



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

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A PDF version is available on the website: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca



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PDF VERSION ON OUR WEBSITE: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca



WEBSITE ADDITIONS

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



Cardinal Cadets (1978)

WEBSITE UPDATE:

What's new on TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

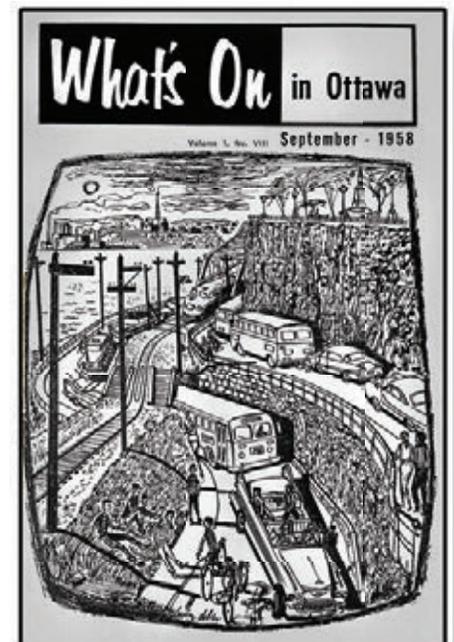
While we continue to add new content to both the main Website and the Photo Gallery, most of our efforts go into the newsletters and the Photo Gallery. We always post Optimist-related images but we regularly include photos of other corps, often those at the Junior "B" and Junior "C" levels, to give as many people as possible a chance to see themselves when they were young. The photo of the Cardinal Cadets in the top-right and the image of the Kiwanis Cavaliers at the bottom left of this page fit into this category.

Recently we discovered some of Don Daber's artwork from the time before he discovered drum corps. These images include elementary school projects, artwork that Don did while with the Boy Scouts of Canada as well as the image below, a cover for the September 1958 issue of "What's On In Ottawa". Some have been posted and others will be added

We hope that you are enjoying the additions to our website and are open to suggestions that you might have for additions to the website.



Kiwanis Cavaliers (1978)



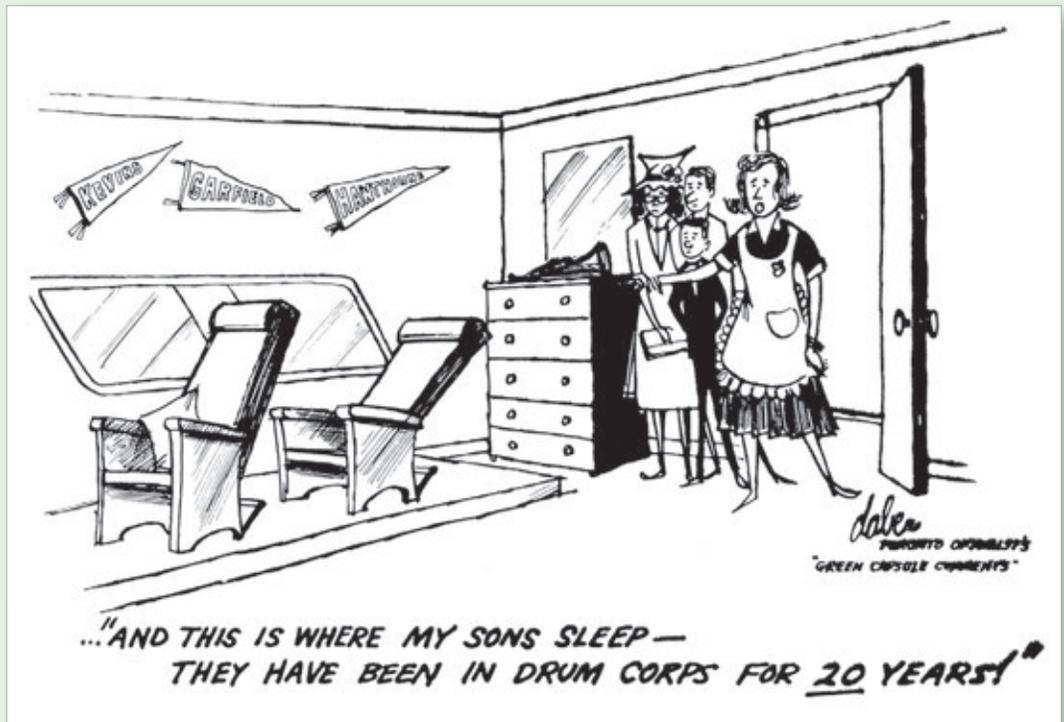
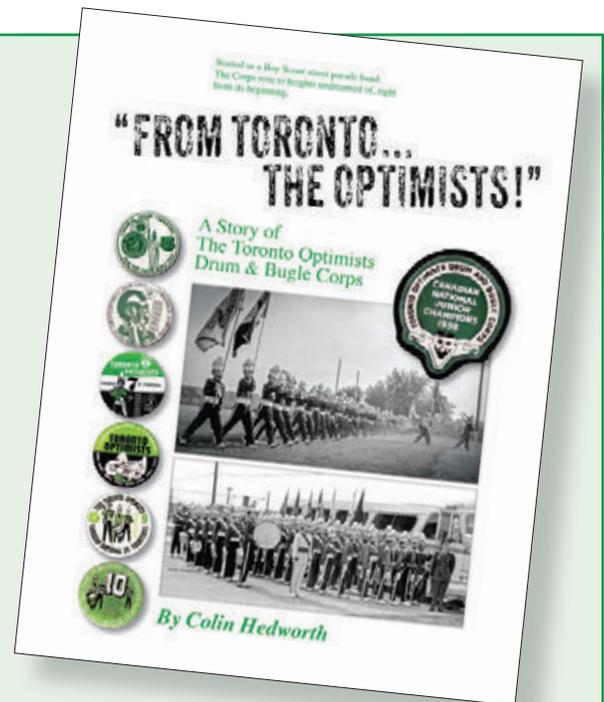
Don Daber's artwork for "What's On In Ottawa" (1958)

In our next newsletter: Chapters 17 and 18

The next issue of the Newsletter (January) will include Chapters 17 and 18 from Colin Hedworth's book "From Toronto... The Optimists!".

THE FOCUS of Chapter 17 is on the years 1966 and 1967. The Canadian Drum Corps landscape was changing. LaSalle Cadets had not only relegated De La Salle to third place but bested Optimists at the prelims to both the 1966 and 1967 Nationals. De La Salle recognized that they had to make changes and they took some radical steps that included hiring former Optimists (Harry Clark as drum instructor, Al Morrison then Terry McKolskey as horn instructors as well as Bernie Beer, a former Assistant Director of the Optimists). These would be the last years that The Optimists were "king of the hill".

CHAPTER 18 deals with the year 1968. In 1958 both De La Salle and Optimists had begun competing in Junior "A" and, in the following years, Del had only beaten Optimists a few times — and those contests were all in 1961. That was about to change. The Optimists began the 1968 season on top but Del fought back. By July, Del was beating Optimists and this continued throughout the months of July and August. Of course, the Optimists were not ready to give up. The tide turned when, on September 2nd, the Optimists beat Del in a contest at the CNE. Five Days later, at the Nationals in Kingston, Optimists once again defeated Del, taking home their eleventh consecutive National title. For the Optimists, the writing was on the wall.



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

Toronto Optimists Feeder Corps

by Bob Carell

BACK IN THE DAY drum corps members were usually just kids off the street, with no training. Age limits for Junior corps meant that there was a constant outflow of trained members coupled with a struggle to replace those who left. On occasion a corps might lose over half its membership. Even the top corps experienced difficulty recruiting new members. In an attempt to deal with this attrition, many junior corps started “Feeder Corps”.

Feeder Corps usually were parade corps or, if they competed, they were in a lower class. For example, a Junior “A” corps might have a feeder corps that competed in the Junior “C” category. The purpose of a feeder corps was to give younger people training in the drum corps activity and, hopefully, to supply a steady stream of members to the main corps. The Feeder Corps gave young people the opportunity to learn to march and play an instrument. The plan was to train members of the feeder corps so that, when needed, they would be ready to join the competitive corps. The hope was that they would actually join the competitive corps. Of course, our hopes are not always realized and some members of a feeder corps might join a competitor. Such are the vagaries of life!



Promo for the Bantam Optimists (1962)

During its existence the Toronto Optimists had four feeder corps: the Bantam Optimists, The Optimist Cadets, the Optimist Lancers and the Cadet-Lancers (a merger of the Cadets and Lancers). The focus of this article is on these feeder corps.

at your service



THE OPTIMIST LANCERS DRUM & BUGLE CORPS
THE OPTIMIST CADETS DRUM & BUGLE CORPS
THE TORONTO OPTIMISTS DRUM & BUGLE CORPS



The Bantam Optimists

WHEN IN 1959 the Junior Optimists Drum Corps won its second consecutive Canadian Championship, it was realized that the high performance standard required to maintain leadership would not be found in boys newly recruited and without previous training. Of



course, members with this training would soon become necessary as Corps members reached the maximum permissible age for competition purposes. Therefore, on the strong recommendation of Mr. Barry C.

Bell, Music Director of The Optimist Jr. Corps, sponsored through the good offices of the Toronto Optimists Club and assisted by The Whaley, Royce Music Company, the Optimists Bantam Corps of twenty-eight boys was formed.

The function of the Bantam Corps would be:

(a) To interest boys from approximately nine years of age up to Junior "A" age in the activities of Drum Corps and to supply good basic instruction in drill as well as drum or horn playing.

(b) To maintain a high standard of efficiency by screening the boys without genuine interest or talent.

(c) To encourage the trained boys of suitable age to seek a place in the Junior Drum Corps.

Thus the major objective of the Optimist Club would be attained by teaching a form of self discipline to many boys requiring guidance, opening the doors to the world of music for many who would otherwise miss the opportunity, and provide an atmosphere for the talented to perform and develop.

The Bantam Optimists, the first feeder corps for the Toronto Optimists, was created in 1960. The



Dave Harris, Ronn Prokop and ?



Bantam Optimists (at Union Station for the Optimist Club Convention, 1960)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Toronto Optimists Feeder Corps (continued)

corps was initially organized by Bill Jay, who had played bugle with the Toronto Optimists, and Fred Johnson who would go on to become a successful politician in Scarborough. The corps was run by various people during their existence. One or two nights a week members of the Toronto Optimists would go a Bantams' rehearsal to instruct them. One of their drum instructors was Ronn "Skip" Prokop who went on to be one of the founding members of the rock group Lighthouse.

The Bantams would not have existed without the help of Bill Shepherd of Whaley-Royce. In his book, "From Toronto, The Optimists" Colin Hedworth wrote: "*it was due to Bill Shepherd*

that the Bantam Optimists Corps got started. His company, Whaley Royce, donated all the drums and bugles that enabled the Bantams to get started."

As competition levels increased it was rapidly becoming harder for an individual without some prior training to join the Optimists. The purpose of the feeder corps was to train young people in the drum corps activity. The hope was that this would create a reserve pool of talent from which the Corps could draw new players. By 1961 it was a thriving enterprise and, very quickly, it would prove its value beyond all doubt.

In 1960, under the musical direction of Mr. Bill Jay, the Bantam Corps took a First at the Kiwanis Music Festival. In addition, they won the 1960 Junior Novice Standstill Championship at the Canadian Nationals in Hamilton as well as the 1963 Junior Standstill Championship in Waterloo.

1961 produced a scarcity of instructors and the Corps stood still, literally. That changed in 1962 when additional marching members of the Toronto Optimists came out to help.

Here's a story about the Bantams many people might not know. At the end of the 1963 season the Toronto Optimists lost a great many horn players as well as a number of drummers. Winter rehearsals sometimes had as few as 12 horn players and, when all the horns were there, there were still



Truman Crawford and Bill Shepherd of Whaley-Royce (1965)



Toronto Optimists and Bantam Optimists (Optimist Convention, Union Station, Toronto, 1960)

only about 17 players. As much as the corps tried, it was unable to recruit enough new members. In the spring management held a meeting to decide whether they could even field a corps. A decision was made to compete; however, this could only be done by shutting down the Bantams corps and moving members of the Bantams to the Toronto Optimists. I think we had 33 horns by the end of the season. And they were good!

Integrating the new members, learning the music, drill, etc. was a challenge and it meant missing our first drill show of the year, a June exhibition in Hamilton that was sponsored by the newly-formed Canadian Commanders. Given the late start we were in rough shape at the beginning of the season. In fact, we got hammered on a June trip to the Midwest. During the summer of 1964 we continued to improve and, surprisingly, no Canadian corps was able to beat us. Thanks to those members of the Bantams, we went on to win our sixth consecutive National title!



Bill Jay leads the Bantam Optimists down Yonge St (1960)



Fred Johnson with the Bantam Optimists (1961)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Toronto Optimists Feeder Corps (continued)

At the time, shutting down the Bantams was probably the best available choice. Without exercising that option the corps might not have competed in 1964. Had they done so, it is unlikely that Optimists would have won Nationals. The

corps also got a bunch of very good members who stayed around a long time. The down-side is that, as experienced members left, The Optimists could no longer rely on a stream of new recruits from the Bantams.



David Burgh of the Bantam Optimists



Bantam Optimists march down Bay St from Toronto's City Hall (1960)



Bantam Optimists (Nationals, Waterloo, 1963)

The Optimist Cadets

IN 1967 TWO MEN who were to exert much influence discovered the Optimists. These were brothers, Al and Greg Tierney. The Optimists realized that unless people could be recruited and trained, the Corps could run into difficulty in the future. The original “Peanut Squad” (as the Bantam Optimists were sometimes called) had been disbanded in early 1964 to keep the main corps alive. Now, it was decided that a feeder Corps was, once again, needed. The process was set in motion.

Recruiting was tough and practice facilities almost non-existent. This was not good. In fact, the whole summer was spent looking for recruits and practice facilities. It was felt that the suburbs of the city were the best place to pursue this idea, and this

led to a lucky break. The Scarborough Knights of Columbus were looking for another youth activity. With baseball and hockey already well covered in the community they were open to new ideas. Like everyone, they were short of money; however, they did possess a practice facility.



