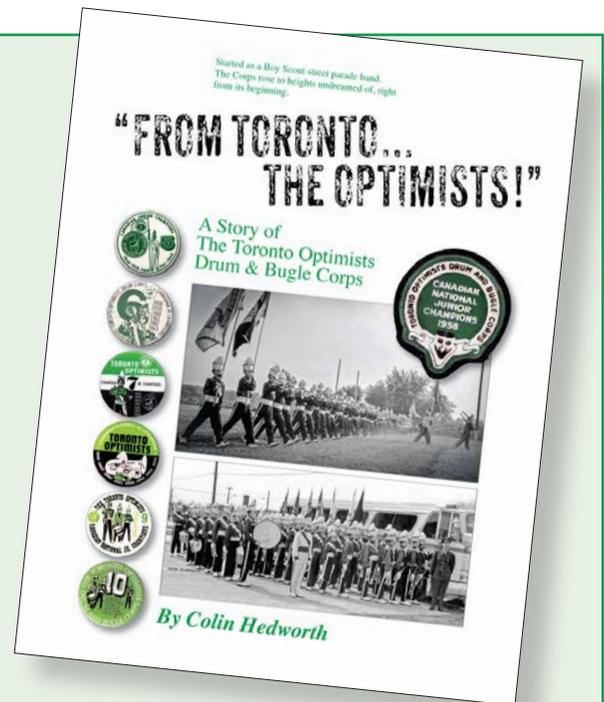
*Conqueror (Waterloo, 1962)*

### In our next newsletter: Chapters 23 and 24

The next issue of the Newsletter (January) will include Chapters 23 and 24 from Colin Hedworth's book "From Toronto... The Optimists!".

**T**HE focus of Chapter 23 is on the year 1973. Unfortunately, the year did not progress as hoped. Optimists started out seven points behind LaSalle Cadets but ahead of De La Salle; however, by mid-July, they had fallen to third place. In early August, there was a situation with corps members and drugs. Optimists' Corps Director and Music Director both resigned. The corps expelled six members while another dozen had to stand on the sidelines as the corps competed. The Optimists continued as best they could, but it was a difficult time for the corps. The scores at Nationals were very close. LaSalle Cadets tied De La Salle for first while Optimists ended up in third, only six-tenths behind the leaders. All things considered, it was a bit of a triumph.

**C**OLIN'S focus in Chapter 24 is on 1974. Winter rehearsals were awful (a dozen horns was a good turnout!). Instead of folding, the corps pressed on, moving girls from the guard to the horn line and pulling members off the street. Optimists withdrew from their first contest because they had not finished learning their show. They finally finished their closing number the day of their first contest! This year the corps had a good drum line, but that was not enough. Even though LaSalle Cadets had disbanded and De La Salle did not go to Nationals, but Optimists ended up in second place, behind the Seneca Princemen.



*Toronto Optimists on retreat (1974)*

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

# Don Daber

by Bob Carell

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



Don Daber (about 1967)

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

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

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

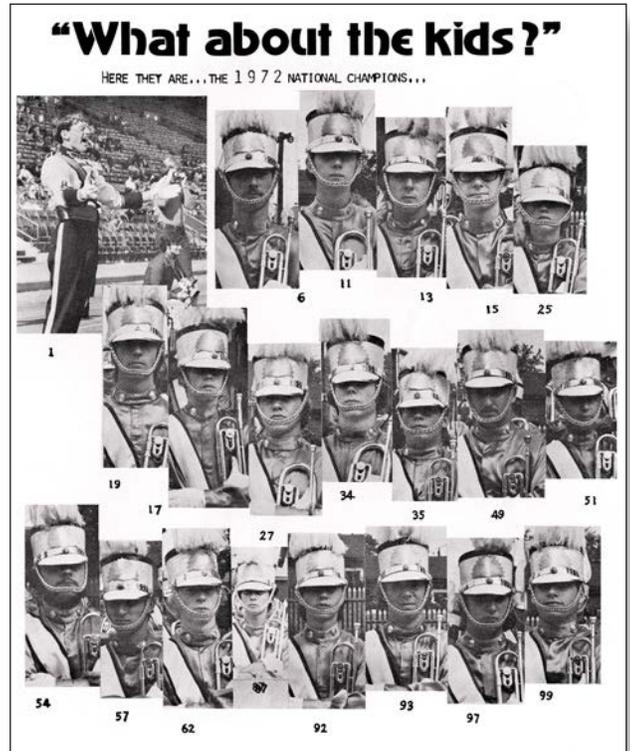
Don's contributions to the drum corps activity extended far beyond the Toronto Optimists, holding various positions with the Ontario, Canadian, New York-Canadian, and AJrC Drum Corps Associations. In his "spare" time, Don designed the album covers for many drum corps records produced by Sunhill, Fleetwood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

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



Don Daber (1963)

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



From GCC, September 1972

## Don’s early days

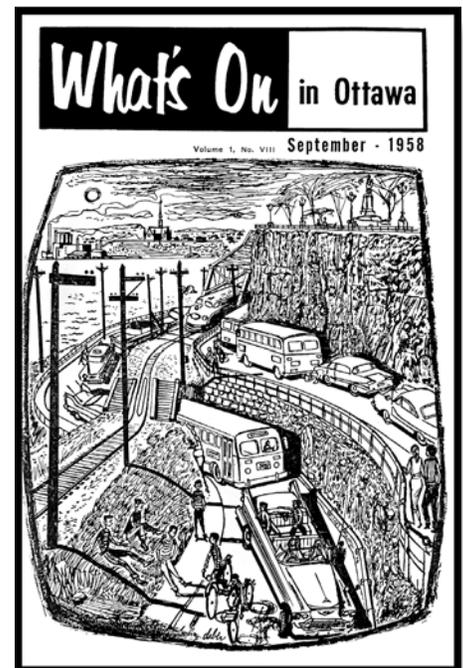
Don was born in Kirkland Lake, Ontario on May 2, 1929. He graduated from Kirkland Lake Collegiate and Vocational School in 1948. He was the only student in special art



A young Don Daber

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

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



Sample of Don’s early work (1960)

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

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

## Don discovers drum corps

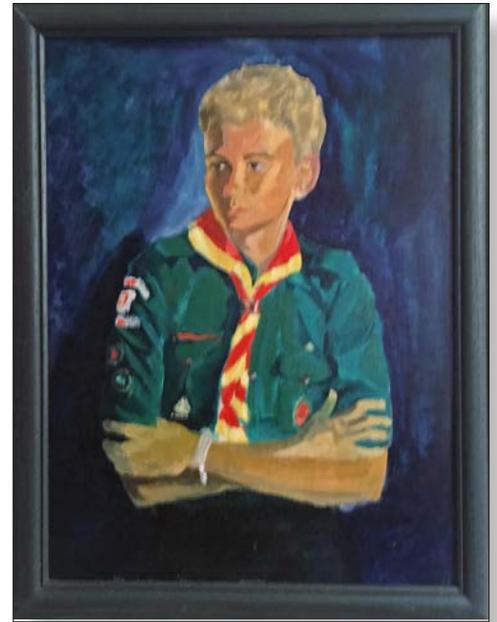
In 1960, Don discovered drum corps and his involvement with corps progressed at lightning speed. We know the chronology because Don recorded the dates in his journal.

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

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

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

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



*Painting of a Boy Scout by Don Daber*

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

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

FRIDAY and SATURDAY NIGHTS . . .

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

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

CANADA'S FAMOUS  
**SCOUT HOUSE BUGLE BAND**

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

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

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



*Toronto Optimists (Rochester, 1960)*

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

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

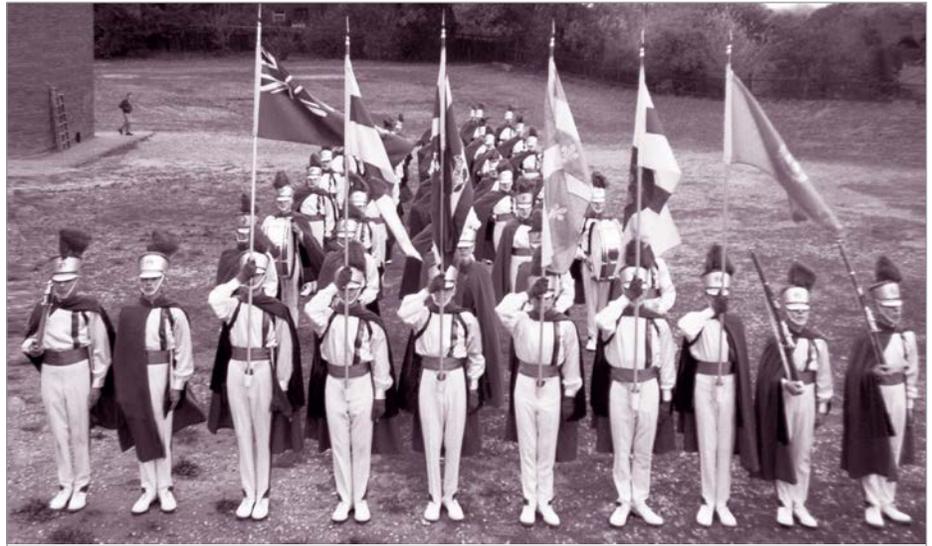


*The first part of Don's draft layout for Weekend Magazine (1960)*

## FEATURE ARTICLE: Don Daber (continued)

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

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

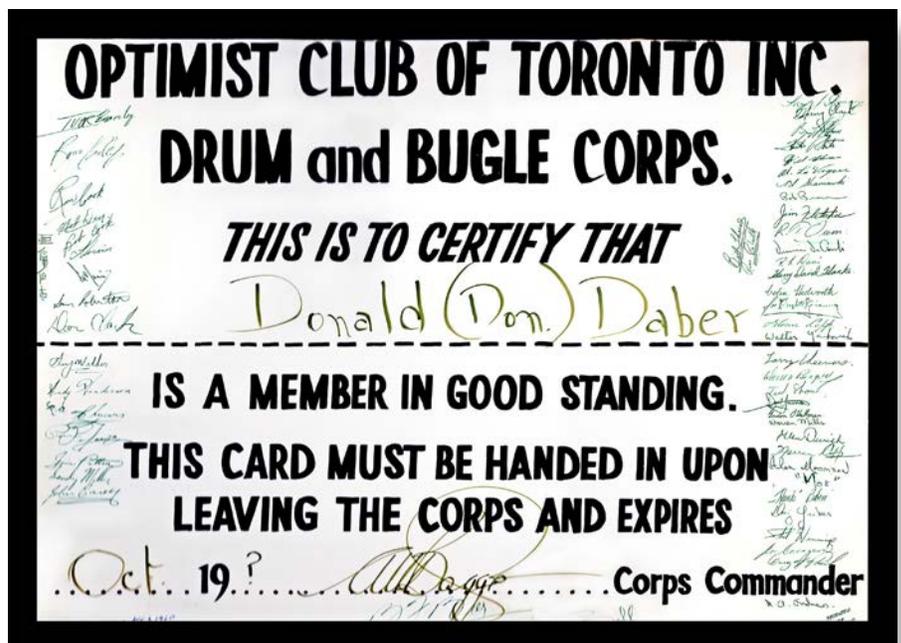


*De La Salle (First time in new uniforms, 1960)*

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

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

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



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

## Don's photographic work

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

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

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

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

## Don and The Optimists

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

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



*Don Daber (1966)*

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

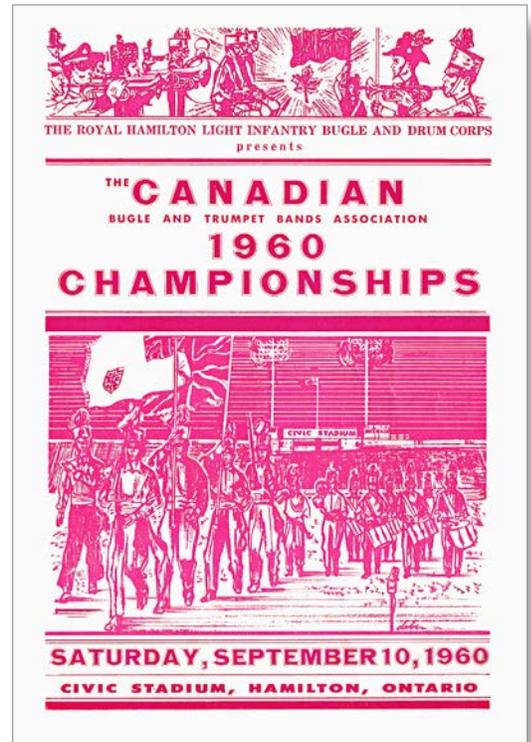
## Corps associations

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

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

## Record album covers

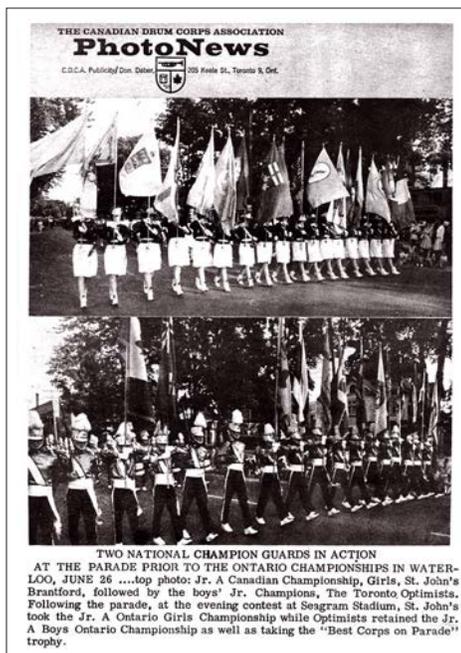
Within months of discovering drum corps, the CDCA had commissioned Don to design an album cover for the 1960 Canadian Nationals. In the following years, many record companies hired Don to design album covers for their drum corps records. Those companies included Sunhill, Fleetwood, Corpsdisc, Fantasy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



