

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

# “FROM TORONTO... THE OPTIMISTS!”



## A Story of The Toronto Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps



*By Colin Hedworth*



# **“From Toronto ... The Optimists !”**

**The Story of a Drum Corps**

*By Colin Hedworth*  
in collaboration with  
*Don Daber*



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# Draft

*This book is dedicated to all those who were in,  
or were associated with, the Toronto Optimists,  
especially those who, for whatever reason,  
are not mentioned by name.*

# Version



## About the Author

Colin Hedworth was a charter member of both the Toronto Optimists, as a marching member, and the Seneca Optimists, as a member of their support staff. He played tenor drum with the Toronto Optimists until he aged out at the end of 1962. Colin joined the equipment department of the Toronto Optimists at the end of 1975. As a result, he was also there when the Seneca Optimists began. He stayed with the Seneca Optimists until the Corps folded. During the intervening years Colin maintained an active connection with the corps and its members.

This book is a manifestation of Colin's love for the Optimists. Colin spent a great deal of time, over a number of years, researching the information that has been included. In addition to the numerous hours spent talking to Don Daber Colin contacted former staff and members of the Scout Band, Opti-Corps, the Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Optimists. He also talked with staff and corps members of some of Optimists competitors. His goal was to gather and discuss various versions of stories in an attempt to validate the veracity of the material included.

Sadly, Colin passed away in July 2013 without having had the opportunity to see his book published.



2008: Colin Hedworth

## Publisher's Forward

The writer of a History has a style and purpose while the reader has expectations. Readers will often wonder why certain material was included and why other material was excluded. Sometimes there is a conscious reason; however, it's often just the way it was written. In addition, the goal of some writers is to create a historically accurate document which includes only information that can be verified as fact. Other writers have a story telling style that relies on memories.

This book is a reflection of Colin Hedworth's perspective on the Optimists and its history. Some parts of this story are based on factual information that can be verified (dates, scores, etc.). Other parts of this story rely on the memories of Colin and those with whom he spoke. Of course, each of us knows that memory can be faulty and that individuals often have different memories of the same situation. As a result it is natural that a reader might question some of what they read here.

If a reader notices factual errors in something that has been included, please let me know. Since Colin has passed away, he cannot make any changes; however, for major errors I will consider adding a footnote in the appropriate place.

In the future others may choose to retell the story in their own way. For now, this is Colin's story. We hope that you enjoy this book and the memories of friends and past experiences that might arise.

The original version of this book was handwritten by Colin and photocopied. The editor has attempted to leave Colin's words intact. He has corrected errors that were introduced in the transition from cursive to digital format, added a few footnotes and enhanced the digital version with photos.

Bob Carell, October 2014



Bob Carell (circa 1965)

**Note:** An Acrobat version of this book can be found on the Optimists Alumni website.

- ▶ Website: [www.optimists-alumni.org](http://www.optimists-alumni.org)
- ▶ Optimists Photo Gallery: [www.optimists-alumni.org/photos](http://www.optimists-alumni.org/photos)
- ▶ Colin's book: [www.optimists-alumni.org/colins\\_book.htm](http://www.optimists-alumni.org/colins_book.htm)
- ▶ Email the Editor: Bob Carell Toronto\_Optimist at rogers dot com



## **Preface from Book One**

This book was born in a Greek restaurant on the Danforth. Colin Hedworth, Paul Thompson and Don Daber concluded a parade corps rehearsal and, as always, the talk turned to drum corps past and present.

Daber asked, “Why not put your knowledge to work, Colin, and write about the Optimists, especially the early years when you marched?” A few days later Colin phoned and agreed.

When he completed the story of his marching years Colin went further. He borrowed the Green Capsule newsletter files, back copies of drum corps magazines, and correspondence to complete the Optimists Years and end Book One. Book Two will cover the Seneca Optimists. Photos and Graphics from the corps’ files illustrate this book. And, no, the rumour that Colin will next do the De La Salle story are not correct. My congratulations to Colin on this, the Toronto Optimists Story.