Al Tierney with some members of the Optimist Cadets (1969)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Toronto Optimists Feeder Corps (continued)

A Grand Knight attended an Optimists practice and was impressed by the discipline. A meeting of the executive of the Optimists and the Knights of Columbus took place. Later there was a second meeting with the general membership of the Knights of Columbus.

Attendees at these meeting saw slides of the Optimists as well as the 1965 movie of the Optimists that was filmed at Ivor Wynne Stadium in Hamilton. All of the K of C men were in favour of this promotion. While they could not contribute financially they agreed to provide their clubhouse for practices as well as assisting with the recruiting drive. On September 1st a final decision was taken to accept this offer. A plan was developed that culminated in a recruiting day on September 17th.

Handbills were distributed with much of the work being done by the Knights (at this time of year the Optimists were busy preparing for the Nationals). On the 17th, the Corps paraded from the Knights of Columbus Hall to a church. There, on the church

steps, they played to a crowd of a thousand. Slides were again shown and short speeches were given by Mr. Daber and Mr. Greg Tierney, Chairman of Youth Activities for the Knights of Columbus. Applications were handed out and, by the end of the day, forty-seven had been completed and returned. The first rehearsal was set for September 23.

Band seeking young recruits

Free membership in a drum and bugle corps for boys 10 to 14 is being offered by the Toronto Optimist Club, which supplies uniforms and equipment, and the Knights of Columbus, who let the band practice in their 975 Kennedy Road hall every Saturday morning. Applicants can phone 759-9231

Published in the Toronto Star on September 20, 1967

During that week a small article in the Toronto Star brought a sudden increase in phone calls to everyone who was involved. Suddenly, the recruiting drive became not only a success but in danger of being swamped. At the first rehearsal, the original forty-seven recruits were there along with

another ninety-five newcomers. Now, membership in the Optimist Cadets, as they were called, stood at 142, with the prospect of more to come as time passed. Thus, money notwithstanding, we now had "The Optimist Cadets Drum and Bugle Corps", Mr. Al Tierney, Director, Mr. Greg Tierney, Manager.



Optimist Cadets (1969)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Toronto Optimists Feeder Corps (continued)

It was a Parade Corps for boys 10-14. Both of the just mentioned men had played a large part in this activity. They would play even larger roles in the future, but this endeavour was most important for the future survival and success of the Corps. They

even began their own newsletter, “Cadet Capsule”, edited by Al Tierney.

In 1975 the Optimist Cadets merged with the Optimists Lancers to form the Cadet Lancers.



Optimists Cadets Awards (1974)

Back: Lynn Oram, Guard-of-the-Year; Lynda Baillie, Cadet-of-the-Year; Bob Moore, Section-of-the-Year

Front: George Price, Drummer-of-the-Year; Victor Decloux, Bugler-of-the-Year and Pat Tunney, Rookie-of-the-Year



Pat Tunney (now Buttigieg) receives the 1974 “Rookie of the Year” award from Vic DeCloux (Optimists Cadets Awards dinner, 1975)



TORONTO OPTIMIST “CADETS”

a Parade Corps for Boys 10-14 yrs.

In The Optimist Cadets (of Scarborough) a boy begins to see himself at work. He starts off not knowing how to march or play an instrument and ends up with people cheering for him on the street.

But “Parade Corps” sounds too easy. It hardly says the things a boy begins to learn.

When he first picks up a bugle or a pair of drum sticks, he works at a scale or a rudiment. He grasps some music appreciation. The plinth of aesthetics.

When he marches on parade, the line is straight because he adjusts himself within the line: a lesson in sociology: his working role in a group of peers. And when he stands at attention he holds himself upright and straight. And a good thing happens. Pride seeps up in his mind.

That’s what a boy begins to learn in The Cadets. Some pride and self-awareness. And that’s what builds values that work.

The boys also learn about earning. They bought uniforms and instruments with funds from their fertilizer sales campaign.

And when The Cadets put on a campaign to get more boys to join, the results showed what kids think of learning discipline. Almost two hundred boys signed up to join.

That shows you don’t have to trick a boy into learning things. Or into accepting authority. If it just begins to help the boy come up to his potential, then you’ve made a Friend.

Still, The Cadets are more than an end in itself. A Cadet hopes to get good enough to join The Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps, the Canadian National Champions. The boy begins to build a long-term plan.

And long-term plans build better cities, better Friends, and better boys.



Optimist Cadets (Batavia, 1969)



Optimist Cadets (Batavia, 1969)



Optimist Cadets (Batavia, 1969)

The Optimist Lancers

By David Burgess

THE ETOBICOKE OPTIMISTS Lancers were formed in the autumn of 1969 and were the creation of Richard (Dick) Brown. The Lancers were to be a 'feeder corps' to the renowned Toronto Optimists, a drum and bugle corps who competed successfully at the Junior "A" level and had multi-national titles to their credit.

In the spring of 1970, the fledging drum corps from Etobicoke became known as the "Lancers" in tribute to the 27th Lancers of Revere, Massachusetts. The 'corps colours' were orange, green and white complete with a rakish white Australian style bush hat. As the summer of 1970 progressed - the Lancers forged into a very strong street parade unit with a very strong drum line, a competent horn line and a graceful colour guard.

A Drum Major (David Burgess) and Colour Guard Captain (Debbie Brown) were selected to complete the package. The repertoire for that summer consisted of "Perot" and "Red Sails in the Sunset".

Highlighting the summer – the Lancers had the honour of being the first drum corps to play at Ontario Place for their opening day celebration.

1971 saw the Lancers evolve into a very solid and well received street parade unit. The Corps added two new musical numbers to their repertoire ("Song of the Vagabonds" and that time honoured Bob Dylan classic "Blowin' In The Wind") and the song "Perot" was mercifully 'retired'! The Lancers had their first taste of competition on the field at the Ontario Provincial Championships that summer. They competed in the Standstill Class and placed second. It was a terrific first time effort and made the Lancer members interested in further competition somewhere down the line.



Optimist Lancers (1970)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Toronto Optimists Feeder Corps (continued)

The year 1972 was a banner year for the Lancers Drum Corps. New musical numbers were added to illustrate how much the Corps had progressed with the additions of “Games People Play” and “Wagon Wheels”. Both songs featured soprano



Calgary Stampede Diamond Jubilee Youth Parade Pin (1972)



Optimist Lancers

bugle soloists (John Burgess and Scott McCabe respectively doing the honours) for the first time. The Lancers took their ‘show’ west that summer and wowed the crowds at the Calgary Stampede. Upon their return to Ontario, the Lancers decided to try

1973 saw the Lancers make the ‘jump’ to M&M (marching and maneuvering) competition at the Junior “C” level. Under the watchful eye of Russ Blandford and the rest of the superb Lancer instructional staff (including the likes of Bill

McLeod and Lorne Ferrazzutti), the Corps showed that their years of dedication to marching in countless street parades had paid off. The Lancers kept “Games People Play” as their off-the-line and “Wagon Wheels” as their exit number. Added to

this exciting mix was “Put Your Hand In the Hand” (into concert), and “Aura Lee/Cecilia” medley for the concert number and a beautiful, stirring rendition of “British Grenadiers” for their colour presentation. The Lancers completed an undefeated



Optimist Lancers (1970)



Drum Major David Burgess (1972)

their luck again in competition and entered into the Canadian National Championship in the Standstill Class. This time, their hard work and dedication was rewarded with a First Place being awarded to the “Orange, Green and White”! To top off that victory, the Lancers also won the Canadian National Street Parade Competition.

season at the Junior “C” level - capturing the “C” Canada title, the provincial title, the Canadian National Junior “C” title and repeating as the Canadian National Street Parade champs.

After the successes of 1973, it seemed only logical that the Lancers make that “big jump” into the

FEATURE ARTICLE: Toronto Optimists Feeder Corps (continued)

Open Class ranks and try competing against such stellar drum corps as the Etobicoke Crusaders, the Toronto Optimists and De La Salle “Oaklands” to name just a few. This meant that they would now be independent and no longer an Optimist feeder corps.

The Lancer staff decided to retain two “tried and true” musical numbers from their Junior “C” success by keeping “Wagon Wheels” (exit number) and the colour presentation of “British Grenadiers.” Added to the mix was an off-the-line from Masterpiece Theatre called “The Masterpiece”, a really ‘kicking’ drum solo based on the number “Smoke On The Water” and a concert medley of “Cecilia” coupled with the amazing “MacArthur Park.”

The Lancer members approached the 1974 season with “optimism” based on their previous undefeated season in Junior “C”. However, it was not to be

for the “Orange, Green and White” that summer. Outside of Canada, the Lancers did reasonably well in competition but inside Canadian boundaries, the story was completely different. The Lancers took heavy defeat after heavy defeat despite their best efforts on and off the field although they did successfully defend their street parade champion status at the Canadian Nationals.

Ultimately, the continuing defeats eroded morale right down to almost zero. At the end of the 1974 season, many of the Lancer members decided to continue their drum corps careers elsewhere and it looked like the Optimist Lancers would fold operations and fade into drum corps history.



Optimist Lancers Group photograph



Optimist Lancers at Ontario Place



Optimist Lancers at Ontario Place

The Cadet-Lancers

By David Burgess

SADLY FOR THE LANCERS but fortunately for the Optimists, a number of members “graduated” to the Toronto Optimists in the winter/spring of 1974/1975. These individuals were front and centre of the rejuvenation of the Toronto Optimists following their very rough 1974 season. (Ric Brown)

1975 looked mighty grim for the Lancers until the Optimist Cadets Drum And Bugle Corps (Scarborough) under the guidance of Mr. Edward (Ted) Baker graciously offered to merge their operation with what remained of the Etobicoke Optimist Lancers. The “Cadet-Lancers Drum and Bugle Corps” was born! The two separate Corps merged together quite well although there were a few rough spots and some “ruffled feathers” as the two became one - not unlike any sort of “marriage”!!

The Corps kept both styles of uniforms with the horn line adopting the Optimist Cadet style tunic and pants topped off with white plumed shakos

while both the drum line and the colour guard went with the Lancer-style blouse and pants/skirts. The drum line went with the white plumed shakos and the colour guard opted for the ‘beret’ style hats.



All in all, the look was stylish and worked well on and off the field. The music for 1975 included an off-the-line of “Paint Your Wagon”, an into concert of “Chattanooga Choo-Choo”, a concert of “Eres Tu” and an exit of “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers In Your Hair)”. The Cadet-Lancers did very well and managed to win the “C” Canada Championship and came second at both the Provincial and Canadian Nationals in the Junior “C” categories, just being edged out by the London Midlanders. The Cadet-Lancers did win the Canadian Nationals Street Parade Competition for 1975.

In 1976, the Cadet-Lancers built upon the solid foundation of the previous year and came out with a truly dynamic show that featured an off-the-line from the overture from the rock opera “Tommy”



Cadet-Lancers (1976)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Toronto Optimists Feeder Corps (continued)

made famous by the “Who” and a new exit number from “Jesus Christ Superstar” - the ever popular “I Don’t Know How To Love Him”. Retained from the previous year was the ever popular swing tune of “Chattanooga Choo-Choo” and the concert production of “Eres Tu”. The 1976 Cadet-Lancers fielded a horn line of 38, a drum line of 24, a colour guard of 24 flags with 8 rifles, led onto the field by two Guard Captains and two Drum Majors. This unit was successful in winning the Canadian National Junior “C” championship against a solid unit from Simcoe, the Golden Lions. The Cadet-Lancers also posted a victory as the Canadian National Street Parade Champions for 1976.



Cadet-Lancers (1977)



Cadet-Lancers (1976)



Cadet-Lancers in guard competition (1977)



Cadet-Lancers (1976)

Chapter 15: 1963 — A Good Corps, Again

The shows began early this year. On December 1, 1963, Optimists’ mini-Corps put on a show for the main Corps executive. They made a good impression, but maybe not good enough.

The first appearance of the main Corps was, as usual, at the Ice Follies, held at Maple Leaf Gardens on January 28th. February and March saw a scattering of appearances that were as good for exposure as they were diverse. Half-time at a hockey game in Galt, Ontario, the locale of the Optimists first ever National Championship victory, a Drum Corps show in Kitchener, followed by an appearance at the Family Night of the Bantam Corps. This date was always kept as it helped to keep the younger kids in this unit interested and reminded them of their eventual destination. It also made a good impression on parents who were eager to see what their boys were into. Parental approval was an important factor in the life of the Corps, and it was seldom found wanting. There was an indoor show, an exhibition and another exhibition in Ottawa on March 16th. A highlight of the budding season was the Jesters’ winter concert. The Optimists put on a far better show here than the one a few weeks earlier at Vaughan Collegiate. It was a good thing, because the Jesters themselves were excellent. When the two Corps combined to play a single number, the audience brought the house down.

To anyone who wonders about the name “The Jesters”, it has an interesting origin. They were originally the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, when connected with the army. In their other role as a competing Drum and Bugle Corps, they wore real clown outfits as a uniform and used the name of “Jolly Jesters”. Later, after severing all connections with the army, they switched to more military, but still flashy, uniforms. Along with this, they dropped the “Jolly” from their name, becoming simply “The Jesters”. Always good, they were among the several colourful Senior Drum Corps of note in Canada.



Jolly Jesters



Toronto Optimists (Ice Follies, Maple Leaf Gardens, 1963)

Also in March, the Corps had paid a visit to Hull, Quebec, to appear at the show, “Music in Motion”, put on by Les Troubadours. The growing activity in Quebec was to produce some interesting results in the future.