Don's first program cover (1960)

## Publications

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



PhotoNews (Drum Corps News, 1965)

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

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



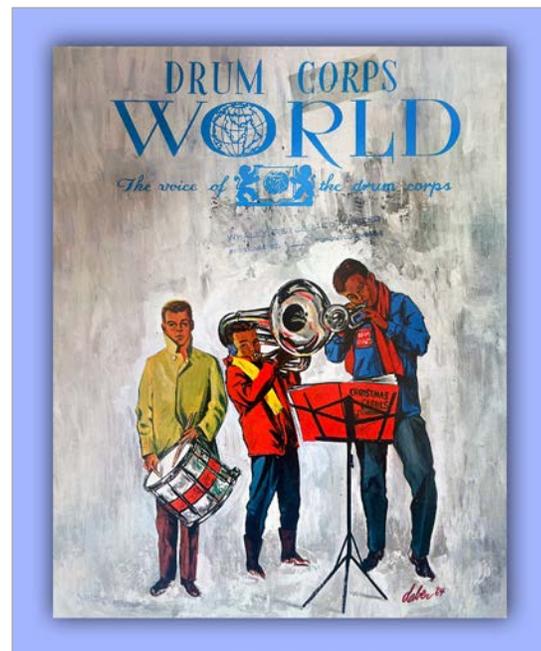
The Rookie (GCC, 1973)

## After the Optimists

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

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

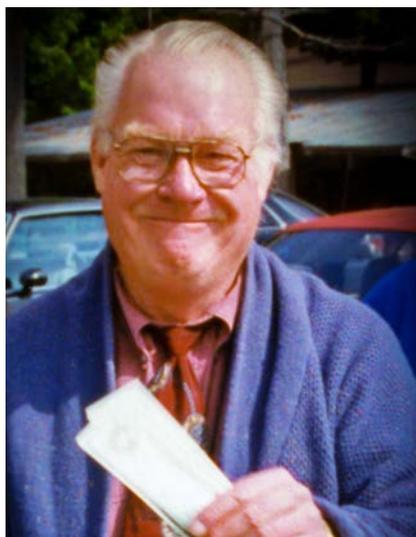
Don's biggest music interest was jazz from the 30's, 40's and 50's. He had a comprehensive collection of LP's, reel-to-reel tapes and cassette tapes. Interestingly, Don had very few drum corps recordings. In fact, Vern Reid, Don's archivist, has talked about these tapes. After discovering a real "gem"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



Don's cover for December, 1964 DCW

## On the website

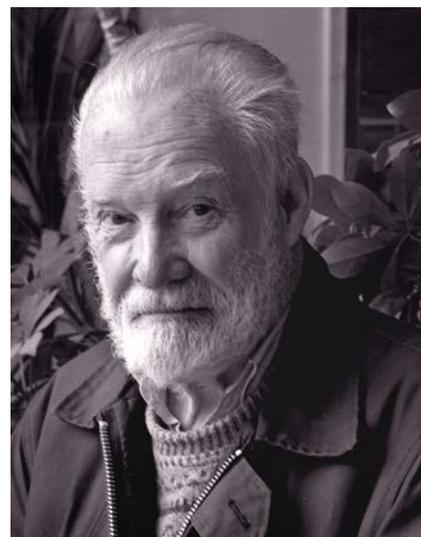
A section in the Toronto Optimists History Photo Gallery is dedicated to Don. To find it, go to the Home Page of the Photo Gallery and look for Don Daber under category. This section contains five albums showing photos of Don plus selections of Don's work



Don Daber (Reunion, 1998)

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

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

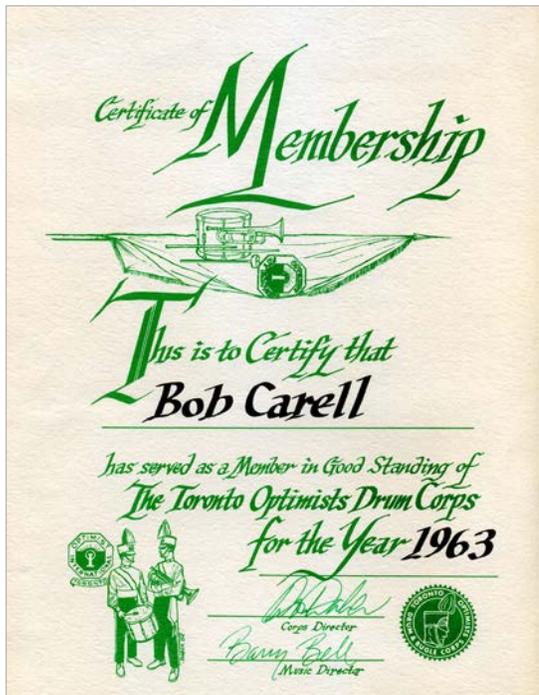


Don Daber (2006)

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

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

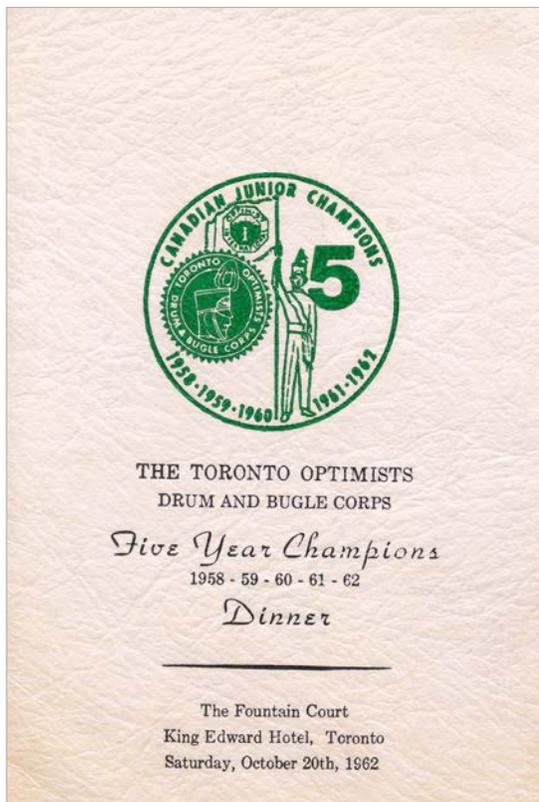
## Here are a few of Don's ideas for corps members



Membership Certificate



Membership Card



1963 Banquet Program



5-Year Ring



21 Club Beer Mug



3-Year Tie Tack



Cuff Links

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

**NOW AVAILABLE!!**  
TORONTO OPTIMISTS DRUM CORPS

**sweat shirts & T-shirts**



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

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

Selling Optimists-branded merchandise

**Seneca Optimists**

APPEARANCES (as of May 31, 1978):

**JUNE**  
10 Contest 1--Seagram Stadium, Waterloo.  
11 Contest 2--Brimstone Stadium, Scarborough.  
12 Contest 3--Ajax High School, Ajax.  
13 Oshawa.  
14 Contest 4--Rose Festival, Welland (Parade)  
15 Exhibition--Scarborough  
16 Exhibition--Algas Football, CNE Stadium, Toronto.  
**JULY**  
1 Exhibition--Queen's Park, Toronto, "Canada Day"  
2  
3  
4  
5 Contest 5--DCI East, Allentown, Penn.  
6 Contest 6--Garfield, N.J.  
7 Contest 7--"CVC Nationals" Boston, Mass.  
8 Contest 8--"Dabco Invitational" Montreal, Quebec.  
9 Contest 9--"Seneca 11 Championships" Toronto.  
10-16 Camp.  
17 Contest 10--"N.T. Open" North Tonawanda, N.Y.  
18 Exhibition--T. Carr Football, Hamilton.  
19 Exhibition--Galt, Pope Championships, Toronto.  
20 Contest 12--Glenora Stadium, Kitchener.  
21 Contest 13--North York Fairground, Toronto.  
**AUG.**  
1 Contest 14--American International Butler, Pa.  
2 Contest 15--"DCI North" Ypsilanti, Mich.  
3 Contest 16--"J.S. Open" Marion, Ohio.  
4 Contest 17--DCI--Lafayette, Indiana.  
5 Contest 18--DCI--Spartan City, Iowa.  
6 Contest 19--DCI--Omaha, Nebraska.  
7 Contest 20--DCI--Hot Springs, South Dakota.  
8 Contest 21--DCI--Scottsbluff, Nebraska.  
9 Contest 22--DCI--Boulder, Colorado.  
10 Contest 23--DCI Championships, Denver, Col.  
11 Exhibition--Missouri, Wis.  
12 Contest 24--Canadian Nationals, Toronto.

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

**SENeca 11**

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

**PARACHUTE POWER '78**

Seneca Optimists  
Dynamity!! Bugles

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

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

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

**REPERTOIRE:** "Seneca and The Larks"  
Thomas Hunt--"West Side Story"  
"Helter Skelter"  
Drum Solo--"Bare Dancer"  
"Seneca"

**TOTAL MARCHING MEMBERSHIP:** 121. Average age--16  
S1--Bum, 25. Percussion 20-SNCR 19-Rolls 2--D.M.

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

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

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

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

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:** Chairman--Wolfgang Petzschke, 40 South St. Toronto, ON, Ontario.  
**INSTRUCTORS:**  
BRASS--Peter Byrne, George Novello, Tim Watt, Bill Thomas, Brad Tingley, PEACOCKS--Al Silverstein, Al Kristensen, Pat Irving, Gary Hendry, Phil Porter. GUARDS--Stevy Pagan, Lynn Hammy, Lisa Austin, Kim Rozzani.  
M.M. Carlo Pappino, Mike Williams, Mike Arsenault and Garth Skypa.  
**EXECUTIVE:** Gord O'Halloran--Director.  
Assistant Director--Rob Brown / DCI Representative--Al Tamney / Registrar--Lore Blakeney, Tour & Transport--Jack Bitt / Booster Club President--Dan Corning.  
Finance--Joe Ganna / Booster Club Rep--Alex Martin.  
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Corps schedules (1963-1978)

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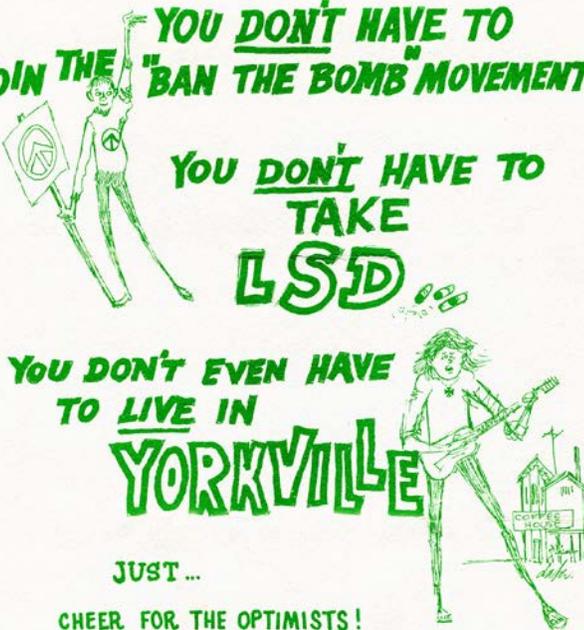
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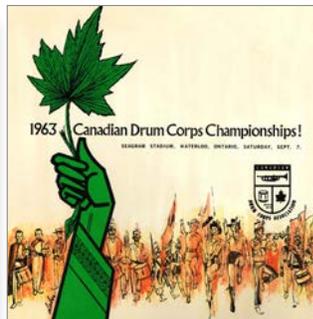
Don designed record album covers for a number of companies, including Sunhill, Fleetwood, Corpsdisc, Fantasy Sound and DCI.