Don Daber, Toronto, May 2, 2001

## Acknowledgements from Book One

This is a list of all those who, in one way or another, contributed to this story. Without them it would not have been possible...

Mrs. G Baggs, Vince Macciocchi, Mrs. Nonie McKolskey-Beer, Bill McNabb, Ivor Bramley, Dave Hanks, Mrs. Nancy Perrin, Al Tierney, Rick Scanlan, Mrs. Bev Ransom, Don Daber, Ed Nanni, Barry Bell, Phil Hennings, Eddie Collins, Mrs. Kerry Armstrong, Lorne Ferrazzutti, Claudia Sauve-Kendal, Jim Patton, Al Miller, John Robins, Paul Thompson, Vic Krukliis, Al Morrison, Terry McKolskey.

### Publications used for research

- ▶ “Magic On The March”, Preston Scout House
- ▶ “Drum Corps World” Magazine (Current)
- ▶ “Drum Corps World” Magazine (Original)
- ▶ “Drum Corps News”
- ▶ “Drum Corps Digest”
- ▶ “Drum Corps America”
- ▶ “Eastern Review”
- ▶ “Drum Corps International” Magazine
- ▶ “Off The Line”
- ▶ “Canadian Comment”
- ▶ “Green Capsule Comments”
- ▶ “Gold Capsule Comments”

A special note of thanks to Dan Daber who endured a thousand phone calls.

Mrs. Bev Ransom who gave of her time and expertise to give this book whatever professionalism it possesses.

To Catherine, who endured.



## Introduction

This is the story of a Drum Corps, not the best, not the worst, definitely not the longest lived. Its appeal comes from the fact that its existence and performance far surpassed the expectations of its founder.

Started as a Boy Scout Street Parade Band, it rose to heights undreamed of, right from its beginning. Before its demise, this Drum Corps had set new standards and established a record that to this day remains unbroken.

This is not an exposé. In these pages you will not find who did what with or to whom. You will not find any slander or malice, other than the ramifications incurred by events as they unfolded. Other Drum Corps have been mentioned in relation to the Optimists to enable the reader to put things into perspective.

This is the story of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps, told from the perspective of a former member. It has been told before, but not in as great detail. Personal recollections, research, and observations, combined with conversations with alumni will, hopefully, give a balanced record. If any offense is taken, it is the sole responsibility of the author.

Colin Hedworth (August 1, 2001)

*All great events have a beginning and an end.*

*Sometimes the end can be slow in coming. When it does arrive, its finality can be unnerving to those who shared its unfolding.*

*It is then that these participants begin to look back, to speculate, to wonder why and to remember how wonderful it all was.*

*The truth of this is no more evident than when those inextricably involved in the event get together and the stories begin to flow.*

*Looking back, 1952 seemed a much simpler time than today.*

*Still to those involved the events were no less exciting.*

*This is how the story began . . .*



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# Draft Version

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## Photo Credits

The majority of the photos included in this book were taken by Don Daber.

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## Chapter 1: 1952 – An Inspiration

Some say that Preston Scout House was the inspiration upon which Mr. A.G. “Bud” Parker based his idea for a Boy Scout band.

Mr. Parker was the man who originally conceived the idea of forming a band for his Scout Troop. Bands of Boy Scout origin were not a novel concept. Preston Scout House, one of the most famous even during this period, had been making a name for itself for some time. Perhaps he had in mind a band that would one day be their equal.



Bud Parker, Scout Master

Whatever his motives, the idea of a parade band was enthusiastically received by the boys of the 18th Toronto Boy Scout Troop. The necessary approval for the project was soon forthcoming from the Oakwood District Commissioner, Mr. A. W. Baggs.

Bud Parker and Al Baggs had no idea of what this band would become. Nor did the Scouts who gathered once a week in the halls of Davenport Presbyterian Church. The church was located in the working-class west end of Toronto, on Davenport Road near Dovercourt Road.