Optimists Mini-Corps

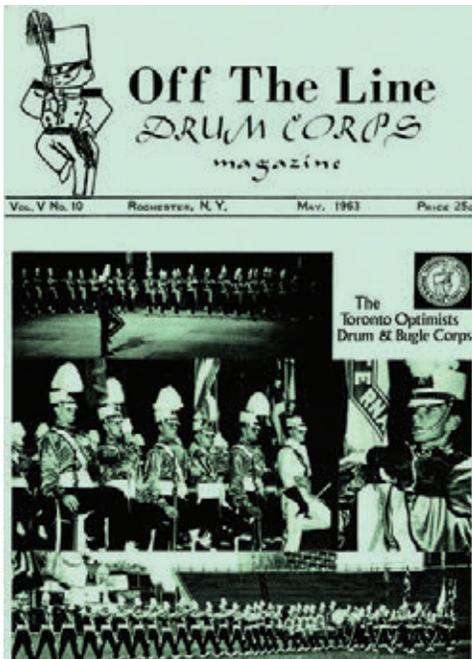
The Optimist mini-Corps was still in operation. Although they had no permanent instructors, their quality had improved from their first year. This activity was a totally new concept in Canada, the idea having been brought from the mid-west United States. In that region, they were commonplace, and the idea had been picked up and introduced to this Corps by Robin Weatherstone. It provided an outlet for people to put their own ideas into effect without using the resources of the main Corps for this. Much of the material used was that of other, usually famous, Corps. It was novel and fun.



Glen Durish conducts Optimists' mini-corps (Hull, QC, 1963)

Other Corps in Canada had these units, namely, Preston Scout House, and De La

Salle. It was rumoured that there would be contests in the fall between these units, after regular competition was over. This possibility was laid to rest in April, when Optimists' small Corps was disbanded. The demands of the regular Corps, with the season imminent, required the full attention of all members.

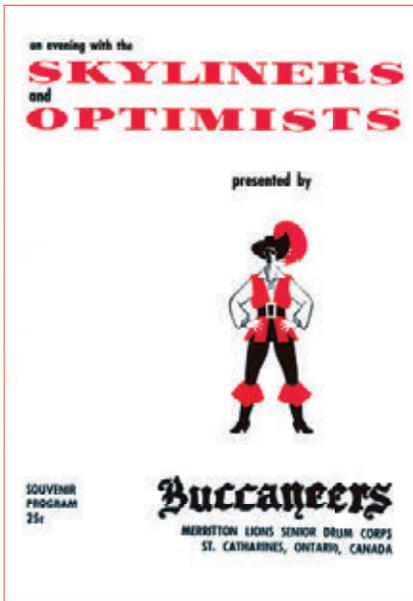


Optimists on the cover of the May, 1963 issue of “Off The Line” magazine

Yet another flag was added to the colour guard. This was the Canadian Association Flag, purchased, not won or presented, but valid. Flag cases for all the flags were designed by Don Daber and Ivor Bramley and were manufactured by the Ladies Auxiliary. This year Ivor Bramley, displaying varied talents, was the drill instructor for both the corps and the guard. For a man who was totally green when he joined, he had come a long way, reflecting his drive and ambition.

The popular Drum Corps magazine out of Rochester, NY, “Off The Line”, had featured The Optimists on the cover of its May edition. It provided a fitting introduction to the appearance of the Corps on the field.

More shows were scheduled before the beginning of the season proper. There was an appearance at the “Sound of ‘63”, run by York Lions. Before their demise, the mini-Corps had entertained at the C.D.C.A. convention and were well received. They also performed with the main Corps at the Kitchener-Waterloo Band Festival. However, the show of most interest was held in St. Catharines and featured the first appearance in Canada of the New York Skyliners. To appear in any show with them



Skyliners with Optimists guard wearing borrowed hats (St Catharines, May, 1963)

is to appear with the best. They proved this by blowing the house down, although the Optimists held their end up with a good performance. This occasion was supposed to see the introduction of the new, white pearl shakos, but not enough of them were on hand. Hats were borrowed from another Corps and the show went on.

Although originally planned for 1964, the Corps was purchasing new black and white pearl drums using their own funds. St. Catharines would be the final appearance of the old, gold drums. At the first rehearsal after the show, they were honourably laid to rest and the new ones were issued. Thus was the Corps decked out properly as befitted the main colour scheme.

The slip-up with the hats, though having parallels in many fields, seems to occur frequently in Drum Corps. Best laid plans, etc. It did not affect the attitude of the Corps toward the new director, as it was apparent that all were happy with him. This is not always the case when there are big shoes to fill.

The 1963 Contest Season

Now, things began in earnest and the Corps, for the fourth time in five years, was off to Jersey City for the Preview of Champions. Leaving from the Canadian National Exhibition grounds, they headed south with high hopes and great expectations. This was partly engendered by the performances of the previous year



Optimists receive a standing ovation (Preview of Champions, 1963)

and the shaping up of the current version of the Optimists. The Corps, however, was never really ready for such an early show and harsh reality intruded. All hopes were dashed by a fourth place finish, eight points out of first. More serious was placing four points out of third place which was occupied by a much improved St. Josephs of Batavia.

The Corps was stunned, expecting a minimum of third, and the result was greeted with hearty booing from the crowd. Well, what can you do? Just take your lumps and grin.

Because of a prior commitment, the Corps was not able to attend their fifth New York/Canadian Championship contest. They had won it for the previous four years, but this year would have been the hardest one to win. De La Salle had come within four tenths of taking it in 1960 but a much improved St. Josephs of Batavia would now have made things much tougher. This was a prestigious title and the Optimists record was a signpost of hard won past glories.



Toronto Optimists (Kitchener, 1963)

The next major event was the 2nd Junior International contest. The Optimists, with the Corps appearing only in exhibition, sponsored it. It was strange that the Corps had competed in the first one, which was also sponsored by the Optimists. Maybe that first year there had not been enough local Corps ready at the time.

With six good Corps and one great Corps in attendance, it was a contest only among the six. The Chicago



Toronto Optimists Colour Guard (Waterloo, 1963)

Cavaliers stood in first place, almost eleven points over the second place Corps. This result would have surprised no one but the most obtuse observers. The Optimists presented the Cavaliers with a Canadian Ensign, in honour of their victory. If they still have it today, it has become a collectors' item, having long been replaced by the Maple Leaf flag as a national symbol.

Comments on this show from the De La Salle paper, “The Corpsman”, included the following: “*First Time that Scout House not given a solid round of applause on the finish line*”.

The early date of this show probably had something to do with this. *“The Toronto Optimists: their past record speaks for itself”*.

In the June issue of this publication, six long paragraphs were devoted to the New York Skyliners. For the Optimists, four lines and the statement, “A fine performance”, summed up the show. The brevity of these comments can be seen as a reflection of the attitude that sometimes existed between these Corps. Although neither of them were of the ultimate calibre in Drum Corps, they ranked pretty high. Their intense rivalry had, and would in the future, provide some of the most thrilling and suspense filled moments of competition anywhere. It could be said that each Corps thrived off the other because, for most years, they were never very far apart on the score sheets.



Optimists on their way to Titusville (1963)

Picking up steam, the season moved on and the next contest was two weeks away, on June 22nd. One way or another, the Corps was working thirteen out of fourteen days to prepare for this, the Rose Festival, in Welland, Ontario. Efforts were rewarded with a win over De La Salle and others, but only by the slim margin of two points. Del took high scores in three captions and were very close in another. They were the only Junior Corps in Canada that had consistently challenged the Optimists. Any let up in effort by the boys in green would almost certainly have seen them take over the top spot.

For the Optimists, a learning experience loomed at the end of the month, in the form of their first trip to the mid-west United States. Virgin territory for this Corps, it meant again different judges and score sheets, along with new Corps to compete against. Before leaving, a message of good will was sent to De La Salle, who were off to Rome, New York. Their horizons were also expanding, and they acquitted themselves well with a third place finish. That was on June 29th. On June 30th the Optimists were found in Mundelein, Illinois, for their first ever appearance in that region. It is always exciting to visit new places, but the gloss was dulled somewhat by a finishing score of 71.73 for fifth place. This was seven points out of first which was taken by the Chicago Cavaliers. This was their backyard, and it was no disgrace to lose to them. Even so, the Optimists took the high general effect trophy. As a sign of the goodwill that existed between the two units, the Corps combined to appear as one on the retreat ceremony. Pictures of the spectacle were used to decorate the cover of a recording of this contest, put out later that year, featuring these two Corps.



From this less than ideal introduction to the mid-west, it was back to Canada, Port Hope, Ontario, to be exact, the very next day. July 1st then known as Dominion Day, now Canada Day, saw the Corps maintain its first place standing over an all-Canadian field. Just three points over Del, who now, themselves, had occasion to glance over their shoulders once in a while. The “Conqueror” of Hamilton, formed only a couple of years prior, were only 2.3 points behind them. Nobody could relax in this business.

Compared to past years, this season was fairly busy for all the local Corps, not just the Optimists. This situation, fairer to all as it was, can partially explain the closer scores that made for more exciting competition. July 6th, in Brantford, provided a good example of this.



Glen Durish and Jim McConkey with Alan Brinker of Cavaliers (Mundelein, 1963)

Optimists and De La Salle captured first and second places, respectively, with Scout House and Conqueror not far behind. Scout House had pulled themselves up to third place and were not yet a spent force. Their greatest handicap was a refusal to play for points, but to present a show designed to please a crowd. By retaining their unique style, they accomplished this; however, it made it that much more difficult to climb in the competitive standings. To place third was no mean feat.



Cavaliers and Optimists on retreat as one corps (Mundelein, 1963)

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 15. (continued)

Again, the following weekend, St. Josephs of Batavia, at Leroy, NY, dumped the Corps. Five points was the margin and St. Joes were establishing themselves as someone to be reckoned with. They were one of the first to come out with the greatly expanded horn line, and this no doubt was a positive factor. Others would follow, until the advent of today’s big ensembles.

Fortunately for morale, and the record, the Corps managed to top one contest in the United States. In Salamanca, NY, a win by six points plus over the second place Corps gave a boost to spirit.

The season dragged on with some hopes and expectations remaining unfulfilled. Indeed, it had become a rare occurrence now to win in the United States, and the Corps was back to trying to maintain its standing in Canada. This, itself, was not an easy task.

St. Josephs of Batavia were on a roll and won at Medina, NY,



Toronto Optimists (Salamanca, NY, 1963)



Jim McConkey conducts the Toronto Optimists’ concert (Salamanca, NY, 1963)

on August 10th. The Optimists were third, six points back of top spot. The Corps was still considered good, but others had improved, in some cases, greatly.

A break in the losing streak south of the border, a situation which, by the way, this Corps had not seen for a long time, came on August 17th. It was in Titusville, Pennsylvania, at one of those increasingly rare events, a mixed Senior/Junior contest. Actually, the Optimists were the only Junior Corps in a field of five.



Toronto Optimists rehearsing in Titusville (1963)

The Geneva Appleknockers came second to the Optimists, but only by 5/10 of a point. Included in the field were the Niagara Militaires and the Hamburg Kingsmen. Not often, in the past had this Corps defeated the Militaires, who were always solid. The Hamburg Kingsmen, who were third at this show, were to become extremely good in later years. When this came about, they managed to beat some of the top Senior Corps in the United States and Canada. This phenomenon happens occasionally, often due to careful planning and much effort. A Corps that has been good, but less than great, suddenly blossoms and becomes a threat to all. It happened with the 1962 version of the Toronto Optimists.

It was back to earth with a bump when this Corps went down again, at Syracuse, NY, on August 24th, once again, to St. Josephs. This time, though, the gap was only three points, and in third place by 1.6 was the Garfield Cadets. These results indicated that the Corps was beginning to peak. Whether planned or not, this was none too soon, as the Nationals were fast approaching.

Before this major event loomed a repeat of last year’s contest at the Allegheny County Fair, near Pittsburgh, PA. This is the show that had been so disastrously rained out the previous year. September 1st was to see a field of corps equal in calibre to those at the 1962 competition.



Toronto Optimists, end of "El Cid" (Pittsburgh, Allegheny County Fair, 1963)

Mother Nature co-operated this time and the contest was held as planned. Blessed Sacramento took the honours, which probably did not surprise anyone, and Garfield was a very close second. Holding down

a respectable third, five and a half points out of first, were the Optimists. This was a decided improvement over the earlier part of the season and, again, reflected a trend toward peak performance. Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights were a great Corps, still in their heyday, and it took a great Corps to defeat them.



Toronto Optimists (Nationals prelims, Waterloo, 1963)

Behind the Optimists were the Madison Scouts, one day to achieve greatness themselves, and the Audubon Girls, who were still a good Corps. The fact that local score sheets only allowed ten points for general effect was a negative factor for the Optimists. This caption was relied on to increase totals. Those who prevailed under these rules had to be extremely good at execution.

On the very next day, the Corps was back in Canada for the Canadian National Exhibition Contest. They had won this every year except 1961, when De La Salle took it. Things would be a little surprising this year. Winning the contest, the Optimists managed to beat St. Josephs for the

first time this year. Being right in the Corps backyard, results like this can lead to speculation about judging standards. When a Corps loses to another unit all year, except in its own territory, things can look somewhat strange; however, it does happen and is not really too unusual. The Optimists had gradually closed the gap that had existed earlier and were near top form for this show. Results also included a four point gap over the closest Canadian rival, which bode well for the near future. Only one week away was the Canadian National Championship, never taken lightly and never a foregone conclusion. Each year increased its importance in the eyes of the Optimists, this year seeing the Corps attempting to extend its winning streak. If they did, it would mean six consecutive Canadian National titles, the symbol of local dominance.



Toronto Optimists playing concert (1963)

It was to be held, for the third year in a row, in Kitchener-Waterloo. New Corps had made their presence felt, and along with the now “old hands” helped to create an exciting spectacle.

For the first time ever, the “Conqueror” of Hamilton, Ontario, edged out Preston Scout House for third place by 0.4. The pattern of Canadian Junior Corps was slowly changing with time. What had not yet changed was the two perennial rivals hammering at each other for the top place.



Conqueror (1963)

Again, in the long-standing duel, things did not change. The Optimists captured title number six. For six consecutive

years, this Corps had won the National Championship, this time by a three point margin over De La Salle. If this was not a record in North America, it was in Canada, although Scout House had won at Waterloo for ten consecutive years. But that was not the Nationals.

It was a good thing that Del was always challenging. If they had not been, people could have been turned off Drum Corps by the monotony. No matter what the activity, dominance by one team, or whatever, is not healthy for its overall welfare. The fact that De La Salle always provided a good challenge helped to maintain interest among fans and other Corps. Optimist success was never so great as to appear insurmountable, and the close



Toronto Optimists (prelims to Nationals, Waterloo, 1963)

runs by one challenger must have encouraged others. Eventually, of course, Del’s unmatched persistence would bear fruit. That, though, would have to wait for a while, as the Optimists rejoiced in yet another title, another notation in the record book, another number on the crest.