Don's first Album



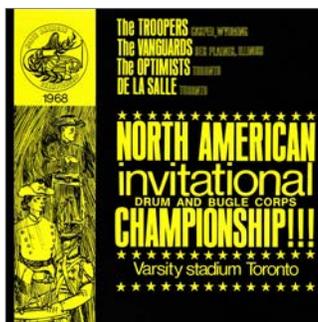
1967 Garfield



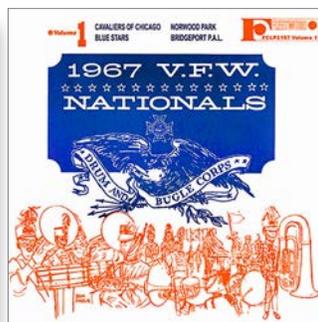
1963 Canadian Nationals



1965 Symphony in Brass



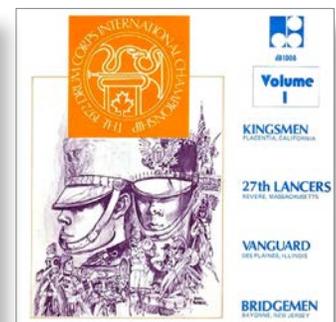
1968 North American



1967 VFW Nationals



1969 Shriners



1972 DCI Finals

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



Rick Cooper



Ray Skyvington



Ray Skyvington with his painting

Here are a few samples of Don's Optimists buttons



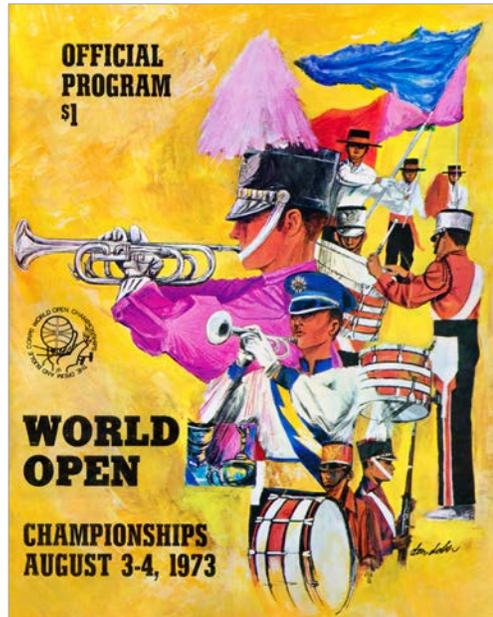
These are some of Don's crests for the Optimists



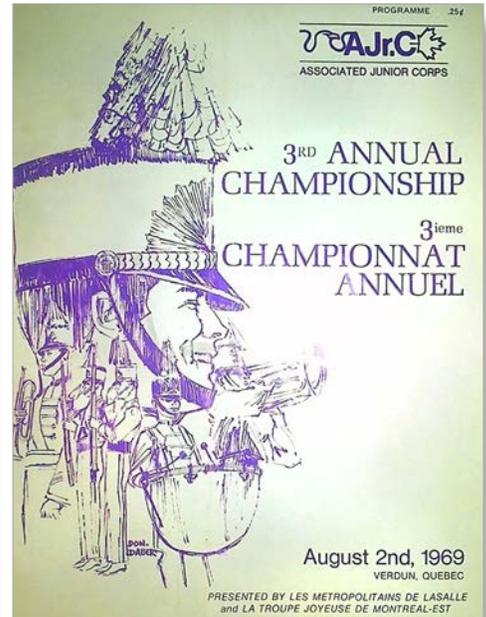
A few examples of Don's promotional materials



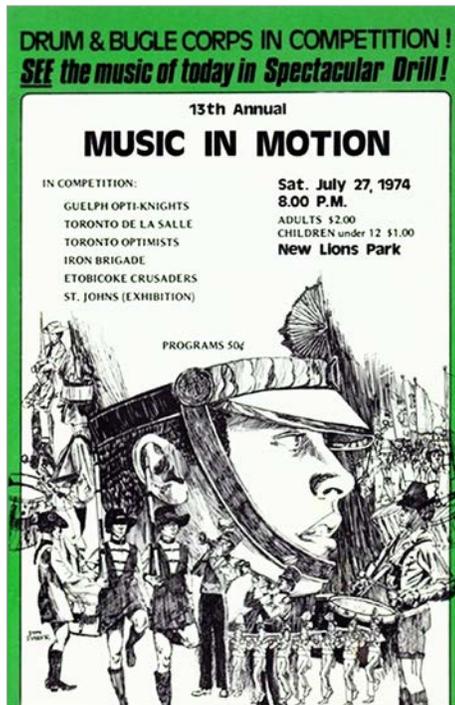
Advertisement for Whaley-Royce



1973 World Open



1969 AJRC Championship



1974 Music In Motion



1972 Canadian Nationals



1977 contest



1971 Shriners Contest

## Chapter 21: Strange, But True

The unusual title of this chapter does not refer to Ripley’s believe it or not, but to the coming year in Canadian Junior Drum Corps. The Optimists would be a part of this somewhat comic scenario. At the moment, though, things appeared to be quite normal.

The Optimist Cadets were now under the direction of Vern Johansson, now and forever, a stalwart Optimist. The Optimist Lancers, the newly created feeder Corps in Etobicoke, were now a going concern. They were under the direction of Dick Brown. With two feeder Corps in operation, it would appear that the Optimist Drum Corps would have a healthy excess of people in the near future; however, things would not turn out quite that way. The new sponsor, The Optimist Club of York-Toronto, would do things in a slightly different, but no less effective, manner than the previous sponsor. The Corps executive and instructional staff would see only few changes.



*Optimist Cadets (St Mike’s, 1971)*

Don Daber was still the corps director, beginning his ninth year in this position. Bugles were now under the direction of Paul Thompson, a graduate of the Optimists. He had taken over from Barry Bell in 1969. Was Barry finally fading out of the scene? Not exactly! He would always remain a supporter, fan, advisor, and club member filling a valuable but now accessory role. As with Lorne Ferrazzutti, his departure left a big hole to fill and whoever replaced him, would have a challenging job. The man to do this was Paul Thompson. Again, as with Lorne, Barry Bell cannot be dismissed so briefly. Barry was one of the founding members, the main bugle instructor until now and, without a doubt, the main driving force behind the Corps. He was mostly responsible



*Paul Thompson with the microphone (Wearing of the Green, March, 1971)*

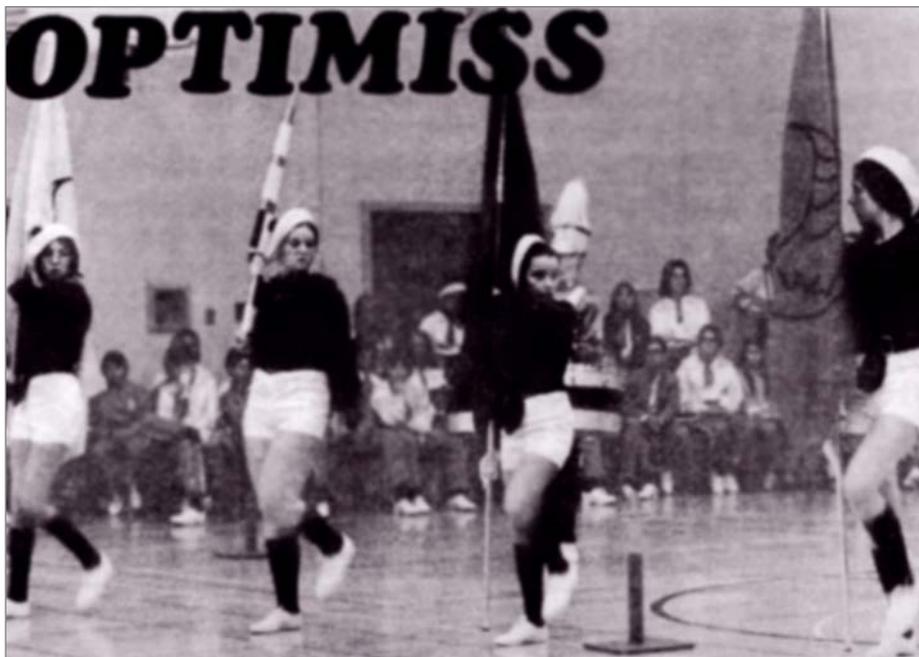
for changes that moved the Corps from its effective but dated origin into more up-to-date methods. This enabled the Corps to compete successfully at a higher level. Beyond this, his dedication was undeniable, never missing any rehearsal other than for personal, health, or economic reasons. His enthusiasm seldom flagged and, if it did, not for long. He was one of the original Drum Corps “nuts”, one of those who would always talk Corps before, during, and after rehearsals. In this respect, he had

lots of company. If his personal life suffered due to this, it was not generally known. In his younger days, he was almost “one of the boys” associating with, even sometimes living with, Corps members. Many people were given opportunities to instruct, some even to arrange, but he always remained in control. This indicated, rightly or wrongly, that, more than anyone, this was his Corps. For most people, through all the years, it was “rightly”. Those who broke away, independently, with some results that we have discussed, should have cause to look back once in a while, and remember where they got their start. Again, as with Lorne and others, I could go on indefinitely, but we must carry on. This tale is about the whole Corps, not one individual. No one is indispensable but some are more indispensable than others are. He easily fits that category.

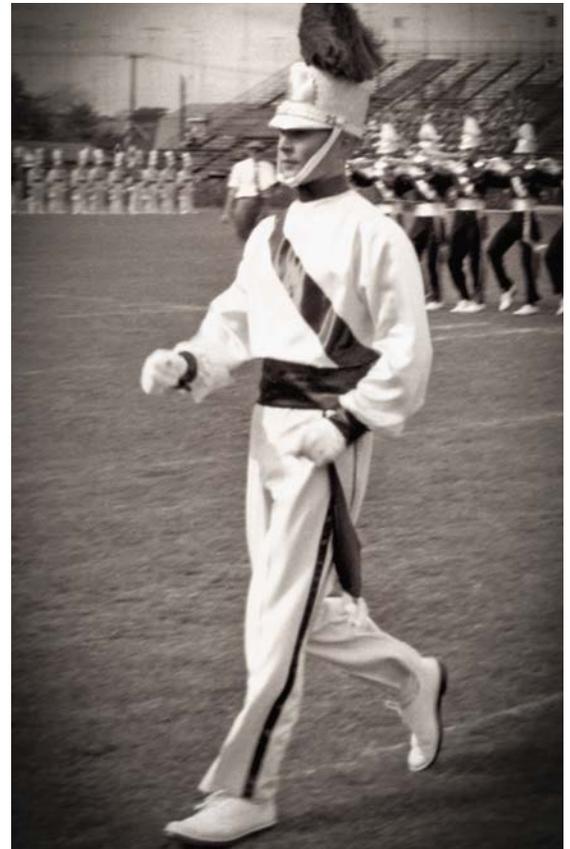
Drums, this year, were still under the direction of Ron Kaiser. He also taught other corps, notably the Optimist Midlanders of London, Ontario, no relation to the Toronto Optimists. Ron is still remembered by them to this day, no doubt because of his effectiveness and exuberant methods.

Drill was still handled by the old pro, Jack Roberts and the Business Manager was still Cliff Billington. The Drum Major was, again, Mike Arsenault, and the Guard Captain, Greg Oxenham.

For the first time in history, girls were to be allowed into the Optimist organization. They would form a colour guard/drill team for competition purposes, preparing to enter circuit competition. More than this, if not enough



*The Optimiss Girls' Guard*



*Barry Bell (Nationals, Hamilton, 1960)*

boys could be found for the Corps' guard, they would become part of the secondary colour section of the Junior Corps.

This development can be looked at in two ways. Either it was the Optimists' way of keeping abreast of the times, this being the age of Women's Liberation, or it was simply the lack of enough boys being interested in order to fill the necessary need. One is tempted to suspect the latter but, whatever the reason, it would turn out to be nothing but beneficial.

## Canadian Drum Corps Association

The Canadian Drum Corps Association (C.D.C.A ) this year had a meeting in Lindsay, Ontario. This was a different meeting from usual. Held on January 29th and 30th it was considered one of the worst ever. The seminars were dull and many member Corps were dissatisfied with the whole set-up.

What had happened to bring this about is unknown. In the past, people had come from all over to attend Canadian conventions, including the United States. Partying aside, they were very good. They would be again, in the future, but right now something was wrong.

As a result of the general dissatisfaction with the current C.D.C.A., four Junior Corps pulled out of its ranks. They were not happy with the way the association was being conducted, concluding that it was not doing enough for its member Corps. As far as is known, this was the first time such drastic action had taken place.

The four Corps that left the C.D.C.A. were The Toronto Optimists, De La Salle, Midlanders, and Les Compagnons D’Embrun. These were long time members whose absence was to help cause a strange year in Canadian Drum Corps. In an attempt to cure the problem, if it could be found, Al Tierney was elected as commissioner, for one month, to investigate and, if possible, remove the reasons for this upheaval.

It was, however, too late this year for any good to be done. The four Corps were out and events would proceed without them. Officially, that is.

The first evidence of this strange scene appeared at the now familiar Individuals Contest. There were two sets of competitors, producing two sets of results. One set was under the auspices of the C.D.C.A., the other was unofficial, as were the results. The Canadian Junior Drum Corps movement was split, not down the middle, but indisputably divided.

At the individual and small group contest, those not now in the C.D.C.A. were designated “open class”. The “open class” snare drum category was won by Larry Blandford of the Optimists. Dana Burrage on solo tenor and John Baye on solo rudimental base also won their events, with the Tim Tom drum duet placing second. All of these were Optimists.



*Promo for the 1971 Shriners' Contest  
L-R: Ric Brown, Jim McKeown, John O'Leary, Steve McNellen,  
Don White & Jerry Maguire*

Those who took part under the auspices of the C.D.C.A. received much higher scores than those in the “open class”, indicating two standards of judging. Not a healthy situation at all.

There were to be more unusual things due to this unusual situation. One of them took place on April 24th–25th. The three Ontario Corps, De La Salle, Optimists, and the Midlanders held a combined seminar/concert



*Optimists Colour Guard in competition (St Mike's, 1971)*

weekend. It was sponsored by a new record company called “Corpdisc”. Three knowledgeable instructors were hired whose names remain unknown as of this date, to conduct the seminars. After this, the three Corps held a concert at De La Salle College. Such things would help to cement the rift that had appeared, and help pave the way for later events. Coincident to this, it was also pushing the Optimists and De La Salle into co-operating more closely than would surely be normal. As the old saying says, “Politics makes strange bedfellows”.

One week prior to this, Toronto’s only Colour Guard Contest took place. At this contest the Optimist guard placed second, behind the New York Squires. The girls, all new, had done well.