As usual, the season was not yet over. The Annual St. Catharines Grape Festival remained on the schedule. In the street parade category, the Optimists placed a lowly third, with Del second and Preston Scout House first. Scout House were always magnificent on parade. Even if you managed to best them point-wise, nobody could match the spectacle they presented on the street. At the night show, the Optimists upheld their forte, field shows, by another victory.



Bantam Optimists (Nationals, Waterloo, 1963)

Note: Whaley Royce, donated both the drums and bugles that enabled the Bantams to get started.



Toronto Optimists (Optimists Convention, Union Station, 1963)

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 15. (continued)

Thus, at last, did the 1963 competition season come to an end. Now followed the usual post season events, some of which had become annual affairs.

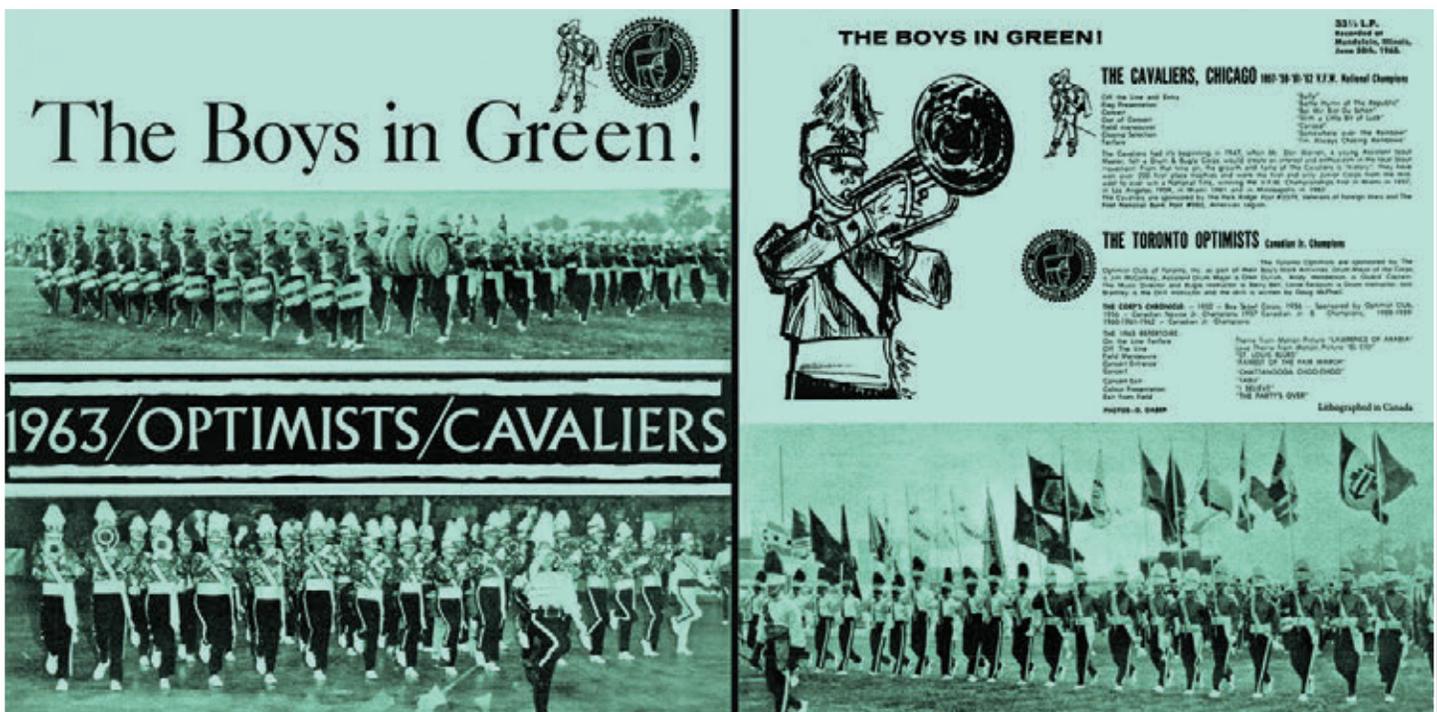
The Jesters held an Individuals Contest at which members of the Optimists took five firsts. It was learned that the Bantam Corps would revert to a parade Corps because so many people were leaving it to go into the Junior Corps. The executive was being reorganized, and it appeared that the whole thing would have to start from the ground up.

Through permission of the executive of the Chicago Cavaliers, the Optimists released the record, “The Boys in Green”. This featured both Corps, as mentioned earlier.

The Corps also gave a concert at the “Optimist International” convention, which was a “must” if it was nearby.

Jim McConkey, the flamboyant American Drum Major, announced that this year was his last. Nobody is indispensable, but no doubt he would leave a big hole to fill. It was also announced that the Nationals would be held in Toronto in 1964.

Finally, the Corps banquet was held. This had become an annual victory banquet. Sponsored by the Optimist Club, it was given as thanks for the devoted hours put in by the members of the Corps, and as a tribute to those who were leaving. Again, it was held at the King Edward Sheraton, presided over by Don Daber, who had survived his first year as Corps Director. Corps rings were presented, along with an honorary membership to one Bill Shepherd of the Whaley Royce Music Company. Unbeknown to most, if not all, was the fact that it was due to Bill Shepherd that the Bantam Optimists Corps got started. His company, Whaley Royce, donated all the drums and bugles that enabled the Bantams to get started. Also, he had been involved in Drum Corps around Toronto in many ways and was more than deserving of this recognition. Thus, with the banquet, the Optimist year was formally ended.



Front and back covers of the “Boys in Green” album featuring the Toronto Optimists and Chicago Cavaliers



Toronto Optimists (Nationals prelims, Waterloo, 1963)

A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of **1963** progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Jersey: Preview (May 26)	Mundelein, Illinois (June 30)	Port Hope, Ontario (July 1)	Syracuse, NY (Aug 24)	Allegheny County Fair (Sept 1)	CNE Toronto (Sept 2)	Nationals Waterloo (Sept 7)
Toronto Optimists	74.50	71.73	83.80	76.75	82.24	85.20	89.00
De La Salle			79.95			81.10	86.00
Conqueror			77.65				77.00
Preston Scout House						71.40	76.70
St Joe's (Batavia)	78.51			79.40		84.15	
Blessed Sacrament	82.88				87.98		
Garfield Cadets	82.26			75.60	86.47		
Chicago Cavaliers		78.68					
Chicago Royal Airs		75.37					

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

Chapter 16: The Middle Years: Part 1 (1964/1965)

This period represented a cycle of change, not only for the Optimists but for the Drum Corps movement as a whole. A greater change than had possibly occurred during any previous equal length of time. New Corps, hitherto non-existent, were formed and made their presence felt, some drastically.

The beginnings of change in the size, presentation, and style of Drum Corps and shows made an appearance. So much so, that barely a dozen years from the start of this period, the activity was changed to a degree that was startling in its effect. Any Corps that wished to not only survive but to become, or remain, successful had to adapt to innovation and invention. Some did and some did not. Those that began during this time, of course, entered the game in line with the dictates of current trends.

The Optimists were not one of these, having already been in existence for a brief, but glorious, length of time. Even during that period, they had found it necessary to alter many things in order to remain competitive. Until now, most of these things had been done to bring the Corps into line with modern competition. When they had started, they had been, by American standards, a little old-fashioned. All this had not been possible until the whole unit had progressed, talent-wise, to be able to handle more advanced techniques.

At this, they were reasonably successful, especially in Canada, where they were still the Corps to beat. The challenge now, and in the future, would be to adapt to and keep up with all the changes that lay ahead. Most of the time they would do this. We shall see what happened when they did not.



Toronto Optimists On The Line (Nationals prelims, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1964)

At the end of the previous year, things were still rosy for the Optimists in Canada. They were still dominant and the future really held no sign that things would not remain that way indefinitely. In fact, the future would, to the end of the period under discussion, remain rosy in most aspects for this Corps.

More importantly, though, the end of this period would have seen changes in other Corps. These changes would begin to erode the supremacy of the Optimists in Canada. In other words, though the Optimists strove to hold their position, others around them got better, and smarter, making the job of staying on top ever more difficult. However, all these changes were in the future, and were to occur gradually.

1964: The Beginning

As of the month of November 1963, Al Baggs was still the Chief Judge of the Canadian Judges Association. After the ruckus at the 1961 Nationals, his durability in this position had to say something about his competence. On the other hand, the fact that he was no longer the Director of the Optimists may also have had something to do with this.

The rumour mill was working overtime, as usual. This was one factor that never changes. A sampling of those current at this time would reveal that:

- The N.Y. Canadian Association was on its last legs. (At its latest meeting, over half of its members were in attendance. This fact would tend to belie the rumour)
- From Eddy Rooney’s column in *Drum Corps World*, there were reports of great things from Scout House. Such stories can only be confirmed or denied by observation. (If the last couple of years were any indication, they would have to do great things in order to have any impact on the current scene.)



Toronto Optimists with a young Vern Johansson (Racine, WI, 1964)

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 16. (continued)

- The Optimists were predicted to win the Nationals by 1½ points. (This remained to be seen.)
- Of course, the eternal, annual rumour made its appearance. The Optimists were down this year. This was usually based more on hopeful hearsay than fact. (A column in *Drum Corps World* reported that the Optimist Corps was looking better than ever, and should stay on top.)
- To show the fickleness of the rumour phenomenon, a lot of other columnists were predicting wins over Optimists by De La Salle, Conqueror, and Scout House. Well, if nothing else, all this at least meant that the Optimists were a topic of conversation, on nearly everyone’s mind.

The previous year had seen the emergence of a new Drum and bugle Corps from the Ottawa area. The La Salle Cadets, or Cadets La Salle. Theirs was to be another Canadian phenomenon story. They had been a bugle band since 1913. Switching to Drum Corps, themselves, they were to become another thorn in the Optimist’s side.

On December 7, 1963, Don Daber, now the Corps Director for the Optimists, visited the Chicago Cavaliers, the Corps that some people claimed the Optimists had imitated. He was there representing both the Optimists and the Canadian Drum Corps Association at the 15th anniversary of the founding of the Cavaliers. Many notables were in attendance, including the Director and founder, Mr. Don Warren.



LaSalle Trumpet Band (1955)

In her final column in “Off The Line” magazine, Audrey Burns reviewed all the Canadian Corps. What she said about the Optimists was very complimentary. Considering that she was the Publicity Director for De La Salle, this was high praise indeed. Relations between the two Corps were in one of their good periods. It would not always be that way.



Toronto Optimists rehearsing (Easter weekend, 1964)

The Corps itself introduced a lot of new music into its field show this year. “Who Will Buy” and “As Long As He Needs Me” from the musical “Oliver”, both popular and current pieces, “El Cumbanchero” for concert, with “It’s Legitimate” and “Jamaican Rumba”. The two final numbers, “I Believe” and “The Party’s Over” were holdovers from the 1962 show. Both among the best numbers ever played by the Optimists. One reason for their retention was that they were hard to replace effectively.

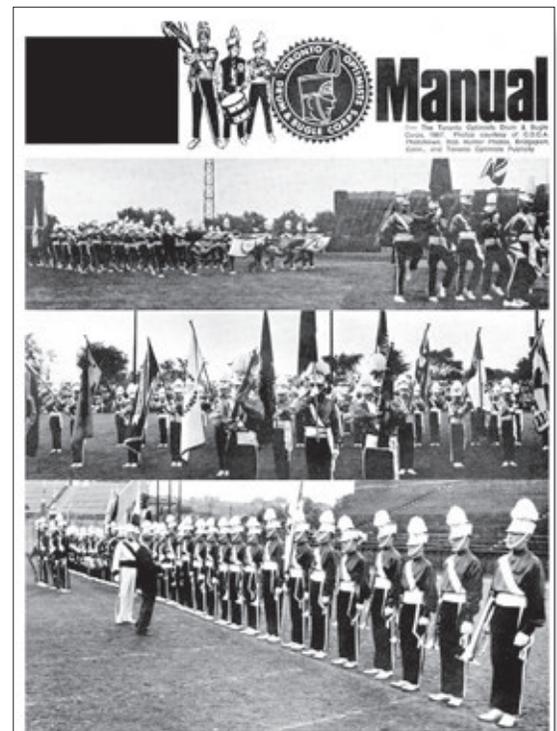


Toronto Optimists playing the intro to “Who Will Buy” (1964)

The Bureaucracy

Along with this new music came something else, a growing bureaucracy that wrapped the Corps in ever longer tentacles of rules and regulations. All this was designed to ensure the continuance of their winning ways. It attempted to make the Corps more efficient in every way and, possibly, taking it further from its original fun-like atmosphere in the process. It was a step towards the operation of Corps as they are often run today, in the decade of the nineties. Let’s take a closer look at some of this heavy-duty organizational activity promoted under the auspices of the director, Don Daber.

First, in order to get the message across, a new version of “Green Capsule Comments” was used. This publication, now going into its fourth year, was the Corps paper and available to anyone else if they were interested. The new version was called “Inside” and was for Optimist Corps members only, as was the information in it. Through its pages were issued all the new methods and systems to be put into practice. They covered just about every aspect of the Corps and its activities. Some of these, all covered by numerous rules, were: Behaviour, Rehearsals, Corps Jackets, Trips, Corps Policies, Drill, Music, Organization, Dues, Uniforms, etc., etc., etc.



Manual for Optimists’ Corps members

It also covered attendance, rules, rules for rules, as well as the penalties to be levied for breaking the rules.

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 16. (continued)

One interesting item stated that no one who was in the Field Corps of the 1964 Optimists could instruct any other Corps but the Optimist Bantams. This was a big break with custom. Two reasons were that nobody could be spared from a rehearsal or trip, and this could happen. Also, you might be instructing a present or future rival. An indication of how things were tightening up all around. As far as the organization of the Corps itself went, the changes were readily apparent from previous years.

Noted previously, the original 1958 Corps had an executive of four people. They handled all the business and instruction necessary. Add a Drum Major and Guard Captain and there was a total of six.

This year, 1964, Green Capsule Comments “Inside” listed a total of twenty-two positions held by eight people. All of these positions were necessary and were just an indication of how complex the Corps and its organization had grown during its six-year existence.

For those who are interested, the positions and those who filled them were as follows:

Director	Don Daber
Music Director	Barry Bell
Bugle Instructor	Barry Bell
Drum Instructor	Lorne Ferrazzutti
Guard Instructor	Ivor Bramley
Drill Instructor	Ivor Bramley
Drill Writer	Doug McPhail
Equipment Manager	Bernie Thompson
Transportation Manager	Richard Boehnke
Ways & Means Chairman	Richard Boehnke
Corps Treasurer	Al Peczeniak
Publicity Director	Don Daber
Booster Club Director	Al Peczeniak
Optimist Club Representative	Al Baggs
Chairman Optimist Club Corps Committee	Mr. H. Jordan
Drum Major	Andy Henderson
Assistant Drum Major	Vern Johansson
Guard Captain	Gene Chepswick
Section Sergeants	Doug MacKenzie, Ross Cation, Dave Watt, Ron Kaiser, Gene Chepswick



Ralph McKittrick and Bill Holloway (CNE, 1964)

A glance at this list reveals that its total is only four numbers short of the entire horn line of the 1958 Corps. It also gives one cause to wonder how the original Corps ever got off the ground and accomplished what it did.

The new “Inside” G.C.C. also issued an edition that listed the Corps schedule for this year. This was one of its better and necessary functions. In the past, schedules had been delivered verbally or written. This sheet gave

a clear concise transcript of all engagements from beginning to end. For this year, it listed thirty-four dates. For a Canadian Corps, this was a busy schedule.

What all this organizational activity was, of course, was a reaction to the needs of a bigger, far more sophisticated Corps than in past years. It was also necessary to keep up with current trends. All of this growth was overseen and controlled by the director, Don Daber. He must have wondered, sometimes, what he had let himself in for, accepting the directorship; however, he was to prove himself up to the task in the most demanding job that a Drum Corps can entail.

What else was happening?

For the seventh year in a row, the Corps appeared at the Annual Ice Follies at Maple Leaf Gardens. This year, a clever change was the wearing of black shoes tipped with black toe rubbers, an improvement over the white buck with thick white socks over them. That was on January 27th, and shortly after on February 8th, it was off again to the Quebec Winter Carnival. The Optimist Club of Quebec City was responsible for this, and it was a welcome break in the often monotonous winter months.

Jim McConkey had left at the end of 1963. Former Guard Captain, Andy Henderson, and former Bantam Drum Major, Vern Johansson, would lead the Corps this year.

Some members of the Conqueror Corps of Hamilton had obtained releases and now came to join the Optimists. There were also some people from the Oakville area, for the Trafalgar Corps, mentioned earlier, who were most welcome. These people were all experienced and the Corps was fortunate to get them. With these additions, it was now planned to boost the horn line to thirty-six, from the previously planned thirty.



Vern Johansson and Andy Henderson (1964)



L to R: Gord Roberts, Rick Morden, Nelson Duffy and Archie Van Dyke from Conqueror (1964)

An interesting sidelight to all this activity was the formation, early in the year, of a new Canadian Senior Corps. They called themselves the Canadian Commanders, a union of the now defunct Hamilton Viscounts and Toronto Jesters. Both personnel and instructors were well experienced and the Corps was destined to make a big dent in the senior circuit. Initially, many of their staff were current or former Optimists such as Gord O’Halloran, Barry Bell, Lorne Ferrazzutti, Al Morrison, and Ivor Bramley. The Metropolitan Toronto Police Association sponsored them, so, at the least, they had the law on their side.

Bill Holloway was now writing the “Optimist” column in *Drum Corps World*. He was the latest of a series of people who had undertaken this task. He was also the only member, so far, to be listed in the records as having perfect attendance. As the season moved closer, other things were occurring.

An article, futuristic in tone, appeared in a publication. It was titled “Is Inspection Necessary?”. It was decided eventually that it was not.

Disbanded were the famous “Blue Eagles”, the Drum and Bugle Corps of the United States Air Force. They had been very good and Truman Crawford had provided much of their guidance.

The month of April 1964 was somewhat of a landmark. The Optimists introduced the new mellophone bugle into Canada. During 1963, they had begun using Euphoniums, three in all, and were now adopting the mellophone. All this was the beginning of alterations to Drum and Bugle Corps instrumentation that was to be a continuous process. The composition of horn line and drum lines would evolve into what we have today.



Barry Bell and Larry Greenwood with Optimists' first mellophone (1964)

On April 4, 1964, the first local formal appearance of the Corps occurred at a concert put on by the new Senior Corps, The Commanders. This was the debut of Optimists' new Drum Majors, Andy Henderson and Vern Johansson. The new music was well received by the audience and encores were requested. On the same program, De La Salle put on a fine show. This year, at the individual's contest in Geneva, New York, Del's drum quartet had topped that of the Optimists. Although the Optimists had won two firsts, to lose to Del on drums was a step in the wrong direction. But, above all, at the April 4th concert, was the amazing debut of The Commanders. Dressed in their dazzling orange shirts, they were a shock to all in attendance.



Commanders (Hamilton, 1964)

Late May saw an indoor M&M show in St. Catharines. Then, when June arrived, things began to warm up.

One week after opening the classic “Players 200” car race at Mosport, Ontario, The Optimists were

scheduled to appear on exhibition at the 6th Annual International Pageant in Hamilton. For only the second time in their history, they pulled out of a show. What made it worse was the fact that they had strove to get this exhibition. It was cancelled due to the imminence of school exams for many members of the Corps, a sensible attitude. It reflected the fact that, after all, the Corps was not everything to all people. Of course, others saw it differently.

“They’re down this year!” “They’re not ready yet!” “Optimists are washed up!” No matter what the top Corps does, there are always a host of commentators to pass judgment. Defending a title for the first time this year, the “Green Machine” confounded all their critics, and the rumour mongers, by re-establishing themselves in number one position by a margin of over four points. This was at the Ontario Championships held at the reborn Waterloo Band Festival.



The following week the Corps was off on its first tour this year of the Midwest USA. They had not fared too well the previous year, but with spirits renewed and hopes high, off they went to try again.

Midwest Trip

Up against the future “Super” Corps, the Boston Crusaders, the Optimists placed ninth. Quite a come down for the reigning Canadian Champions. To Boston’s first place score of 77.4, the Optimists scored a lowly 61.75. A columnist thought the Optimists’ show somewhat disappointing, remarking that they were not down, but the other Corps were much improved. This was a different league here!

The next day, in Milwaukee, it was a circus parade. Then on to Menominee, Michigan, where history repeated itself – fifth and last to the Chicago Cavaliers first, 72.2 to 67.65. At least it was an improvement over Racine.

These scores and placings no doubt had a damping effect on morale. More than a few years in the future, Canadian Drum Corps would go to these places and triumph over the good American units, but at the moment the Optimists were not yet good enough.



Toronto Optimists (Racine, WI, 1964)

Now it was back to Canada, where the Corps resumed its winning ways, for a while. The next few weeks saw the Corps eat humble pie with a string of losses.

It began, oddly enough, with the first loss of a Canadian contest since late 1961. At least the “Canadian” aspect remained intact because the loss was to an American Corps, St. Josephs of Batavia. They had been around for a while and were now on their way to National prominence in the USA. The Optimists were one of their early victims.



Andy Henderson and the Optimists (Montreal, 1964)

regular competition this year but were not faring very well. By competing, however, they were on the right track. The results would show in the future.

What could appropriately be called “Black August” now loomed for the Corps.

August 8 – Rochester, New York

St. Josephs of Batavia won by almost eight points over the Optimists, who were fourth. Second and third were held by two new arrivals, the Magnificent Yankees and the Starlighters, of New York State. This could have once been called Optimist territory, but no longer. At least our old friend, the writer Bob Mannhardt, did not agree with the result and said so in his column, “Rochester Drumbeat”.

Back to the Midwest

Now, it was back again to the field of broken dreams, Highland Park, Illinois deep in the Midwest.

Illustrating the complex nature of this business, De La Salle, who could not yet defeat the Optimists, could, and did, defeat St. Josephs. This rather mixed up situation was minor compared to what was to come.

Offsetting all of this negativity, Andy Henderson was getting rave reviews for his performance as Drum Major for the Optimists, who were still holding an average six-point lead over their closest Canadian rivals.

La Salle Cadets had entered



Bill Holloway and Doug MacKenzie play a duet in “El Cumbanchero” (Menominee, MI, 1964)

CAVALIERS DOWN SAC AT HIGHLAND PARK

BY: Dale Karrigan

HIGHLAND PARK, IL., Aug. 15, 1964

The city of Highland Park was the scene tonight of one of the Midwest's greatest Drum Corps shows. The CAVALIERS of Park Ridge and Chicago proved that they still have what it takes to be a National Champion by soundly defeating the very sharp BLESSED SACRAMENT GOLDEN KNIGHTS of Newark, N.J. by 5 points.

The real crowd pleaser and favorite of the entire audience was the TORONTO OPTIMISTS. They had the crowd “eating out of their hands.” The people out here really enjoyed Opti's excellent horn line, and those “crazy” drums, which, along with some very superb music and drill, had everyone giving the Optimists a standing ovation as they left the field. Some of the Optimists most outstanding music was “Who Will Buy”, “More,” and “The Party's Over”.

It was an encouraging improvement over the previous trip, as the Corps placed fifth in a field of seven. Chicago Cavaliers and Blessed Sacrament were first and second, ten and five and a half points over the Optimists, respectively. Two years previously, the Optimists had defeated Blessed Sacrament.

Titusville, Pennsylvania, a favourite with the Corps, as they were with the locals, saw an improvement of fortunes. The Corps was second in a field of seniors and juniors, losing only to the Rochester Crusaders, in what was the last US contest of the season.

During this month the Optimists had again lost to St. Josephs, this time by five points. It had become a fact of life that both the Optimists and De La Salle were to have much trouble with the N.Y. State Junior Corps. This situation would not be resolved for a long time, and then in an unexpected fashion. Nothing is permanent in this game.

No doubt the Corps was glad to see the end of this month. It had been a definite downer, but educational. If this Corps was like the Optimists of previous years, they would learn lessons from those experiences and apply them in the future. If they had not, our story would end right here.



Alex Glover leads the Optimists Choir (Menominee, 1964)

Nationals

As it has for over two thousand years, August led into September, which in Canada meant, among other things, the Canadian Championship of Drum Corps. The junior division was not a very exciting contest. Again, there had not, been a major challenge this year, and the contest preliminaries and finals were a reflection of this. The Optimists captured their seventh Canadian title by a comfortable margin. Where the surprises lay were in the succeeding scores. The new Sarnia Sertomanaires placed only one and a half points behind De La Salle. La Salle Cadets, the newest arrival on the scene, were fifth

And now it was time for off-season events before looking ahead to next year. It would come soon enough, and with it renewed pressure to win yet again.

There was a final exhibition in Hamilton at the Senior Internationals. The largest crowd yet seen in Canada for a Drum Corps show saw top seniors do their stuff. They also saw why the Optimists were still Canadian Champions.



*Toronto Optimists playing concert
(prelims to Nationals, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1964)*

In the last months of the year “Off The Line” magazine published its final issue. Bill Holloway handed over “The Optimists” column in “Drum Corps World” to Barry Radford.1965



Toronto Optimists (Nationals prelims, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1964)



Toronto Optimists (Nationals prelims, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1964)

A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of **1964** progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Waterloo (June 27)	Racine, WI (July 3)	Menominee, MI (July 5)	Toronto (July 25)	Highland Park, IL (Aug 15)	Nationals Toronto (Sept 12)
Toronto Optimists	83.81	61.75	72.20	82.90	73.77	84.35
De La Salle	79.50			79.40		79.35
Sertomanaires						77.75
York Lions				68.40		72.90
Blessed Sacrament					79.28	
Cavaliers		73.90	78.65		84.17	
Kilties		72.40	78.60		76.40	
St Joe's (Batavia)				83.45		
Norwood Park Imperials		66.30			74.63	
Boston Crusaders		77.40				

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

1965

The Corps was to lose only one or two members this year and an influx of new members put about ninety people on the rolls. This was the most applications to join the Optimists made for several years during the free month of October. To add to this bounty was the possibility of a new set of matched, chrome, Imperial horns for the summer of ‘65.

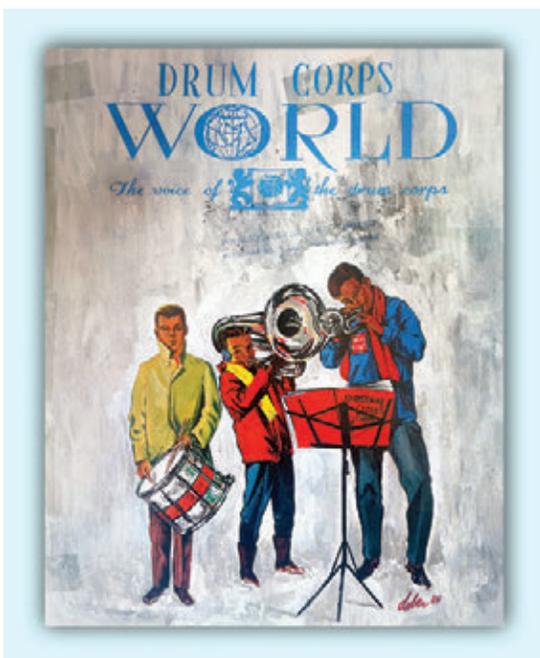
Practices were now being held in the Duke of York School. Despite its imposing name, it was situated even deeper into the heart of the city than was Jarvis Vocational. So, amid these surroundings, Canada’s top Junior Drum and Bugle Corps tooted and tapped its way into 1965.



Toronto Optimists performing at their home show (1965)

It was to be a year as eventful as any yet, with events taking off in many and varied directions. Not, it must be said, always successfully.