The Corps itself had not been idle. They still were intent on regaining the title, as they always would be. A new off the line number, “Victory at Sea”, was being used. St. Vincent’s had used this number in 1958, at Batavia. Most of today’s Corps had probably never heard of St. Vincent’s. The brass arrangement was by Truman Crawford, with Jerry Shelmar of Boston doing the percussion. Most winter activity was confined to parade work at Winter Carnivals.

A new Junior “C” circuit was formed this year. It consisted of seven Corps and included the Optimist Lancers, Optimist Cadets, and the Sparkies. The Sparkies were the feeder Corps of the Scarborough Firefighters Junior “A” Corps. The other Corps in this new circuit were the Kitchener Dutch Boys, Hanover Girls, the Cardinals, and the Durham Girls. Some of these Corps had bright futures ahead. They would have regular contests in their own class, which was a “standstill” category. The Optimists Cadets, now four years old, would now be able to compete at their own level at more than just the Provincial and National competitions.

If there was dissatisfaction with the C.D.C.A., its sponsoring and fostering of such initiatives must surely note as a plus in its favour.



*Toronto Optimists Guard in competition (St Mikes, 1971)*

## The 1971 season

### A loss to Scarborough Firefighters

Not the first contest of the year but a most revealing one, took place on June 12th, in Ottawa. The Scarborough Firefighters, in their Junior “A” debut, defeated the Toronto Optimists. This was not the upset it would have once been but still a good start for a new Corps. The Optimists, past eleven year champions, were not used to losing to new Corps, especially when still attempting to improve, even renew, their status. This lesson would be acted upon. De La Salle, who were really to come into their own this year, won the affair. They posted a five point margin over La Salle Cadets. Scarborough was third and the Optimists fourth. Five Corps took part so at least they were not last, if that were any consolation.

From here on the Canadian Drum Corps season was underway. It would get hot and heavy throughout the summer. More surprises lay ahead and, in Canada, things continued with the split in C.D.C.A. unhealed.

Some established contests would remain unaffected by this situation, usually those that were international in composition. Such affairs mostly used dual judges associations, disputes in one of them being papered over for the duration. But they are, of course, still there.



*Scarborough Firefighters (CNE, Toronto, 1971)*

### Shriners International

The first of these was the Shriners International, in its seventh performance in Toronto. Now an all junior affair, it featured some of the best from the United States and Canada. Based on the results of the last contest, the Scarborough Corps should have been a participant, however, these things are booked long ahead of time and the Optimists were in it.

This was the biggest contest of the year, so far, for the Optimists and it was a chance to re-polish their image. It would also be a good indication of what possibility, if any, existed for this Corps to regain the Canadian title.



*Toronto Optimists (Shriners' Contest, 1971)*

## “From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 21. (continued)

In the past, the Optimists often had done well at this show, even though such shows had been dominated by American Corps.

In 1966, they had won the junior division of what was then a senior/junior combined contest. They were third in 1967 and fourth in 1968. A slow decline was more apparent in 1969 when they were second last. Now, what would happen?

Here is what did take place. They placed a lowly second last again, in a mixed field of Canadian and American Corps that included both De La Salle and La Salle Cadets. They were the last place Canadian Corps. It appeared that current trends would continue, unless the rebuilding effort began to bear fruit. In the past this would have been a disaster, but not so much now. Maybe, even, par for the course. But the season was young. There was still time.



*Paul Thompson conducting concert (1971)*

As has occurred before, information now thins out somewhat. It is there, somewhere, but time and resources lacking, no apologies are offered.

The Optimists were off to Garfield on July 10th – 11th. Despite their lesser place in the scheme of things, they were still invited to good contests. Right after this, on July 13th, came the 5th North American Invitational, a show on a par with the Shriners show. It featured such luminaries as the Casper Troopers, Chicago Cavaliers, and the Santa Clara Vanguard. The Optimists did not pull off any surprises. All that we know is that De La Salle placed fifth.

Now about halfway through the season, the Optimists had not scored any notable successes, nor shown any sign that such lay in the near future.

As the Optimists left on July 14th for Michigan, De La Salle took off for the Eastern seaboard, and three big contests. Their constant exposure to top-flight competition would bear dividends. A contest on July 24th demonstrated this. Called “Scarborough Fair”, De La Salle cruised to an easy victory; however, an interesting highlight was reported that the Optimists had showed improvement.



*Toronto Optimists (in front of Eaton's College store, 1971)*

## **Alhambra Invitational**

On August 2nd the same factors appeared, at the Alhambra Invitational Parade and Contest. Another top-notch line-up with eleven Corps, it was won by the 27th Lancers. A strong second was De La Salle. They were now doing what had only been rarely done before, beating top American Corps, in this case, the Boston Crusaders. On a positive note, from our perspective, the Optimists were considered the surprise Corps of the evening. The surprise was that after a terrible start to the season, they were finally starting to improve, showing potential.



*Toronto Optimists (CNE, 1971)*

De La Salle cemented their growing reputation by defeating the Chicago Cavaliers, on their own turf. This definitely established them in the top ranks of North American Drum Corps. It probably proved them to be the best Junior Corps to ever come out of Canada thus far. Although the Optimists had scored some notable successes during their long reign, they were now being surpassed.

## **CNE Invitational**

The next big contest, the Canadian National Invitational Championship Contest, was, again, won by De La Salle. For the Optimists, though, this was a landmark, as they were only 4.2 behind Del. A big change compared to the fourteen-point spread of earlier times. It was at this show that the new, improved Optimists recorded their first win over the La Salle Cadets. They had not beaten them for quite a while. It was not that La Salle was down. It was because the Optimists were coming up.

Now, things began to get confusing, as a result of the still not repaired split in the Canadian Drum Corps Association.

An organization by the name of the Canadian Open National Commission sponsored the Canadian “Open” Junior “A” Championship. This was the outfit set-up to run a contest for those Corps who had left the C.D.C.A.



*Toronto Optimists (1971)*

Although it was called a Junior “A” Championship, the real title would be the one awarded by the C.D.C.A. since they were still the ruling body. No information being available for this affair, we move on to ever more murky situations.

## **Ontario Provincial Championship**

The Ontario Provincial Championship was held on August 21st, two weeks after the “Canadian Open Junior “A” Championships, a reversal of decades old form. This was followed one week later by the “Showcase of Champions”, featuring nine Canadian and one American Corps. Held at the CNE Stadium, it was a good show with all the Corps at, or near, their peak form. It was a pageant, not a contest, so no titles or championships were awarded.

## **Canadian National Invitational**

The next day, August 29th, was held what was considered by many to be the closest thing this year to a true Canadian Junior “A” Championship. The Canadian National Invitational saw six Canadian Juniors vie for victory. These were De La Salle, Optimists, Scarborough Firefighters, Les Compagnons, Midlanders, and La Salle Cadets.

Four of these units were, of course, the four that had resigned from the C.D.C.A. earlier this year. Because of this, they could not participate in the C.D.C.A. Championship, which always had been, and would be, the true Canadian title. So, although this would be thought by many to be the championship, it could not, and would not, be one.

Not surprisingly, De La Salle, who were virtually unbeatable in Canada or anywhere, won it this year.



*Toronto Optimists (1971)*

An encouraging performance, after a dismal beginning to the year, saw the Optimists in second place, only four points behind mighty Del. Three points back, in third, was La Salle Cadets, with the plucky Scarborough Corps only six behind the Optimists.

## **Canadian Championship**

Two weeks later came the “true” Canadian Championship. “True” as in “official”. The winner of this would go in the books as the Canadian Junior Champions for 1971. It was predicted to be a flop but was not, even though only 7,000 fans attended.



*Toronto Optimists (CNE, 1971)*

Held in Ottawa, Ontario, the hometown of La Salle Cadets, the local crowd finally got to see their heroes become Canadian Junior “A” Champions for the first time. In the past, they had come so close, more than once.

La Salle Cadets were now the official C.D.C.A. National Junior “A” Champions for the year 1971. They did it by defeating the Scarborough Firefighters by eleven points. De La Salle was the defending champion, but were not in attendance to defend it. If they had earlier hoped to establish a dynasty, as had the Optimists, they would have to begin again.



*Toronto Optimists (CNE, 1971)*

For the Optimists, also not in attendance, it was an opportunity missed to regain the now distant title, no matter how fragile the chance of it occurring.

This is the way things were during that confusing year, and to continue in this manner would be to the detriment of all. Something had to give.

This, to all intents and purposes, was the end of the Canadian Drum Corps season. It had seen the Optimists hit their lowest point ever. It had also seen them pull themselves up to within four points of the De La Salle powerhouse during the course of the year. If ambitions and hopes remained unfulfilled, at least the progress made was encouraging. The Corps spirit that had always existed was still there. Without that, they would not have done what they had. It was a reason for taking an optimistic outlook when looking ahead to 1972.

There is always next year.



Don's draft for a 1971 Toronto Optimists record album from Corpsdisc



Toronto Santa Claus Parade (1971)

## A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of **1971** progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Ajax, ON (June 12)	Shriners (June 17)	Garfield (July 10)	Long Island (July 11)	North American (July 13)	Alhambra (Aug 2)	National Junior Invitational (Aug 29)
Toronto Optimists	61.80	61.90	55.35	64.90	63.30	68.20	78.90
De La Salle	74.60	74.70			78.25	75.25	83.10
LaSalle Cadets	69.65	67.10					78.85
Scarboro Firefighters	63.35				63.25		72.55
Blessed Sacrament			72.10	73.9			
Blue Stars		74.50			74.95		
Boston Crusaders			77.85	80.50		74.45	
Garfield			78.55	81.05			
St Joe's Batavia			70.90	72.85		72.50	

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

## Chapter 22: What Will Be, Will Be

One of the final impressions from the end of last year was given by a report from the Eaton’s Santa Claus parade. The Optimists, it said, with thirty horns, looked very impressive. When measured against the fact that both of the other Toronto Corps, De La Salle and Scarborough, were also in it, this is no mean compliment. It was another sign of a renewed Optimist Corps. Generally recognized was the fact that the Optimists were again going strong, in excellent shape for the coming season. After three years of defeat; they had survived and made a recovery.



*Toronto Optimists (Eaton’s Santa Claus Parade, 1971)*

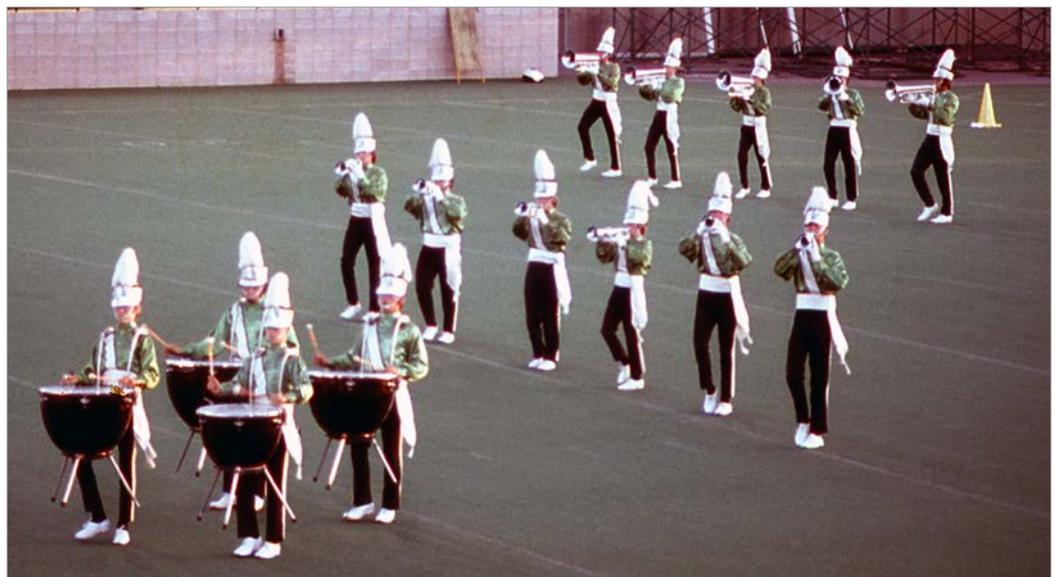
### News

The Corps would be keeping part of their 1971 field performance. “Patton” and the concert, both with improvements, would be retained. “Superstar”, from The Carpenters, would replace the melodious “San Francisco” as the closing number.

Current predictions were that Optimists would be a powerhouse this year, and that De La Salle was having problems. As we have seen before, rumours and predictions are not worth much until confirmed or otherwise.

Counter to this, De La Salle was still heavily favoured though, having been sort of, three times, National Champions. Individual Corps aside, other things were happening in various departments of the Drum Corps World.

The Shriners contest, a big attraction, was changing its location from Toronto to Hamilton, Ontario. Since its inception, it had been held in Toronto. CNE Stadium, where it had been held, was to be equipped with new drainage and artificial turf. This was for the Toronto Argonauts football team, whose stadium it was. The alterations would not be complete by the contest date, June 17th. Choosing to stick with the set date, the



*Toronto Optimists (Shriners’ Contest, Hamilton, 1972)*

contest committee had to change the location. Hamilton Civic Stadium, now Ivor Wynne Stadium, became the new location. It turned out that this hurt neither the contest nor the crowd.

Remaining a top draw for both Corps and crowd, there were already seven good Corps entered, including the Optimists. Gord Robinson, of the Optimists and Shrine, would be the contest co-ordinator. Who else but Don Daber would be in charge of publicity and public relations.