The December 1964 cover of *Drum Corps World* was being hailed as a Don Daber masterpiece. His art was among the best around in this culture, which is not surprising considering that he was a professional. Oddly



Truman Crawford, Bill Shepherd of Whaley Royce and Dave Watt with Toronto Optimists first Contrabass, part of Optimists first set of matched horns (1965)

enough, he was never given a nickname to highlight this talent, just “Mr. Drum Corps”.

When Truman Crawford had visited the Corps, he had stressed the need for a new set of matched horns. Of the ones currently in use, no two horns were matched. This fact helped to highlight what the Corps had accomplished thus far. With new instruments, the potential for further success could only increase.

Among the winter activities that engaged the Corps this year, other than rehearsals, two events were to stand out.

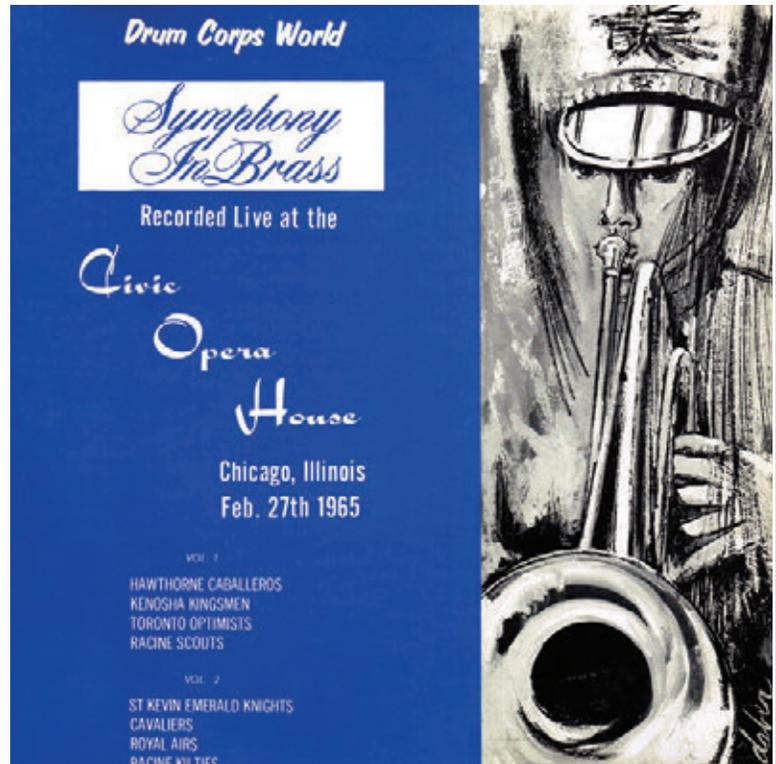
The first of these was to occur on February 27, 1965, when Drum Corps took a step up the cultural ladder, albeit temporarily. They had already invaded Carnegie Hall, a bastion of culture. Now, someone had seen fit to arrange a Drum Corps concert at the Chicago Civic Opera House, and the Optimists were among those to be invited. Drum Corps, with their sparkle, brilliantly coloured uniforms, would blend well in the opulent surroundings. Also, if reports were to be believed, the acoustics of this place were tailor made for the unique sounds of drums and bugles.

Not all reports of this show were positive, which is surprising considering the exalted line-up which included Hawthorne Caballeros, St. Kevins Emerald Knights, Toronto Optimists, Park Ridge Cavaliers, Chicago Royal Airs, Racine Kilties, Kenosha Kingsmen, and Racine Scouts.

The audience in general responded very well to the lone Canadian entry. This endorsed the story now going around that the Optimists were every bit as good as they had ever been. Patt Lindberg, a columnist specifically cited “I Believe” and “The Party’s Over” as crowd favourites. This was the fourth year for these numbers matching the record of “In The Mood” of earlier years.

A fitting conclusion to the occasion was provided when the Canadian Vice-Consul visited the Corps dressing room. Along with this honour, the Corps had unknowingly become the first Canadian Drum Corps to display the new Canadian flag officially in a foreign country. The Optimists flew it in just thirty-three minutes prior to the York Lions of Toronto, who were appearing in Rochester, N.Y. Someone, somewhere, must have gone to considerable trouble to unearth this fact.

The second standout event of this winter was to conclude on a negative note and raise interesting questions.



Don Daber's album Cover for 1965 "Symphony in Brass"



Optimists, the Easter Seals Show and the Musicians Union

It all began innocently enough when the Optimists were invited to appear on the annual benefit telecast “Timmy’s Easter Seal Parade of Stars”. It was the first time that a Drum Corps had been asked to appear at this event. Televised nationwide, all participants were asked to donate their services, including the star, Bob Hope.



*Timmy with Bob Hope
1965 Easter Seals Show*

They readily agreed to do this. They had never been averse to performing for those less fortunate, having done it before. They would again, long after this affair was forgotten.

The mechanics of the appearance required a dress rehearsal, at which pre-taping would take place. One week prior to this, the TV station was informed by the musicians’ union that no Corps could appear on television, even though no money was involved. This was not a request but an order, which the station had no choice but to obey. As a result, the whole deal fell apart. In the past, Drum Corps in Canada had often clashed with the musicians’ union, which, it must be said, was protecting the livelihoods of its members. It was unfortunate that such benevolent intentions had to be scuttled.

Questions raised by this were why did this not happen at the Chicago Opera House, where money was involved? (Though this end of it turned out to be a bust.) Secondly why, later in the year, was no protest raised when Corps began doing half-time shows at Canadian professional football games, which also involved money? These are questions never likely to be answered.

The telecast went on, minus the Optimists, and no one was the wiser about the drama that had taken place behind the scenes.

More news

Optimist Club involvement with the Corps had now reached the ten-year mark. A concert was planned to note this occasion, and three types of Corps jackets were made available. All this was the brainchild of Don Daber, who else.

March 20th was the Optimists first spring concert. They were now immersed in exams and Corps policy was “school first, Corps second”. Well,

at least there was a policy. During the early days, nobody much cared what you did; however, now, the Corps was to be “officially” considered a hobby. The fact is that at this time, and more so in later years, it became increasingly more difficult to regard it as such.



Toronto Optimists corps members and staff (Home Show, 1965)

In a flashback to the past, Mr. Daber brought a record of the 1958 Corps for the current Corps to hear. Although it was, of course, minus bass baritones, euphoniums, mellophones, and contrabass, it made a good impression on this youthful group.

The Optimists had always had an edge in drums in Canada and were aware that, if that were to disappear, there could be problems. Well, on March 27th, De La Salle entered and won the drum quartet division of the St. Kevins individual's contest. They defeated some of the top eastern lines in the United States in the process. It was one of many little bits and pieces that would fall into place and this year saw a renewal of the cold war between De La Salle and the Optimists.

The Canadian corps scene was gradually being transformed by the appearance of other definite contenders. Sarnia Sertomanaires, York Lions, and La Salle Cadets were some of these. For the overall well being of Junior Drum Corps in Canada, these developments were most welcome.



De La Salle's Champion Drum Quartet (1965)

Before plunging into the hotbed of summer, after an unusually busy winter, there is one more story to tell.

Optimists and the Shriners

Easter weekend had been spent learning drill. Before this, a music rehearsal had been held at the Shrine. This was the Toronto headquarters of one of the largest fraternal orders in North America. How had the Optimists acquired the use of this building?

It had begun when it became necessary to find an indoor, Sunday rehearsal spot. Armouries and schools were often unavailable but someone had noticed this solitary building situated on the shore of Lake Ontario and made inquiries as to its availability. These were directed to Mr. Gord Robinson, recording secretary of the Shrine, who was responsible for such matters. His reaction was negative but not hostile. He explained that it was the custom of the local Shriners to have regular Saturday evening parties at this particular location. This meant that the place was a mess the next day and the janitor did not come in to clean up until the afternoon. It would not be in a fit state for anything, even a Drum Corps rehearsal. Someone, however, was not about to give up so easily. Again, enquiries were made. This time accompanied by a suggestion the Corps clean up the place themselves before using it. This practical suggestion found favour with Mr. Robinson, who then agreed to the proposal. Thus were the Optimists allowed into the Shrine. A major offshoot of this minor affair now began to take shape.



Gord Robinson

The Shriners were looking for something to take the place of their famous three-ring circus, held annually as a fund raiser. Now, becoming aware of Drum Corps, they decided to investigate further. Lord Athol Layton, the local head of the Shriners, had been to a few Corps shows in 1964. He presented a favourable report on the subject to a committee set up for that purpose. On the strength of this, the Shrine decided they had found what they were looking for and what direction they would take. Drum Corps was it. This would lead to a string of landmark contests that would become renowned for their quality. Not being time-wasters, the Shrine had already organized the first one to be held this year, 1965, on June 19th.



Order form for the 1965 Shriners' Contest

The 1965 competitive season

The first Canadian field contest this year was the International Pageant, on June 12th. A senior show, the Optimists were in exhibition, somewhat surprisingly considering this was the show that they had pulled out of the previous year. A week later was the first Shriners' contest which turned out to be a big success. It was, however, an all-senior contest with the Optimists and Sertomanaires in exhibition. It was at this show, which drew 21,000 people, that the Sertomanaires were being touted as the most likely to upset the Optimists. In future the show would change its format, becoming a senior/junior affair, and then strictly junior.

For the Optimists, the contest season now began. To help prepare for this, they had acquired, for a while, the services of Vince Bruni. A first class drill man who was associated with the Rochester Crusaders and, later, the Empire Statesmen.

This season was not to hold many surprises, being almost a repeat of previous years. In Waterloo, the status quo was maintained in the form of the Ontario Championship. So it went, on through the month of June and into July. Port Hope, Welland, Sarnia, Welland again, the victories ranged in extent from 8.0 points to 2.15. De La Salle who, due to a huge penalty, had lost at Waterloo to Sarnia, retained second place. Sarnia threw a scare into everyone. La Salle Cadets were showing up here and there, although far back. Even a reconstituted Grantham was back in the fray, and Scout House was seen



De La Salle (1965)

in exhibition. Even so, the junior shows were entertaining but not exciting, result wise. The outcomes were often too predictable. Optimist domination was responsible for this, but it must be said that they went to great pains to keep it that way. Careful planning, long rehearsal hours, and constant brain washing all played a part in this. Changes in this situation would come, but slowly.

The Optimists lost a Canadian contest this year, on August 6-7, but to an American Corps, the Norwood Park Imperials. Things like this are good for a Corps that often romped home in its own backyard. It kept our feet on the ground so to speak.

Making a Movie

Two weeks prior to this defeat, the Corps undertook a major project. They made a movie. It all took place in Hamilton Civic Stadium and was a thoroughly professional undertaking. Motion picture professionals were in charge and filmed the Corps in 16mm colour with synchronized sound. Filming took place in two parts. Initially, the full thirteen-minute field show, in uniform, as if at a contest. Following this, a “behind the scenes” depiction of a National Champion Drum Corps. Thus was a celluloid record of the 1965 Corps preserved for posterity. This had never been done before. The Corps never did this sort of thing again. One reason may have been the cost, six thousand dollars. Added to steadily increasing annual costs of maintaining the Corps, this represented a considerable outlay, an expensive frill. Finally, the title chosen from many submitted, if not totally original at least totally appropriate, was “Fanfare of Bugles, Thunder of Drums”.



Clare Reid, Gord Robinson and Graham Gordon
(Optimists movie, Hamilton, 1965)



Bill Holloway and Barry Radford during filming of Optimists movie
(Civic Stadium, Hamilton, 1965)

Other Contests

Attica, NY

Although there was no Midwest tour scheduled this year, there were a couple of shows still to do in the United States. August 7th, Attica, N.Y. saw another loss to St. Josephs of Batavia. They were becoming a power in New York State, soon to be followed by others.

Kingston, NY

A bigger show, on August 28th, after the official Corps holidays, had some extraordinary results considering the layoff. It was also one of the big contests of the year for the Optimists.

This was the “Pow-Wow” in Kingston, New York, won by the future super Corps, the “Casper Troopers”, with Garfield Cadets in second. The Optimists were just four points back, albeit in fourth place. Best Drum Major was won by Andy Henderson. This was a good result considering the layoff due to Corps holidays.

Then came September, heralding, of course, the Nationals.

Shawinigan

There was a championship to defend in Shawinigan, Quebec, on the 4th, which was done successfully with a 1.4 decision over Les Diplomates de Quebec. The “Dips”, as they were often called, were a Senior Corps noted for explosive power and general effect. Tonight, it was not quite enough.



Andy Henderson accepts award from Ralph Shapiro for best Drum Major (Kingston, NY, 1965)



Toronto Optimists (Shawinigan, QC, 1965)

CNE

The CNE Championship came on the 6th. From its inception, save for 1961, this had been an Optimist preserve. The victor then had been De La Salle. Putting on their best show, Del now attempted to repeat, coming within 1.7 of the Optimists.

Nationals

Now, of course, came the most important local contest of the year, the Canadian Championship.

Everybody always gave their best at this one, including the Optimists, which was why they already owned seven of them. These shows were never considered a foregone conclusion by these Corps, no matter how the past year had turned out. The results of this year's show was to bear this out, as all involved gave of their best. For the Optimists, their 8th national title was obtained with a score of 86.2, followed by De La Salle, Sertomanaires, and York Lions. All the Corps were separated by approximately four points, and, as far as big titles were concerned, the season drew to a close.



Toronto Optimists (CNE, Toronto, 1965)



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1965)



Not only was this number eight, adding to its value was the fact that they were consecutive. As the number grew bigger, the pressure to maintain this momentum increased. Still yet, there was the St. Catharines Grape Festival parade and contest. De La Salle won the parade, while the Optimists won the contest, thus preserving their Canadian record in Canada, against Canadian Corps. This now stood at four years. A summary of the year reveals that the Optimists possessed eleven firsts, two seconds and one fourth, for the 1965 season. The second and fourth places were all to US Corps, reflecting the fact that success in the United States, for this Corps, was not yet an accomplished fact.

Post-Season

Now, in the post season, came the usual round of events and changes. Bernie Beer, once Assistant Director of the Optimists, took himself, his experience and knowledge to the Canadian Commanders as he became their Corps Director. Grantham finally called it quits as a Drum Corps, this time for good. Three years earlier Jim McConkey had suggested an Optimist yearbook and this, now, became a reality. It covered all the events of the past year, along with profiles of all Corps members. This happened because someone was available who could, and would, print it in the desired quantity at a low cost. And “The Optimists” column in Drum Corps World again changed hands, this time from Barry Radford to Frank Mendicino.

The Corps banquet, now an annual affair was held at the Royal York Hotel. It commemorated not only eight national titles, but also the tenth year of Optimist Club sponsorship. The men partially responsible for this, back in 1955, must have looked with amazement at what they had helped create. Corps rings were presented, and a new tradition established, the first “Rookie of the Year” award. It went to Dave Simms, the first of what would be many deserving people.

There were other milestones, some good, some not so good. An eight-year National Championship button was issued to recognize a landmark achievement that no one else could imitate.

Probably the biggest announcement was that the Optimists Drill Instructor, Ivor Bramley, would no longer be with the Corps. He was getting married and returning to his native England, permanently. Always eager and ambitious, he had been one of the best the Corps ever had, making up in intensity and commitment what he might have lacked in knowledge and experience. And he didn't lack much. This was borne out by the fact that the Hamburg Kingsmen, who rose very high, had hired him. Also, he instructed the Commanders, who became prominent, and had an offer to instruct the Syracuse Brigadiers. Certainly, in some other respects he was, if not indispensable, irreplaceable. A final comment on his tenure is that when he left, two replaced him, Doug McPhail and Jack Roberts.



Also leaving was Andy Henderson, Drum Major for the past two years. His talents, however, were not to be wasted, as he went on to front the Commanders. For the Optimists, Dave Johns, former bass drummer, Corps clown, and assistant to Don Daber would replace him.

Not to forget the senior citizens, Al Baggs was still Chief Judge, responsible for administration, assignments, and general supervision of the judges' chapter as a whole. After the usual Santa Claus parades, the year was finally laid to rest.



Toronto Optimists (1965)

The Optimists could, yet again, look back on unqualified local success in their own backyard. How long this could go on was beyond anybody's ability to predict accurately. However, if anyone had cared to look closely, they would have seen the seeds of powerful forces, set in motion earlier, gathering. These factors would slowly gain impetus, eroding Optimists' supremacy and, finally, altering the situation forever.

Let's continue on this trip through the past to see how all this came about.



Toronto Optimists (Hamilton, 1965)



Toronto Optimists (Sarnia, 1965)

A few Scores for Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of 1965 progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Waterloo (June 26)	Sarnia, ON (Aug 7)	Attica, NY (Aug 8)	Kingston, NY (Aug 28)	CNE Toronto (Sept 5)	Nationals Toronto (Sept 11)
Toronto Optimists	75.30	78.65	75.95	77.20	81.96	86.10
De La Salle	63.55	74.25			80.20	82.35
Sarnia Sertomanaires	67.00					78.46
York Lions					66.35	74.95
Cadets LaSalle						70.60
Norwood Park Imperials		80.00				
Garfield Cadets				81.21		
Casper Troopers				81.47		
St Joe's (Batavia)			77.40			
Magnificent Yankees (Utica, NY)				76.976		

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

St. Andrews Drum & Bugle Corps

ST ANDREWS Drum Corps were from Cambridge, Ontario. The corps first competed in 1974, winning the Jr. "E" class championship in both 1974 and 1975. In 1976, they began competing in the Jr. "C" class before moving to Junior "D" in 1978. The corps instruction staff came primarily from members of the Guelph Royalaires, Dutch Boy and the K-W Flying Dutchmen.

In the winter of 1987 St. Andrews merged with the Kiwanis Kavaliers.



1977



1976



These 3 photos are from 1978

SPOTLIGHT: on St Andrews Drum Corps from Cambridge (continued)



1978

1963 Titusville, Pennsylvania

By Mark Wicken

THE YEAR was 1963 and we had just finished a competition in Titusville, PA. on a Saturday.

There was to be a drum corps show in New Jersey on the Sunday (no idea who was there) and a few of us planned to drive from Titusville to New Jersey after our show.

Ronn ('Skip'...but not yet) Prokop owned a black VW Beetle, which was to be our means of transportation for the trip. There was one other member of the corps with the two of us but unfortunately I can't remember who. If this story sounds familiar please identify yourself.

Now, I know this sounded like a fun journey but there was one unfortunate factor that we had not planned for. On the way to Titusville Ronn's VW blew its' muffler and there was no way to fix it before our trip.

For the next two days we travelled to New Jersey (400 miles and 7 hours) and back to Toronto (520 miles and 9 hours) in a car that sounded like a Mac truck from the outside and a jet engine from the inside. The noise was relentless making conversation in the car almost impossible.

I guess the show in Jersey was worth it (I can't recall) but the memory of that trip was everlasting.



*Ronn Prokop, Vic Krukliis
and Mark Wicken*

St. Catharines, Ontario

By Mark Wicken

IT WAS 1963 and the corps was doing a show in a hockey arena in St. Catharines. Jim McConkey was the drum major.

The corps entered the arena from one end and while playing, marched down the length of the arena. As we approached the end of the arena it became apparent to all we were headed for a disaster. What do we do?

McConkey look scared and turned around to the drum line and asked."Can you do a counter-march?" Having never done one before we all shook our heads as the end of the arena approached.

"WELL DO ONE" McConkey yelled. At which time... keeping proper time, the drum line all turned to our right... turning completely around... and marched back through the ranks of the horn line. Everyone followed and we actually did a counter-march for the first time without a rehearsal. It may have looked terrible from the crowd's point of view but at least we came away unscathed.

Learning on the job.



Jim McConkey

Looking Back at My Days in The Optimists

By Jeff Shimotakahara

BACK WHEN I was known as Jeff Shimo, short for Shimotakahara I started in a Boy Scout trumpet band that morphed into the Midtowners Jr “B” Drum Corps. In 1963, I left them and joined The Optimists. As a rookie playing lead soprano, I thought I had arrived !

A memory that really stands out for me that year was competing in the ‘63 Preview of Champions at Roosevelt Stadium Newark NJ, the Mecca of drum corps then. I had listened to Blessed Sac, Garfield, Boston on records and read about them and idolized them. Here I was in a church parking lot watching the Blessed Sac horn line practice. What struck me about the soprano line was that the guys were a bit scrawny and tough looking, but could they blow! And their horn line sounded real sweet.



Jeff with the Midtowners (Jr. Internationals, Varsity Stadium, 1962)

Another memory I have is from a contest in the states I think in ‘64. This was after the competition. A guy from The Chicago Cavaliers came up to me and said “We was beat by the Boston Bean”. (Boston Crusaders). I immediately bonded with him and said “Do you want to swap corps T-shirts”. He said yes and we took off our T-shirts on the spot. I think he got the better deal because I later discovered that his was full of holes. But it didn’t matter !

I stayed initially with the corps in ‘65 but got a summer job in Sarnia in my engineering field and aged out that summer with The Sertomanaires.

A corps that always impressed me was Garfield because of their military precision, and West Point uniform. In 2009 I got back into the drum corps scene and went to Rome NY to see The Cadets (Garfield) with my wife. Once I saw them I was hooked again! From that year right up to today, we have made the yearly trek south to DCI shows, always rooting for The Cadets.



*Toronto Optimists (Nationals prelims, Toronto, 1964)
While playing the “Yankee Doodle” segment of “It’s Legitimate” Jeff held his horn sideways to mimic a fife.*

I would never have guessed back then that certain drum corps experiences from my youth would have such a strong influence on my life today.

A Few Memories of 1963

DRUM CORPS have changed a lot since the early days. Today's corps are large and it takes 5 or 6 buses to transport all the corps members and staff. That was not the case in the old days. In the early days of the Optimists, the corps was small and, until the end of the 1963 season, one bus and a few station wagons was sufficient to transport the entire corps – including our three instructors! (Each station wagon carried a driver and 7 or 8 members.)

For the 1963 Preview of Champions in Jersey City, I was a passenger in one of the station wagons. For some reason I always preferred the rear seats, looking out the back window at where we had been. It was about 3:00 am and we were somewhere on the New York Thruway when

I saw lights flashing in the distance. It was the highway patrol! They escorted us to the next service area. We passengers got to relax while they took the driver away! Apparently, they took him to a Justice of the Peace who found him guilty of speeding. Luckily, he had enough money to pay the fine. The highway patrol returned him to the service area and we continued our trip; however, for the rest of the trip there always seemed to be a highway patrol vehicle close to us.



Toronto Optimists with Terry McKolskey on the tailgate of the station wagon



Joe Gianna and Jim McConkey (Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1963)

Later in the season, we were on our way to a contest in the USA. Included in one station wagon was Jim McConkey, our drum major, and Joe Gianna, a soloist. US Immigration always asked where we were born and the usual answer was “trawna” (that’s how we pronounced Toronto). When asked, Jimmy, instead of saying Jersey, responded with “Cuba”. The immigration officer was not amused!! Everyone was hauled inside and interrogated. For Hours! The rest of us had arrived safely and we were rehearsing – minus a drum major, a soloist and about 6 other corps members. We were also wondering what had happened to Jimmy and Joe and the other guys in the station wagon. Eventually the folks at immigration let them go and they arrived – just in time to get dressed and perform. I think that was the first and last time that we ever had an incident like that.

Continued next page

Memories of 1963 by Bob Carell (continued)

On the Sunday of Labour Day weekend, we were competing against SAC, Garfield and Madison at the Allegheny County Fair in Pittsburgh. On Saturday night we stayed at a camp (YMCA?) in Zelienople, about 30 mi North of Pittsburgh. On Sunday, contest day, we got up in the morning only to discover that all of our clothes, including our uniforms, were wet. We were up in the hills and, at night, the dew can get quite heavy. We discovered that sleeping with the windows open was not a good idea.



Optimists being inspected (Allegheny County Fair, 1963)

No one expected a traffic jam on a Sunday in Pittsburgh but that is what we encountered. I remember almost being late for the competition because traffic was so bad. The bus was stuck in a tunnel and we were stressed out, wondering whether we would make the contest. After a bit of thought and, perhaps, as a joke, we rolled down the windows and made the best siren noises we could.

Like Moses parting the Red Sea traffic parted in front of us! I have a vague recollection that, when we exited the tunnel, a cop was there scratching his head, wondering what happened to the ambulance/fire engines. We ran from the bus to the starting line. It was not our best show but we, at least, managed to compete.



Toronto Optimists (Allegheny County Fair, Pittsburgh, 1963)

1964 — Corps Party

IN THE SUMMER of 1964, I decided to have a few drum corps members over to our house for a party the night before having to travel to some far-off city for a drum corps competition. My parents were spending the weekend out of town, so the opportunity to party was not to be missed. Everyone brought his uniform and instrument so



Mike Thys

that they could sleep over and then take the streetcar to the CNE grounds down by the lakeshore where we were to meet the busses early the next morning. In attendance were Doug MacKenzie, Bill Hannah, John Shearer, Bobby Harkness, Tom MacGregor, and possibly John McAlpine with a few others, some of whom did not stay overnight. BYOB was the order of the day, and all complied.

We talked, sang, and listened to drum corps records at full volume, or at least as full as the old HiFi unit could muster. Some snacks and eventually pizza was involved, but mostly the focus was on consuming the beverages provided by our underage group. The drinking age was 21 at that time, (none of us was close to 21) and more importantly, there was a strict prohibition against alcohol consumption during corps functions. In fact, instant dismissal from the ranks was the consequence if the rule was breeched. Since our gathering was not an official corps event we felt secure enough to proceed.

The evening grew very late, and a variety of sleeping accommodations were selected. Someone slept on the couch, someone on the floor, two in my single bed, and four in my parents' bed.

I was concerned that some nauseous effects could come into play during the night, so I very cleverly brought two steel pails up from the basement and placed them strategically on the wooden floor next to each bed. I had also set an alarm clock to bring us back to consciousness in time to leave for the bus, but we must have resisted its demands.