Another positive event in Canada was the reforming of La Salle Cadets on January 9, 1972. A dedicated group of twenty-nine men and women took over this fine corps, setting them once more on the road to competition. They were the defending C.D.C.A. champions and, if they could make it back, it would make the season more interesting.

Dec. 19, 1971.

Dear Editors:

I regret to inform you that LaSalle Cadets of Ottawa, in existence since 1963, has officially folded. Surely members of other corps will be interested to hear of this sad news.

The members in the corps however, are not remaining inactive. They are joining the corps in the immediate area, mainly The "Compagnons" from Embrun and the "Ambassadors" from Gatineau-Buckingham. Perhaps, next September will be the beginning of a new year for LaSalle.

Wishing the corps in the Toronto area the best of luck for '72, I remain,

Yours truly,

Jean Leblanc.

253 Beechwood, Ottawa, Ont.

*Letter saying that LaSalle Cadets had folded (from GCC, December, 1971)*

In Scarborough, on January 30th, twenty-nine Corps had a meeting. The object was to gain acceptance by the C.D.C.A. of the Drum Corps Canada presentation. Drum Corps Canada was represented by one Bob Christie.

The next item of news was of significance mostly to the Optimists. The indestructible, indefatigable, overworked Don Daber stepped down as Director of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. He had filled this position for nine years and seen the Corps through some of its best, and worst, years. His dedication had never wavered, and it is safe to say that without his presence there might well not be an Optimists Corps in 1972. He would stay on with the Corps, handling publicity and personnel. Mr. Bob Christie would fill his place as director. This man had been the Assistant Director to Mr. Daber, as well as a member of the equipment department. Before this, he was a marching member.

The Corps had a new drill man on basics. This guy had really been around. John McAlpine was an ex-Optimist, ex-Boston Crusader and, hold it, ex-De La Salle man. This reversed an earlier trend. If nothing else, he certainly had experience and was rumoured to be working on a new style of drill.

The Optimists Colour Guard was still getting its feet wet, placing 19th in a January 29th contest. Twenty points out of first.

Scarborough Firefighters, now the Scarborough Princemen, having been taken over by the borough from the fire department, would sponsor this year's Ontario Individuals. They



*Seneca Princemen (CNE, 1972)*

had done this for the last few years and usually ran a good show.

On the same lines, La Salle Cadets were to sponsor the first Canadian Open National Guard and Individual Championships. To be held in Ontario, in March, it was for Canadian members only. This Corps, having briefly folded, had picked up where they had left off, barely missing a beat in the process.



*LaSalle Cadets (1972)*

South of the border, the Corps that was once the idol of the Optimists, Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights, were still going strong. They had encountered some problems but seemed to be able to handle them. They had been around a long time and were one of the most famous and consistently good Corps.

In a magazine, *Drum Corps News*, it was reported that Agatha Christie, the famed mystery writer, had alternately panned, raved about, *Green Capsule Comments*. Since it had never reported any murders, this report must have been of dubious origin.

Don Daber began a cartoon series in *Drum Corps World*. Although now only responsible for Corps publicity, he still did this for the C.D.C.A.

At the Ontario Individuals Contest, Sam Kays, of the Midlanders, won the solo snare award with a score of 89. This was the high mark of the day and a harbinger of future prominence.

An article in *Drum Corps News*, by one Myron Melnyk, stated that De La Salle had enjoyed their greatest year ever in 1971. This was true, having been ranked seventh in the world, higher than any Canadian Corps before. Harry Clark was still the drum instructor, but Terry McKolskey was no longer with them, on bugles. What was not mentioned in the article was that the Optimists had pulled themselves up fairly close to Del that year. This fact, though loaded with promise, was probably not considered noteworthy, and ignored.

Canadian Corps, registered to enter the first DCI Championship this year, were the Optimists, De La Salle, and Scarborough Princemen. This competition was not to be limited to the founding Corps.

As far as the Optimists were concerned, they were planning to field a moderate size Corps, but with a percussion section that was large for this era. Eight snares, four



*Cartoon by Don Daber*

double tenor, four tympani, backed up by a bass drum section and three or four cymbalists. This percussion ensemble would complement the most difficult music program in the history of the Corps. Moves such as these demonstrated that the Corps was still committed to moving onward and upward, aiming, yet again, to gain the coveted National title.

With De La Salle’s previous year, La Salle Cadets resurgence, and the Optimists evident promise, this year showed signs of being reminiscent of just a few years ago – tension packed and exciting.



*Toronto Optimists’ drums (Big 10, Hamilton, 1972)*

At a C.D.C.A. meeting on March 4, at the prestigious Valhalla Inn, Don Daber was named the new vice-president. If he quit one job, he took up another one, or two. He was also appointed contest co-ordinator for this year’s Nationals. At this meeting, although the details are not clear, the four Corps that had left the C.D.C.A. were reinstated. This must have meant that they were happy with the C.D.C.A. It also meant that all Canadian contests this year, including all those with titles, would again be “official”.

Dave Shaw, a well-known figure, had compiled a master schedule. It showed that the Optimists had eleven contests this year, three of which were in the United States. Compared to this, De La Salle was entered in sixteen, eight of them south of the border. This was an example of how the best Corps got the most attention. During the late fifties and the sixties, it was the Optimists who were the busiest. Also, during those fondly recalled days, Bernie Beer had been on the Optimist’s staff. Now, after an absence, he was back with De La Salle. The end of March saw the Optimists guard defeat two guards in Rochester, NY. This only kept them from last place, which they would see again, but it was a beginning. At the end of the season for guard contests, the “Optimiss”, as they were known, were improving.

The Canadian National Championship in this category was held in Guelph, Ontario, April 22, 1972. After practising all morning in Toronto, where the show was broken down into details to improve its execution, off they went. Appearing thirteenth, they placed ninth, for a new guard, this was not bad. Above them in sixth was the Scarborough Princemen, and in first, the Canadian Ambassadors of St. Catharines.



*1972 Button and the photo of Rudy Wey on which it is based*

The field show of the Optimists, this year, was changed considerably from the previous year. It would, however, consist mostly of popular, known melodies, often in contrast to modern practice. The use of well played but obscure music tends to leave ordinary fans in the dark as to what is being played.

The Optimist program was aired at a Scarborough Princemen Concert on April 8th. In a prelude to the approaching season, a powerful presentation was given. Optimist morale was very high this year, and they were eager for the competition season to begin. They felt that they were capable of challenging the best. In order to test these high hopes, the C.Y.O., POW WOW, and U.S. Open, were just some of their future dates. They would also be appearing at the Optimist International Convention in Montreal, a tribute to their sponsor. Now, in an unusual happening, there was a new Corps director for the Optimists. George Wright, a former marching member, replaced the incumbent Bob Christie. The reasons are obscure.



*Dave Burgess of the Lancers receives trophy (1972)*

The new feeder Corps, the Lancers, elected themselves a Corps Council. This was a move in the direction of independence and was to become significant. A planned trip to the Calgary Stampede was in the works for them.

## **Girls in the Colour Guard**

Something happened in April that was not entirely unexpected. Due to a lack of members in the Optimists Corps Colour Guard, girls would now be allowed into these positions. Why not enough boys were available is not known; however, as a result of this situation, the Optimists discarded an age-old custom, the use of an all-male guard. But this was, really, nothing new. Girls' guards, for boys' Corps, went back as far as anyone could recall. Also, by doing this, the Optimists were only following a current trend. Their move in this direction left only three major Junior Corps in North America that were all male. These were De La Salle, Madison Scouts, and the Chicago Cavaliers. This would also diminish in the future.



*Optimists Silks (1972)*

There were some boys in the Optimist Guard but not enough. More secondary flags for the field show were needed. On April 11th, eight girls joined up, with more following in short order. All this went on with the presence of Hugh Mahon, of Garfield, as an advisor.

The promising Etobicoke Corps, the Crusaders, held an indoor concert on May 13th. It included almost all local Corps. The Optimists, in an unusual display, showed a flashing red light, with the number “12” on it. This

could be interpreted as a show of confidence as regards their ambitions this year. It was unusual, because such displays of intent were not often promoted. It did, though, signal their intentions and confidence.

In order to help realize these aspirations, the Corps went to camp for the long weekend of May 19th – 22nd. A week prior to this the Corps, or the more devoted members, had participated in a ten mile walkathon to raise funds. This was a young, spirited bunch, which they would have to be to realize their goals.

There were still some events to fulfill before the true season got underway. A parade at Ontario place saw a very poor performance in the morning. After a strenuous practice the afternoon show was much improved. The next day, and the day after, saw no poor showing.

Indeed, on the third day, the Corps was seen as superb, both marching and music. The potential was evident.

A parade in Hamilton on May 27th saw the Optimists and the Optimist Cadets in attendance. The Cadets, although the first feeder Corps created since the demise of the “Peanut Squad”, were the most inexperienced at this. As a result, the Optimist Lancers became the number two concern of the York-Optimist Club. The Lancers would perform the pre-show exhibition at the Shriners Contest, a job previously handled by the Cadets.

Prior to this, and the season, the third annual T.A.S. night was held. Rookies were officially welcomed and old guys renewed their “Tradition, Allegiance, and Spirit”. Corpsman of the year, elected by the Corps, for 1971 was Greg Oxenham. Special speeches made this night culminated in the one that announced George Wright as the new Corps Director. He was untried in this position, but would be seen to grow into it.

Now that the Corps was finally on a solid footing, with show, executive, instructors and schedule all in place, they could face the coming season. The Optimists were third in the local pecking order, behind De La Salle and the La Salle Cadets. Due to this, they did not have the best schedule, not even a very demanding schedule. This was because they were not champions. De La Salle was not a champion either. The Canadian powerhouse, the La Salle Cadets, were the titleholders.



*Toronto Optimists (Ontario Place, 1972)*



*LaSalle Cadets (Big 10, Hamilton, 1972)*

## 1972 Contest Season

Whether the Corps stayed in this position remained to be seen, and the results of the first contests were to give mixed indications.

### Scarborough

Opening on June 3rd, at the Preview of Champions in Scarborough, Ontario (not Jersey City, NJ), they looked very good. In a field of eight Canadian Juniors, the Optimists placed second to De La Salle by only 0.35. In doing this, they topped the third place La Salle Cadets by over three points. The Scarborough Princemen were fourth, but fifteen points back. Seen to be steadily improving were the Etobicoke Crusaders, noted as the surprise Corps of the evening.

This was a fine beginning for the Optimists, serving to bolster their ambitions. Only two weeks away loomed the 8th Annual Shrine Show, the first big test for this rejuvenated Corps.



*Etobicoke Crusaders (1972)*

### Shrine Show

Alas, the results were somewhat disappointing. In a field of eight good Corps, the Optimists were eighth. Worse, they were six points behind De La Salle, who were sixth. This was a blow after such a promising beginning and probably the cause of the Optimists being discounted as a serious threat to anyone in Canada this year. It was, though, reported that they were in good form. The others were just that much better.

The season was yet young, so there was still time to effect change in scores and standings. This would become evident soon enough.

### Brantford

July 23rd, Brantford

1st	De La Salle	82.25
2nd	Optimists	77.95



*Seneca Princemen (CNE, Toronto, 1972)*

A loss by 4.30! Tied for third at this show was the Etobicoke Crusaders and the Seneca Princemen, at 66.1. Note the name “Seneca Princemen”. Formerly the Scarborough Firefighters, they had become the Scarborough

Princemen; however, they had been somewhat rudderless since leaving the Fire Department sponsorship, and had at last accepted a good alternative. The whole Scarborough Drum Corps organization moved to the neighbouring borough of North York. There, they came under the sponsorship of Seneca College, to form the Seneca College Community Drum Corps Organization. The college, one of the fine community colleges in the Metropolitan Toronto area, offered to sponsor this as a student and community service. It would be open to all. The Junior “A” Corps became the Seneca College Princemen, soon to become just the Seneca Princemen. The Junior “C” Corps, once the “Sparkies”, would become the Seneca College Knights.

Back to the main topic, the competitive scene.

Once again, after the blip of the Shrine Show, three Canadian Juniors were again in close contention. Understandably, rumours at the beginning of the year favoured De La Salle to reclaim the Canadian title. Increasingly, though, the Optimists were being looked at with different eyes.



*Toronto Optimists (Shriners' Contest, Hamilton, 1972)*

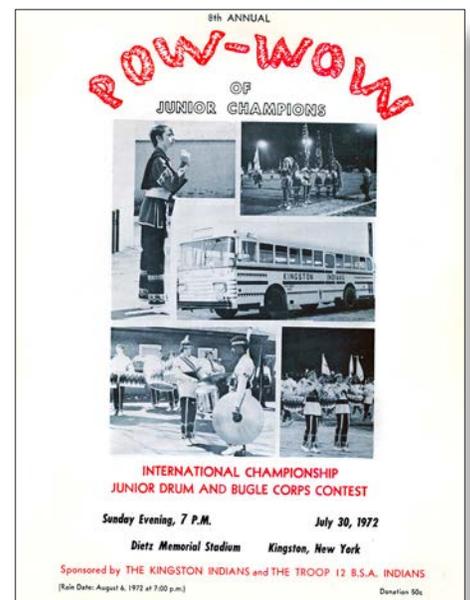
The girls had now moved into the Corps in a big way. Except for five working rifles, the entire Optimist Guard was composed of girls. They wore a very attractive uniform that served to compliment the improving Corps with whom they marched. That corps now entered the field using eight snare drums, four double tenors and four tympani included in their percussion section. Growth like this was necessary for a corps to remain competitive, as things were changing rapidly. The re-activated La Salle Cadets were fielding forty-two horns, a number at one time only common to Senior Corps.

Musically, the Optimists program was no doubt enhanced by a concert of very popular, if old time, numbers. “Moonlight Serenade”, “Tuxedo Junction”, and “Caravan” were golden oldies that, if played well, could hardly fail to please.

One interesting item, a tribute to the past, appeared in the form of a letter to the magazine Drum Corps News. In the July 5th edition, someone had written asking for a list of D.C.I. Corps, so that they could boycott them. Not everybody, it seems, was in favour of D.C.I.

## **Ogdensburg and Kingston, NY**

July 29th saw the Corps in Ogdensburg, NY, and the following day in Kingston, NY. The latter was the Annual POW-WOW of Junior Champions, a top-notch show and notable for various reasons. The Anaheim Kingsmen, firmly establishing the presence of California Corps on the scene, won it. This is borne out by the fact that the second and third place Corps were Blue Rock of Wilmington, Delaware, and Blessed Sacrament.



The Optimists placed fifth, twelve points out of first place, defeating two rivals in the process, the Magnificent Yankees of Utica, NY and the current Canadian Champion, La Salle Cadets. Following this, competition came thick and fast, mostly, but not all of it, in Canada.

### **Undertime in Marion, OH**

Dates in London, Ontario, and Scarborough served as good preparation for one of the year’s big contests, the U.S. Open in Marion, Ohio, on August 12th. Entering a field of good quality, mixed American and Canadian Corps, the Optimists were really primed for this one. Possibly hoping to pull off the upset they were after this year. Unfortunately this eagerness and preparation backfired, and all hopes were shattered, at least for now.

During the prelims, the Corps was so fired up that the pace they set caused them to come in under time. Penalized for this, they ended in thirteenth place, 0.25 behind Auburn Purple Lancers. Since only the first twelve Corps made the finals, this result effectively put the Optimists out of the show. Without the penalty, they would have placed eleventh. General opinion was that they had given the most exciting performance of the day. This was helped, no doubt, by the pace set; however, it was small consolation. De La Salle were tenth at the prelims, and ninth in the finals. Not good, for them, gauged by the last couple of years, but still giving them a comfortable three point margin over the Optimists. This late in the year, it appeared there would be no major upset. Or would there?

In fact, it was a rather dull season in Canada. There had not been that many contests and, since the beginning, the Junior “A” standings had remained unchanged: first, De La Salle; second, the Optimists and third, the La Salle Cadets



*Toronto Optimists (Marion, OH, 1972)*

This was reminiscent of the old days of Optimist supremacy when the question was “Who would come second?” At least, for the Optimists, this was an improvement over the previous two years. Events in the immediate future would cause one to alter their opinion of the outcome of this year.

## **Windsor**

The day after the Marion disaster, in Windsor, Ontario, the Optimists defeated an improving Seneca Princemen, by only six points. A contest in Scarborough was won by De La Salle. They were still in the driver’s seat although, for some reason, not as firmly as expected.

Again, the now familiar line-up appeared.

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



*Toronto Optimists tympanis (1972)*

Apart from one minor detail, it appeared as if this situation would continue until the season was over.

The minor detail was the scores. At this show, only 2.90 separated the first and third place Corps. This left the Optimists in the middle, second, 1.75 from the top. It was only two weeks before Nationals. Could things change in such a short time? It had happened before, but not often. General predictions were that De La Salle would regain the title.

Before the major showdown of the championship, which really is the one everybody wants to win, the Optimists had two good contests. Information is lacking regarding the first, in Titusville, Pennsylvania. The Corps had been doing this one as long as anyone could remember. They were popular there, and probably could have become the town band, had the town wanted one. This affair, though, was but a prelude to what was to be one of the most exciting weekends in Canadian Junior Drum Corps since 1969.

## **The Big 10**

The Canadian counterpart of D.C.I., Drum Corps Canada, had scheduled its first Annual Championship to be held in Hamilton, Ontario, on September 2nd. This was only one day before the Canadian National



*Seneca Princemen (Big 10, Hamilton, 1972)*

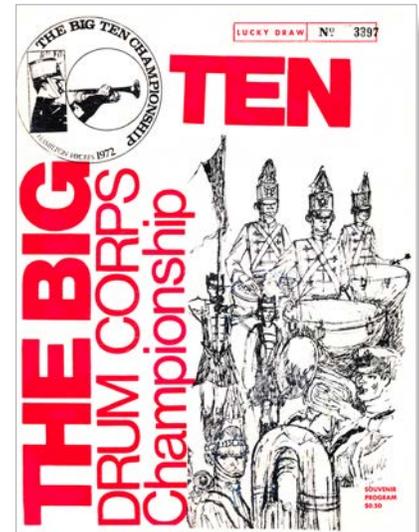
Championship, to be held in Toronto. It could almost be considered a preview of the Nationals because fifteen of Canada’s top Junior Corps would participate. Of this fifteen, only ten would reach the finals. This is why it was called the “Big 10” Championship.

It was running in conflict with another show, the Central Canada Circuit Championship, held on the same day. No matter, the Big 10 must have attracted the most attention. All the perennial rivals were in it and, although no major changes in standings had yet occurred, there was always a possibility.

This weekend was Labour Day weekend in Canada, a big public holiday. It could just as well have been called Drum Corps day weekend. The shows being held would effectively close the Junior Drum Corps season for 1972, in Canada.

As already noted, these were:

- The Central Canada Circuit Championship
- The Big 10, or Drum Corps Canada Championship
- The Canadian Championship, or Nationals



Number two and three are what concern us here. It was not generally expected, nor was there reason to expect, that any major upsets would occur.

September 2nd dawned and Mother Nature smiled, as the weather proved no impediment to having a contest. She must have known it was an important one. It was!

Having ten Corps in the finals, out of eighteen eligible, and fifteen competing, meant, of course, that there had to be preliminaries.



*LaSalle Cadets (Big 10 prelims, Hamilton, 1972)*

## “From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 22. (continued)

Preliminaries are often not well attended by spectators. Also, they often do not entail the playing of a complete show by the participants. This leaves room for speculation as to the outcome of the finals.

Whatever, people who attended the prelims were to witness Canadian Drum Corps history.

This had been the case before now. On that momentous afternoon, the Optimists defeated De La Salle for the first time since the end of 1968. The first time in almost four years! It was by the merest of margins but that was enough.



*Seneca Princemen (Big 10 prelims, Hamilton, 1972)*

The results were:

1st	The Optimists	79.50
2nd	De La Salle	79.30
3rd	La Salle Cadets	77.65
4th	Etobicoke Crusaders	68.90
5th	Seneca Princemen	68.70

This was a major upset. During the year, this had seemed possible, but not probable. Now it had happened, setting the stage for suspense filled finals in the evening.

At the evening finals, events repeated themselves, with some changes.

The Optimists did it again, widening the margin of victory. They were now the top Drum Corps Canada Champions, by a margin of 1.10.



*Toronto Optimists (Big 10 finals, Hamilton, 1972)*

The actual scores were:

1st	Toronto Optimists	79.10
2nd	De La Salle	78.00
3rd	La Salle Cadets	75.55
4th	Seneca Princemen	65.90
5th	Etobicoke Crusaders	65.00

By comparing these results with earlier ones, we can see that all the Corps slipped from the afternoon to the evening. The odd thing was that all the others slipped further than the Optimists, thus widening their margin at the top of the heap.

## Canadian National Championship

So, with that contest over, and the very next day being the Canadian National Championship, the scene was set. Set for the most suspense filled, unpredictable Nationals that Canadian Junior Drum Corps had seen for some time.

At the CNE Stadium, the next day, the promise of the previous paragraph was fulfilled as if it had been planned that way. For the Corps involved, it was nerve-wracking. For the fans, it was unprecedented suspense, ranging from euphoria to disappointment. The thrill of victory, the agony of defeat. What everybody got that day, certainly, was full value for their money.

In the Junior standstill division, the finals of which were held in the morning, the Optimist Lancers took top place. Eight points ahead, at 75.0, of second place. The Optimist organization had scored once again.

Junior “B” saw the Etobicoke Crusaders surge into first place with a score of 68.60. This was a Corps with promise. They had done well in the Big 10 the day before, being in it because it was “open”. Anyone could enter. Adding lustre to their win was the fact that they had not won the prelims.

Back to the afternoon, and the onset of the duel that was to provide the most suspense.

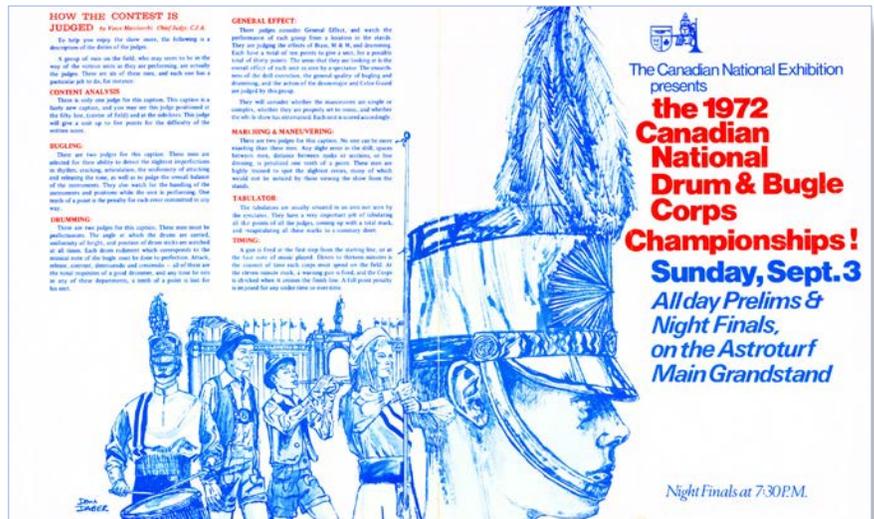
Based on results throughout the year, and those of the previous week, no one could safely make a sure prediction. No doubt, though, some tried.

There were five entrants in the Junior “A” division; De La Salle, La Salle Cadets, Optimists, Seneca Princemen, and Midlanders. All valid entrants. This, now, was the Junior prelims, the results of which served to further muddy the waters.

1st	De La Salle	81.35
2nd	La Salle Cadets	81.10
3rd	Optimists	80.25
4th	Seneca Princemen	71.15
5th	Midlanders	56.60

From the previous night, the Optimists had fallen from first to third, leaving Del and La Salle to move into first and second, respectively.

Now what? Where would all this end?



Toronto Optimists (Nationals prelims, CNE, 1972)

Among the top three, there was no huge gap in scores, nothing that could not be overcome. The margin from first to third was only 1.20. As we can recall, preliminary contests have not always been a reliable indication of what can occur later in the day. In fact, in the past, the Optimists had, more than once, been the ones to overturn results from prelims to finals. That, though, had been when they were perennial champions. What could this new, unchristened group do?

Whether they were aware of it or not, there was a weight of tradition and precedent behind them. They probably were. T.A.S. night would have seen to that.

Came the evening. The crowd was large, Drum Corps, and abrim with anticipation. They were not to be disappointed.

All of the finalists put on sparkling shows. At this time of year, this is to be expected, but here, tonight, the stakes added impetus to their efforts. When the final note had sounded, the last tenth added, the last Corps in place for the retreat, here is how things stood.

1st	Optimists	81.40
2nd	De La Salle	81.30
3rd	La Salle Cadets	81.25

Everyone was within 0.15! A crackerjack outcome.