Fortunately, but very unhappily we were eventually awakened in a most unpleasant manner. Me, groggily "Why does the bed feel warm and wet??" Someone said: "Uh, I guess that was me." Suddenly all four of us scrambled to jump out of the urine-soaked bed, three of us cursing mightily. We quickly roused the others while I supplied dry underwear to my bedmates. Fearing that we would be late for the corps bus and dreading the consequences – blame for destroying a tight schedule, and shortened meal breaks rather than shortened rehearsal time – we



Don Daber, Andy Henderson (back to us), Ed Rooney (of Drum Corps News), Brian Houghton, Bill Hannah, Dave Watt and Jeff Shimo (1964)

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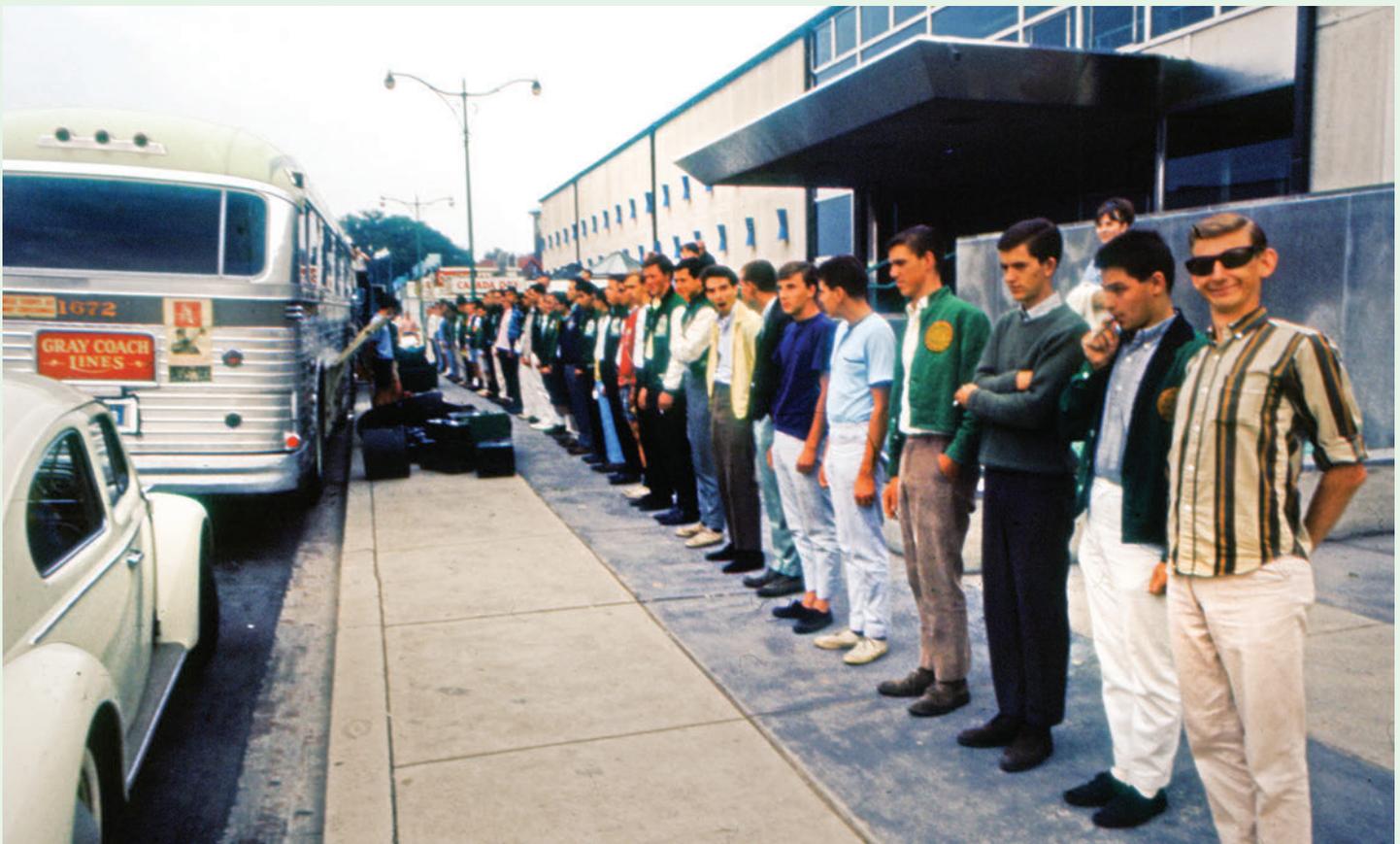
The 1964 Corps Party by Mike Thys (continued)

dressed, grabbed our gear, and ran to the St. Clair streetcar stop. When we boarded the trolley, we flopped onto the rear seats and held our pounding, hungover heads. Doug tells me he still remembers trying to hold his forehead against the cold metal rail of the seat in front of him to stave off nausea and temple throbbings. Through bleary eyes we watched his head bouncing around on this chrome tube. At Bathurst street we switched to the streetcar which took us to the Exhibition grounds. There we again had to run almost half a kilometer to the bus loading area, trying not to drop our shako boxes while bouncing our gear off knees and hips all the way. Our panicked and disheveled arrival as well as our sickly complexion was noted but I believe that the “don’t ask, don’t tell” strategy was put to good use.

Haltingly, but then shockingly, the realization came to mind that we had not only missed any kind of breakfast, but that we had not cleaned up one

single part of the mess we had made. My parents would be surprised and then shocked to walk into a disaster area. They would find the empty pizza boxes, dirty plates, glasses and overflowing ashtrays everywhere, as well as the incriminating empty booze bottles. Worse yet, they would go up to their bedroom where they would see and be disgusted by their wet, yellow-stained sheets and mattress.

I spent most every spare moment of the weekend away obsessing over what I would face when I got home. They were understandably angry with me and let me know it when I returned. The mess left behind by us was even worse than I had feared. Someone had thrown up into and obviously slightly next to the metal pail I had deployed beside their bed as a safety precaution. As a result, the pail had left a black ring of oxidized metal etched into the wooden plank floor. This mark would never completely come out and was a constant reminder of my transgression for years to come.



Roll Call in front of the Food Building at the CNE before the Optimists head out for a contest

TWO UNFORGETTABLE PARADES

By Mike Thys

The Great Circus Parade (Milwaukee, 1964)

THE OPTIMISTS often did street parades before contests, to celebrate holidays, and before movie premieres or sporting events. If asked to name their most memorable parades, those of us whose years in the corps included 1964 would probably have at the top of their list the Great Circus Parade in Milwaukee Wisconsin (see article on Page 44). It was very long, blistering hot, and included many of the top corps of the era. The spectators packed the sidewalks from the curbs to the buildings.

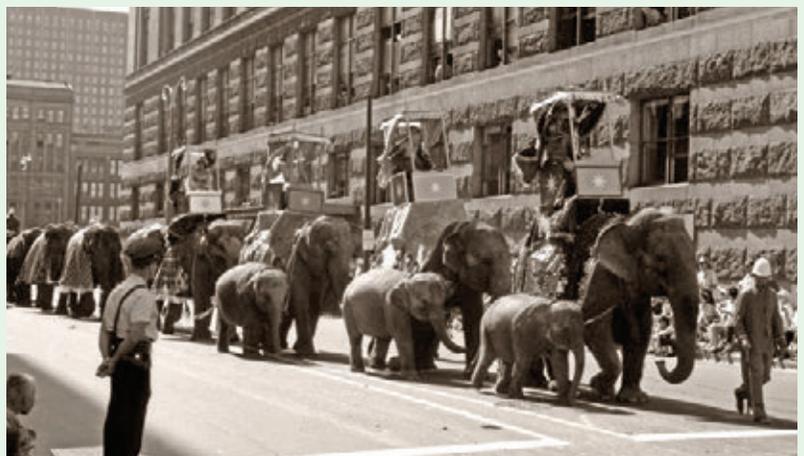
In addition to the many corps and bands the parade had many circus wagons, circus performers, and animals, including a contingent of elephants involved. Although there was a team of men with large shovels and bins trying to clean up behind the pachyderms, we still had to swerve aside occasionally to avoid some of their leavings. Because of the extreme heat there were many rest stops, during which parade officials would carry big trays filled with containers of beer out to the marching members. Milwaukee did consider itself the beer capital of the world, after all. Unfortunately, since the consumption of any alcohol was strictly “verboten” in the corps, we had to wait for the water and soft drinks trays to come along. At the end of the parade there was much intermingling between the various corps and other musical groups, making for a most memorable experience.

Toronto: 1963

For me, however, there was another parade, the previous year, that was even more unforgettable. In most of our parades, the

colour guard would be out front leading the drum major and the drum line. Next, the horn line usually marched in a block of six rows of six horns, with the 18 sopranos forming the first three rows, the six French Horns forming the next row, and two rows of the lower brass making up the last two rows. Very occasionally, if the road was wide enough and we wanted to make an impression with our ability to march in perfectly straight lines, we would have the horns in two lines of eighteen each. We chose this setup one hot, bright sunshiny 1963 summer day in Toronto. The parade route was packed with people out to enjoy the spectacle.

I was in the second (the very last) row. We were not all together in our section but interspersed with high and lower brass at random, keeping our line “dressed” while playing by making sure our elbows were in constant contact with those of our neighbor on each side. As often happened, there was a small delay in the parade, and we had to wait for things to move forward again by marking time while still playing our musical selection. As mentioned, it was a very bright sunny day, and while marking time and playing my French Horn, the sun was being reflected off the bell of my horn and straight into my eyes. It was similar to being blinded by a flash of sunlight reflecting off a car windshield, but constant. I knew that I should not try to avoid the blinding glare by angling or tilting my horn away from the straight and narrow. I just had to suffer



These guys preceded us in the parade (Great Circus Parade, 1964)

Continued next page

Two Unforgettable Parades (continued)

and squeeze my eyes shut tight. The next thing I knew, the sound of our music was taking on peculiar properties. It seemed to become very mellow and was taking on an eerie receding quality - a diminuendo such as I had never heard before. At the same time, my own playing was becoming more and more predominant. This all indicated to me that I had better force my eyes open right away. As I squinted with one watery eye I saw the rest of the corps proceeding down the street while I was still marking time and playing my horn. I quickly ran up to rejoin the last line and fill in the blank that I had left open. This had all seemed to me to take forever, but it must have been only eight or nine beats at most. We finished the number and marched on as if nothing had gone awry.

Looking back on it before our next number, through my embarrassment, the only somewhat redeeming factor was that my “unintended solo” had sounded pretty good, with proper attacks, releases, dynamics, and tone. Unfortunately, I also vaguely remembered hearing some laughter from the crowd as I ran up



Great Britain Wagon (Great Circus Parade, Milwaukee, 1964)

into my spot. Not unexpectedly, there were some older members who let me know of their displeasure at my blunder in no uncertain terms later. I did not even have the excuse of being a rookie anymore. The embarrassing incident did make me more aware of the importance of paying closer attention to details (such as maintaining the slight pressure on the elbows of the horn players to the right and left of me) from then on.



Toronto Optimists (Great Circus Parade, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1964)

The Great Circus Parade

By Monica Witkowski
from the *Encyclopaedia of Milwaukee*

PERHAPS IT'S NO SURPRISE that in a city made famous by beer, Schlitz Brewing brought the circus to the streets of Milwaukee by sponsoring the first Great Circus Parade in 1963. As a fundraiser for the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, the Great Circus Parade featured animals, circus wagons, marching bands, wagons, clowns, and circus performers. The parade, held twenty-nine times in Milwaukee, attracted tens of thousands of spectators each year, making it one of the largest spectator events in the state.

The Great Circus Parade honored the many circuses that had originated in Wisconsin. The most prominent circus in the state was founded by the Ringling Brothers, whose family had moved from Iowa to Baraboo when the boys were young. In 1884, five of the brothers founded the Ringling Brothers Circus in their home town. In 1907, the brothers bought out their largest competitor, the Barnum & Bailey Circus, to create one of the largest circuses in the United States. The Ringling Brothers Circus normally went into winter quarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin, now the site of

the Wisconsin Historical Society's Circus World Museum.

The Great Circus Parade was born of the collaboration of C.P. "Chappie" Fox and Ben Barkin. Fox, a self-taught circus historian, was director of the Circus World



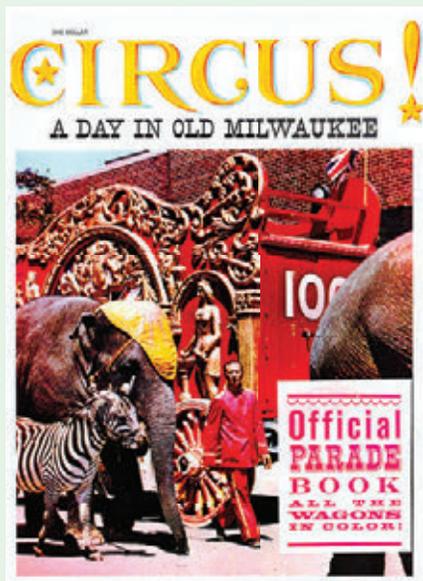
Cole Bros Wagon (Milwaukee Circus Parade)

Museum in Baraboo from 1960 to 1972. He focused on finding and restoring antique circus wagons from all over the United States, eventually accumulating over 120 wagons and other circus vehicles. This trademark of the museum was expensive, and Fox turned to Ben Barkin, a Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company public relations specialist in Milwaukee to raise interest and funds for the expansion of the Circus World Museum. They convinced the company to finance a parade.

The parade format represented a period in American history, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when circuses traveled by rail from town to town. They held parades in each city to attract publicity and paying customers, with bands, "wild" animals, and elaborately ornamented wagons. The Great Circus Parade featured its own train, which traveled the 200-plus miles from Baraboo to Milwaukee by way of northern Chicago suburbs like Arlington Heights, Barrington, and Palatine. Once the parade train arrived in Milwaukee, the public was invited to Veterans Park on the lakefront to get close looks at the animals, circus performers, and wagons. In 2009, the last time the parade was held, the Great Circus Parade Festival ran for four days prior to the parade.

The first parade was held in Milwaukee in 1963. A few years later, after renowned actor Ernest Borgnine revealed to Tonight Show host Johnny Carson his dream to play a clown, Barkin proposed

Continued next page



Cover of Program for 1964 parade

THE GREAT CIRCUS PARADE (continued)

that the actor appear in the parade. The Oscar-winning actor appeared as the “Grand Clown” in every parade held over the next three decades. Even a hiatus from 1973 to 1985 could not permanently derail the parade. After its return in 1985, the Great Circus Parade continued to attract thousands of spectators and various celebrities. In 1988, Spuds MacKenzie, the bull terrier who famously represented Budweiser Brewing rode in a carriage in the parade. In the same year, the parade featured the world’s oldest circus carriage. The 2009 parade featured over fifty carriages, along with clowns, bands, and exotic animals (in 1989, there were a total of 750 horses in the parade). One of the most dynamic attractions of the parade for a number of years was Iowa farmer Elmer Sparrow’s 40 Horse Hitch. The feat had not been attempted since 1904, when horses were still used to move circuses into town, but Sparrow brought his team to the parade a number of times in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

The parade has faced its share of difficulties. The parade was cancelled in 1968 due to racial tensions in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, and in 1994, four Clydesdale horses broke free from a wagon, bolting into the crowd, and injuring at least ten spectators. Early in its existence, mayors of cities such as Chicago and New York attempted to have the parade moved to their cities. However, Barkin refused to see the parade leave Milwaukee. He stated “no one



Larue Olson rides Pat, a buffalo (Circus Parade, 1964)

else can do this parade, because no one else has the wagons.” But the primary difficulty over the years was lack of funding. Indeed, for most of the 1970s and early 1980s, the lack of sponsors forced the parade into a twelve-year hiatus, from 1973 to 1985.

Due to lack of financing, the parade was officially cancelled after 2003 parade; founder Chappie Fox died in the same year (Ben Barkin had died in 2001). However, in 2009 Bill Fox, Chappie Fox’s nephew, helped lead the effort to raise \$1.5 million to hold the parade one last time.



Great Britain Wagon from Circus Parade



Toronto Optimists On The Line (Movie shoot, Hamilton. 1965)

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