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





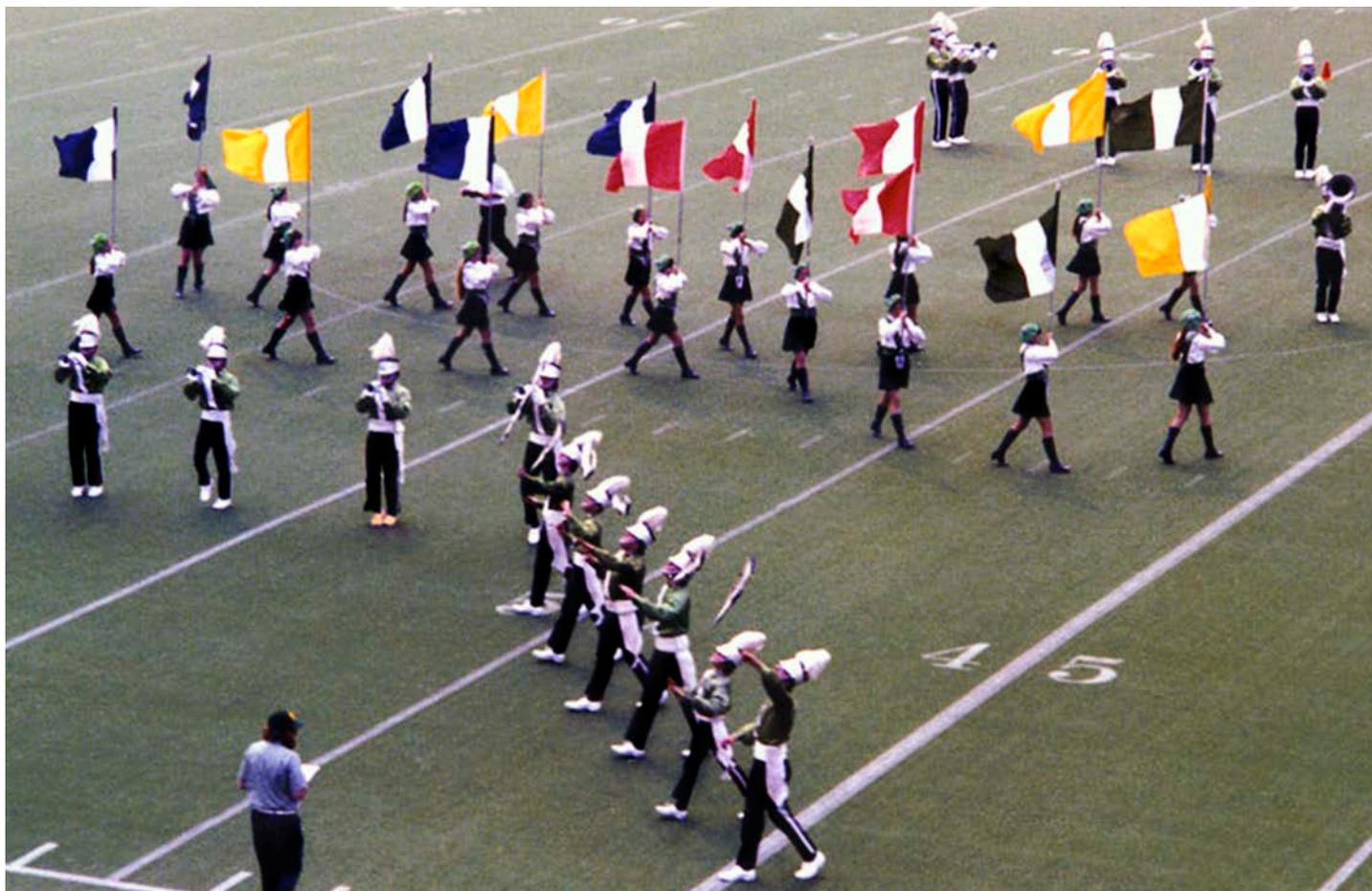
*Toronto Optimists at the start of show (Nationals, CNE, 1972)*

The Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps were, for the twelfth time, Canadian Junior “A” National Champions. The fact that it was four years between number eleven and number twelve is only negative in that the consecutive streak was interrupted. Most of the lads that won this one were new to this status, and for them it was a big thing. Deservedly so!

They had, literally, bled for it. Even years later, there were comments, from people who had been in a position to know, that these people had been pushed, hard. That is possible. Had any, though, been asked that evening, probably none, if any, would have admitted it. It was over! They had done it! The Corps was, again, Canadian Champions. They had rescued, and re-established, the reputation. If they were proud of it, they had a right to be!



*Toronto Optimists on the finish line (Nationals, CNE, 1972)*



Toronto Optimists (Big 10 prelims, Hamilton, 1972)

## A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of 1972 progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Scarboro (June 3)	Shriners (June 17)	July 30 Pow Wow (July 30)	US Open prelims (Aug 2)	Big 10 Hamilton (Sept 2)	Nationals Toronto (Sept 3)
Toronto Optimists	76.50	68.75	71.20	74.40	79.10	81.40
De La Salle	76.85	74.65		77.10	78.00	81.30
LaSalle Cadets	73.15		69.95		75.55	81.25
27th Lancers		81.50		83.80		
Blessed Sacrament			79.90	77.70		
Blue Rock		77.30	81.8500	82.20		
Garfield		75.50		80.10		

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

## Brampton Senators

by TJ Stevens (from DCXmuseum.org)

**O**RIGINALLY, the Senators were started by the Toronto Police Association as a senior marching band which lasted until 1967. The Brampton Police Assoc. took over the name and uniforms in late 1967, early 1968 and turned it into a junior parade corps, headed up by corps director Bill Reilly. They marched in the early days primarily in South Ontario. In the parade class, the Senators won many 1st place awards in the category of junior corps. with less than 50 members. The Senators Drum and Bugle Corps executive included Robert Davis, corps director, Carol Davis, treasurer, Amy Stevens, registrar and Linda Murray, booster club president.

In 1972, they moved into the competition circuit by entering into the Stand-Still class. In 1973, they decided to move up into the Junior “C” class. The drum corps was sponsored by a number of different organizations over years including the Brampton German Hansa Club, Brampton Legion and also funded by the Town of Brampton. The, then City of Brampton, in 1976 cancelled all funding and the Senators Drum Corps tried to keep going, but eventually disbanded in 1978.

In 1980, two former members, Len Kerr & Timothy Stevens, set up a meeting with city officials, business groups and community organizations to try to secure funding or sponsorship to revive the corps. Unfortunately they showed no interest in doing so.



*Brampton Senators (1977)*

## Spotlight: the Brampton Senators (continued)

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*Brampton Senators (1977)*



*Brampton Senators (1977)*



*Brampton Senators (1977)*

## Spotlight: the Brampton Senators (continued)

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*Brampton Senators (1977)*



*Brampton Senators (1977)*



*Brampton Senators (1977)*

# From Danforth to Danforth in More Ways Than One

by Doug MacKenzie

**J**OHN BODKIN LIVED up the street from me on Monarch Park, which ran off Danforth Avenue, referred to by Torontonians as “The Danforth”. He was walking by as I was sitting on our veranda steps, stopped and said, “why don’t you come to our rehearsal (Optimists) and bring your horn?” I was in Leaside Lions then, it was October, and many of the guys were leaving to go either to De La Salle or the Optimists. What did I have to lose? With my parent’s permission, off I went with John on the streetcar to Jarvis Vocational, where the Optimists rehearsed. I was introduced to Barry Bell (DCI HoF), who recognized me, and I knew from his instructing Danforth Crusaders when they used to practise around the corner from our house. I could ride my bike a couple of blocks to Danforth Tech and watch them, which I often did.

I told Bell I wanted to join. He introduced me to Doug McPhail, a guy I didn’t know. He was the section Sergeant for the second and third sopranos. He took me down with my horn into the school’s bowels; it was dark, damp, and creepy; we were in the pool area. To say I was nervous would be an understatement. This guy was old, twenty-one, and I was thirteen. Play something for me. What? Play something. I played Chant of the Jungle, an old 1930s tune Leaside, AKA the Jungle Kings, played in concert. When I finished, he said not bad, play



Doug MacKenzie and Doug Yarker

something else which I did, but I can’t remember what it was I was so nervous. This was my audition. We went back up to meet with Bell, and McPhail said he’s good enough to play third soprano. I was in! McPhail took me to meet with the other thirds, Doug Yarker, a



A young Doug MacKenzie with a majorette when they were in the Leaside Lions (1958)

rookie from Sky Raiders and Don Clark, who had been with the Corps for some time. They were old too, eighteen or nineteen. We practised standing in a stairwell until we were summoned to join the rest of the sopranos in the school library. Al Morrison (Moe) was the Section Sergeant for all the sopranos. He had thick coke-bottle lenses and was intimidating. If you made a mistake, he would chew you out. You didn’t want to make a mistake! Moe was also a wonderful and extremely reliable soloist. He would drum major the Corps in ‘61. He would then become the featured soloist for the Jesters and Commanders. Moe would go on to teach many Corps in Ontario, including our arch-rival De La Salle.

Now I said that many guys were leaving Leaside for



Al Morrison

## Memories From Douglas MacKenzie (continued)

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Del or Optimists. My best pal at Leaside was Billy Grant. He and I planned on going to Del. I knew Mike Delany, Rick Scanlon, and Arthur Ailey, who all lived in the neighbourhood. I was a big fan of Gerry Faraday, the great '58 and '59 soloists for Del. Billy and Darcy McGroarty, and I had all been talking to Brother Eugene, the moderator of Del, at various times during the summer about joining Del in October. Little did I know the night I joined Optimists, Billy joined Del. He wasn't alone; John McBride, Wayne Richardson, Norm Henderson, the Hudsons and Darcy also joined.

When I went down for the ensemble rehearsal in the auditorium, many guys from Leaside were already there. They were all older than me. Jim Stewart, Terry Sweeney, Ron Cottrell, Dave Bignall, Don Willison, Roman Perohanycz, Mel Day, Neil Ibbitson, Bill Thorne, Jim Nesbitt and Phil Campbell, who was about fifteen years old. All of them had joined Leaside from Royal Lancers for the '59 season. In '58, they appeared at the Nationals dressed in Hawaiian shirts. Beachcomber straw hats, pedal pushers and bare feet. They had a Caribbean theme and played calypso music under the direction of Doug Saunders. They disbanded in late '58 and came to Leaside along with Saunders. Now they were members of "The Toronto Optimists."



*Don Willison, Ron Cottrell and Mel Day*

The winter months went by with our rehearsals at Jarvis on Wednesdays. One memorable night the famous Wild Bill Hooten drum major of the famed Reilly Raiders and a real character came and spoke to the Corps. As I recall, his talk was on the correlation between hard work and winning. I still recall being in awe. An anecdote from Frank H Haddaway: "Bill Hooten drove onto the field in a sports car just as the Corps prepared to "kick-off." Those were the days when Corps formed a company front and entered the field from the left goal line (starting line). Seeing a sports car pull onto the field as the Corps was being announced, watching a sun-glassed Bill Hooten alight from it and lead the Corps onto the field was awesome and highly entertaining."

**O**N SUNDAYS, we rehearsed at A. E. Long, where Mr. (Bern) Beer (WDC HoF), our Assistant Director, was an executive. As soon as the weather got better, we headed outside on weekends for drill rehearsals at the waterfront. At one early drill secession, 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 Corps to another without a written release granted in October, the free month.

My squad mates were Al Lavigne (baritone) and Jim Patten (soprano). They were excellent corpsmen and helped me in my first year with the Corps, along

## Memories From Douglas MacKenzie (continued)

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with mentors Brian Williams (snare) and Warren Mills (French horn). This would be Jim's last year. Warren and Brian would age out in '61, and Al in '64. Pictured are Warren, Jimmy and me.



*Warren Mills, Jim Patten and Doug MacKenzie (Falconer, 1960)*

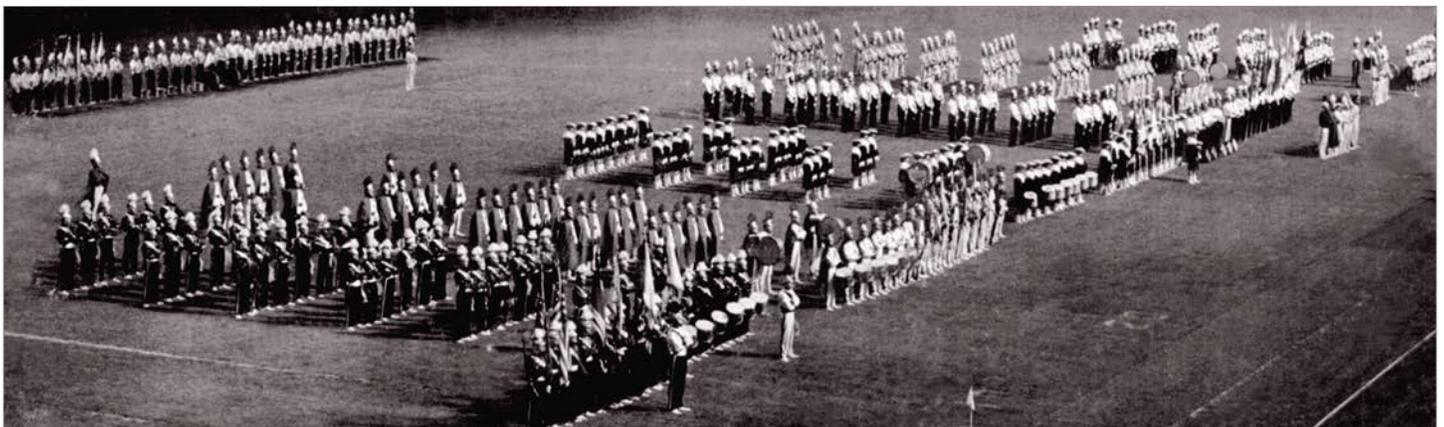
Our first show of the year was the Ice Follies at Maple Leaf Gardens, sponsored by the Downtown Toronto Optimist Club, which sponsored the Corps. This was an annual affair and a highlight for me as a then-Toronto Maple Leaf fan to tell my grade eight schoolmates I played at the Gardens.

Our next show was a standstill held in Toronto, which we won. I don't recall much about it. It was held at Leaside Memorial Gardens. I'll note that Leaside was a hub of activity as far as the Lions Club was concerned. They sponsored the Jungle Kings, a feeder corps and majorettes, along with baseball and hockey teams, put on fireworks

displays and ran a week-long carnival. Like many service clubs, churches and school groups, many kids could have gone astray without those organizations. Sadly their ranks have dwindled over the years, and those sponsorships are missed. I should also mention that they also sponsored the Lions International contest held at U of T's Varsity stadium to packed crowds in the late '50s. Lt. Norman Prince, Syracuse Brigadiers, Hawthorne and Reilly competed against the Jolly Jesters, Guelph Royales and Marching Ambassadors.

Our next outing was to Woodstock, Ontario, for Empire Day, Victoria Day, or 2-4 weekend, given various monikers depending on your age or beverage preference. We were hosted and billeted by the Woodstock Imperials, a senior corps. Our rehearsals ran all day Saturday, learning and perfecting our M&M, then at night for ensemble repeat on Sunday. The Corps rehearsed again and did a parade and exhibition on Monday, which I missed with a case of sunstroke. Warren and Jim were my medics.

**O**UR FIRST contest would be in Jersey City at Roosevelt Stadium, a drum corps Mecca. Roosevelt Stadium was at "Danforth Avenue" and Route 1, Jersey City. The stadium was well-used. Jackie Robinson played his first international league game there in 1946 for Montreal, and the Brooklyn Dodgers played fifteen games at the stadium before moving to LA. It was also home to professional



*Corps on retreat (Lions Club contest, Varsity Stadium, 1960)*

*L-R: Optimists, De La Salle, Audubon All-Girls, The Ambassadors, Royales, Lt Norman Prince, Back: Leaside Lions:*

## Memories From Douglas MacKenzie (continued)

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boxing and high school football. Most memorably, it was the home of the famous Dream Contest from 1946 to 1982. Anyone who participated at Roosevelt would remember the scoreboard, whether drum corps or some other event.

After an overnight bus trip, we arrived at St. Patrick's Church in downtown Jersey City, which was huge. We were billeted in the Church's basement along with the Chicago Cavaliers. I remember being impressed by the rows and rows of army cots that would become our beds over the next two nights.

Once we got our gear in and put our sleeping bags on our cots, we were outside rehearsing. The priest, Fr. Gaffney, told us we were in a safe area as long as we did not go into the park a few blocks down the street at night. Besides that, it was safer to catch a bus and go into New York "but stay out of the park." I went with a group into NYC to sightsee, while some others stayed around the Church. I vaguely remember someone saying that

a couple of guys had gone to a laundromat, why I don't remember, and the owner there gave them a bag full of Canadian coins that had been put in the machines. The story was his bank wouldn't accept them. You may remember our dollar was ten cents higher than the greenback back then.

I remember the ladies of the parish serving us breakfast at long tables. Breakfast consisted of a small cereal box with milk, sweet rolls, and coffee. (Pronounced sweet-woes and quaff-fee.) The ladies were terrific and could not have been nicer. We were well looked after, and we were appreciative.

The day of the contest came. We did a warmup by the Church and loaded the bus. Out front of the bus were two motorcycle cops to take us to the stadium. What a ride! We drove through Jersey City like celebrities, with the cops standing up and cranking their foot sirens through several intersections and into the stadium parking lot. It was a hive of activity, with junior and senior Corps preparing to enter the contest field.



*Blessed Sacrament On the Line with the Chicago Cavaliers on the Ready Line (Preview of Champions, Jersey City, 1960)*

## Memories From Douglas MacKenzie (continued)

I don't recall our starting position, but I was in awe of the crowd once on the field. Perhaps fifteen to twenty-thousand knowledgeable fans, the feeling was electric. I hadn't expected that the field was a baseball diamond laid out as a standard football field; it didn't matter as all the Corps faced the same setup. After our performance, we were under the stands, some of the Corps I had seen before, such as Garfield, Hawthorne and Reilly, the rest I had not. I felt before the contest that we would be more competitive with the other junior Corps. This naivety probably stemmed from seeing Optimists win so many contests in Canada. Other factors were that the US corps competed earlier in the season than we did, and the judging sheets differed from those in Canada. We were also an unknown quantity in Jersey.

Junior: 5) 79.70 Toronto Optimists,  
4) St. Catherine's Queensmen 82.05,  
3) Garfield Cadets 84.80,  
2) Chicago Cavaliers 86.40,  
1) Blessed Sacrament, 86.90

Senior: 5) Reading Buccaneers 83.15,  
4) Reilly Raiders 84.85,  
3) Archer—Epler Musketeers 85.65,  
2) New York Skyliners 86.40,  
1) Hawthorne Caballeros 86.90.

Note the scores for the top two Corps, Junior and Senior.

The contest's results were disappointing; regardless, it was a learning experience. We headed back to Toronto, knowing we could and would get better. At the time, I didn't know I would remain with the Corps for seven more years and eventually become the last Director of the Toronto Optimists in 1975. I would meet people who would have a lasting impact on my life and many who remain close friends to this day. Returning to Toronto, there would be a summer of rehearsals, parades, exhibitions and contests, and it would be a short three months before I entered high school at "Danforth Tech" and The Optimists would win their third straight National Championship.



*Toronto Optimists (Preview of Champions, Roosevelt Stadium, Jersey City, 1960)*

### Who Knew?

*by Peter Byrne*

**W**HEN I JOINED the Toronto Optimists in September of 1968, the corps had won eleven national championships in a row.

Stop and think about that for a minute. They didn't repeat or 'threepeat'. They didn't win four or five or seven or eight national championships in a row.

They won eleven consecutive years. For eleven years, they'd never lost. Mind-boggling.

When you're 16 and your priorities are so screwed up the only thing in the world that matters is drum corps, and you're sick to death of losing, where are you gonna go?

Well, you're gonna join the Toronto Optimists, right?

I sure did. I mean if ever there was a sure thing, a lock, a cinch, a foregone conclusion, if anyone was ever going to have things all sewn up, if it was going to be over before it began, if ever something was in the bag?

The Toronto Optimists were going to win the Canadian National Championship.



*Toronto Optimists (Big 10 prelims, Hamilton, 1972)*

## Memories From Peter Byrne (continued)

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Three years later, I hadn't won a damn thing. We lost and lost and lost. We could not win for losing. During three entire seasons we never beat De La Salle. More specifically, more importantly, I never beat De La Salle. Not even once. And, as I said, I cared way, way too much about that.

To me, the most critical matter on the planet in September of 1972 wasn't Watergate or the Viet Nam War. It wasn't even the Soviet/Canada Hockey summit. What the world demanded to know was would the Toronto Optimists ever again beat the De La Salle Oaklands.

The heartbreak of the 1969 loss (which I still believe we won fair and square) was followed by the futility of the 1970 season, inarguably the worst corps the Optimists had fielded in well over a decade. 1971 was a little better. We didn't embarrass ourselves. But 1972? 1972 felt different.

We began behind, of course. But as the season wore on, we began to knock on the door. Very quietly at first. Just a gentle tap, really. But unlike the three previous years, something felt right about that corps that year.

We got stronger and stronger and edged closer and closer. The knock more persistent and urgent.

Labour day weekend, 1972: It was an unusual setup. We had a show with preliminaries and finals called "The Big 10" at Ivor Wynne in Hamilton. And then the National Championship at the CNE. Again, prelims and finals.

In the four years I was a Toronto Optimist, my most sacred memory was not of winning the Canadian Championship at the CNE. It was winning those prelims in Hamilton.

There was no retreat, we just stood around on the track waiting for the scores.

For reasons difficult to fathom given the historical record, we somehow felt confident. Cocky, practically.

The announcer merely confirmed what we'd already known in our hearts. We'd won!

Sitting here, 50 years later, I so vividly recall that moment; it remains so clear and present it's as if it happened weeks ago.

We won. I won.

And I remember feeling something I had never felt in my life to that point. Joy. Perfect joy.



*Peter Byrne plays a solo (Nationals prelims, CNE, 1972)*

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*Submitted by Peter Byrne. Peter played soprano from late 1968 through 1972. After marching with the Anaheim Kingsmen Peter returned to the Optimists as the corps' brass instructor. He instructed both the Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Optimists.*

## The Big “10” and Nationals

*(Excerpts from a longer article in the August-September, 1972 issue of GCC.)*

### The Big “10” Championship

**T**HIS SATURDAY was much like any Saturday in a drum corps summer except for one thing. Today the stage was set for one of those big drum corps upsets as nineteen corps converged on Hamilton early that morning to obtain this DCC (Drum Corps Canada) crown.

DE LA SALLE was seemingly the most likely to succeed mainly because they had not yet been defeated by any of their Canadian competitors so far this year. For the Toronto Optimists it was their last chance to beat Del before the Canadian Nationals in Toronto the next day... and Ivor Wynne Stadium also happened to be the site for the Green

Machine’s biggest defeat by Del earlier in the year at the famed Shriners’ International... a six point spread. Then too, Cadets LaSalle had not beaten Del or the Optimists yet this season but would have edged over the Optimists at the “Pow Wow” in Kingston, NY if it were not for a four point penalty. This was then the “Big 3” of the “Big 10” and anyone could have won.

After the smoke had cleared late in the afternoon and the prelim battle was over... Cadets LaSalle sat in third spot while the next two placings stunned the Canadian drum corps world as, for the first time in four years, the green machine, the Optimists, rolled over the De La Salle Oaklands. The last time the Optimists defeated Del was at the 1968 Canadian Nationals in Kingston, Ontario and many bets were placed for the night finals here tonight.

As it turned out all the corps put on excellent showings in the night finals and the top four were truly magnificent. On the retreat everything was



*Drum Majors on retreat (Big 10, finals, Hamilton, 1972)*

very tense as the awards were handed out. Best horn line went to The Optimists; Best Percussion: The Optimists!; Best Drum Major: De La Salle!; Best G.E.: De La Salle!

Ten scores were then read and a great tenseness began to build until only two remained. The announcer, Rick Scanlon, then read the scores – “The second place score is 78.0 and the first place is 79.2... . In second place from Toronto, De La Salle!” Many in the crowd went wild as the Optimists defeated all competition and sat a comfortable 1.2 over Del who were still the reigning Canadian National Champions with the next big battle the following day at the CNE Stadium in Toronto.

## The Nationals

Early Sunday morning drum corps took over the CNE Stadium in the centre of the famed Canadian National Exhibition with prelims, and finals, in some classes beginning shortly after 9:00am on the CNE Astroturf. All corps competed in prelims with their full show and the spectacle built up to the

Jr.”A” prelims in the middle of the afternoon. From the previous evening the “A’s” put on spectacular performances with the scores raised into the 80’s. The positions were changed around however. When the results were tabulated with Del finishing in first position, the LaSalle Cadets taking 2nd and the Optimists bringing up 3rd!

De La Salle was the first competitor of the first three corps of the “A” finals. From where I stood, on the ready line, Ontario resounded great throughout the stadium and the crowd cheered wildly as Light My Fire exploded toward them! It was played excellently. No corps trooped the stands so, as soon as the last note of Del’s closing fanfare on the finish line ended and the standing ovation of the crowd of 7,000 died down, the spotlight swung to the starting line as the announcement stated: “On the starting line, Green on Green, the Toronto Optimists!” Many in the crowd broke into immediate applause because this could be September the 13th (day of 1958 Championship). The OTL (Off The Line) was very smooth and the bugles seemed to ring out clear... the drum solo tempo change went over with perfection and “More And More” ripped through the



*Toronto Optimists (Nationals prelims, CNE, Toronto, 1972)*

## The Winning Weekend by Peter McCusker (continued)

stands. Concert was a symphonic sound, projecting notes never really accomplished previously. The percussion's superiority was evident as they crumbled all competition. The corps was really up for this year's match.



*LaSalle Cadets (Nationals prelims, CNE, Toronto, 1972)*

Finally, Cadets LaSalle and their OTL of “One Fine Morning” from “Lighthouse” was played like never before and the corps seemed to suddenly surge upward, as the Optimists had done this weekend, only their transformation took place almost overnight: The giants were extremely close in their performances tonight as the scores related about 15 minutes after Cadets La Salle completed their show with the retreat, starting immediately, almost before the Cadets crossed the finish line.

As the announcer said, just as he announced the “A” results – “I’ve never seen all three corps and scores this close before”. “Cadets LaSalle: 81.25; De La Salle: 81.3 and Optimists: 81.4”.

*Peter McCusker works as a freelance photographer. During the early 1970s Peter marched with the Guelph Opti-Knights and the Toronto Optimists.*



*Toronto Optimists on retreat (Nationals, finals, CNE, 1972)*



### **Peter Barclay**

**April 7, 1947 — April 15, 2023**

**Corps: Canadaires, Toronto Optimists**

**P**ETE played soprano in both the Canadaires and the Toronto Optimists (Pete marched with Optimists during the 1967 and 1968 seasons). He returned in 1971 when all of the Canadian corps were using overage members, I last saw him around 2012 when he came to watch us perform in Welland during the Rose Festival.

Pete spent five decades as Senior Storekeeper in what is now the Earth Sciences Department, and at the time of his 2018 retirement, was recognized as the University's then longest-serving, ongoing employee. Those who knew him well saw Pete as a Brock historian for his stories about working at the University's original campus on Lockhart Drive at the bottom of the Glenridge hill. A Celebration of Life will be held Friday, April 21 at 6 p.m. at the Pleasantview Funeral Home at 2000 Merrittville Hwy., Fonthill. Brock's flags will be lowered to half-mast on the same day in Barclay's honour.

He was a great guy who will be missed by all who knew him.

#### **Here are a few quotes from some of those who knew Pete:**

*"If Pete lived his whole life in the way he was as a teen, and young adult, it would have been one of kindness, devotion, and love."*

*"Peter was a special person with a great sense of humour."*

*"He could see the positive in almost any situation. Even when his health concerns became more serious he continued to look ahead. He set an example for us all."*

*"He had a gentleness about him with a tremendous sense of humour and a good dose of common sense. I've laughed and cried with him."*

*"A kind and thoughtful man who loved to smile."*

*"He was a very kind and gentle soul that took great pride in everything he did."*

*"Your dad was a lovely man. He could see the positive in almost any situation. Even when his health concerns became more serious he continued to look ahead. He set an example for us all."*



*Toronto Optimists (Nationals Prelims, CNE, Toronto, 1972)*

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**Or mail:** Bob Carell:  
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