In line with the community-oriented policies of most churches, its facilities were available for worthwhile activities like the 18th Toronto Boy Scout Troop of which “Bud” Parker was Scoutmaster with Mr. Peter Chapman as his assistant.

Although the Scout District Office and Church approved of the band, they did not supply the instruments. Mr. Parker paid for them himself and they remained his property. The Scouts were issued straight plastic bugles with no valves, herald horns and drumsticks but no drums, just pieces of wood. Equipping a band is an expensive proposition. For complete beginners though, these instruments were no doubt adequate.



1952: Pre-Optimists Scout Band at Oakwood Collegiate

Practice was held in the church after regular Scout meetings. Eventually, used drums were obtained and a properly equipped band was now a reality. The drums, as was the norm then, were fitted with pigskin drum heads. Plastic heads, if they existed then, were not in general use. Pigskin heads were susceptible to climatic



conditions, but, since everybody else used them, there was no disadvantage. The 18th Scout Troop Drum and Trumpet Band was now a fact. No one noticed, but Canadian Drum Corps history was about to start a new chapter.

“Trumpet Band” was a term in common use in Canada at this time. To the Scouts in the band, the terms “Drum and Bugle Corps” and “Drum Corps”, were unknown. Such distinctions had no impact on the band members who just wanted to get on with it. Rudiments of bugling and drumming occupied their minds now. Soon the rafters of the church were resounding with what vaguely resembled music. In his project, Mr. Parker was assisted by Peter Chapman and Al Latham, the first Drum Major. Mr. Baggs was not heavily involved with the band at this time. He stayed on the fringe but his support was always there.

## Guidance

In order for the band to progress and flourish, they needed proper guidance. At this time, there were other bands in the Toronto area, some of high calibre. From these came willing, experienced instructors. Without them the whole thing might have collapsed.

Bill Self and Ross Wilson of the Second Signals Trumpet Band were two of them. Don McVicar of Leaside and Rolly Formica were two more. These names were, and still, are well known in Toronto Drum Corps circles. Their efforts put the band on solid footing. It is interesting to speculate whether they had any idea what it would one day become.

Under the supervision of “Bud” Parker, the band continued to learn and develop throughout 1952. Their initial purpose was to be a parade band for the Scout Troop. During the first year their appearances, usually Church parades, were minimal. Not until 1953 did they begin to appear in street parades, which began to reveal the shortcomings of this “green” outfit. They only knew one song; however, Al Latham, the Drum Major, with the wisdom of a pro, had them play it every second block. This way, it always played to fresh ears. No one was the wiser.

Their single-song repertoire consisted of “Powerhouse”, a standard march for beginners. Somewhere along the way, the intricate maneuver of the counter march



1952: 18th Scout Troop (Oakwood Collegiate)



1954: 18th Scout Troop Band (Waterloo)

was learned, to complement the straightforward work of street parades. (A foggy memory says that it was earned one night at a parade in Waterloo, I believe, because it was necessary for participation in the street parade.) Despite the fact that this band was just supposed to be for parading, they also began to enter some competitive events. You cannot do street parades forever. Success raised its smiling head in 1953 when the band won a prize at the annual Waterloo Band Festival. No one is sure what they won, but it was a sure sign of progress in only their second year. They paraded with Preston Scout House, a recognition of their status as an independent “Trumpet Band”. A definite sign of things to come?

Preston Scout House, along with Western Technical Commercial School Trumpet Band, better known as “Western Tech”, were the two best junior bands in Canada. The Waterloo Music Festival was one of their major showcases.

Although street parades, for the 18th, were still the band’s main activity, entrance into a show such as this was indicative of their desire to progress. This desire would never cease.

During this year, Mr. Baggs started paying a bit more than casual attention. This was a trend that was to augur well for the future.

## 1954

As time moved into 1954, the band again entered the Waterloo Festival and this time earned the silver medal for second place in the standstill contest. No one won first place, not having achieved the required score, but second was a worthy place for a unit still so young.

It was during this year, however, that the band, having a small nucleus of reasonably experienced players, became subject to player stealing, one of the major concerns of the Drum Corps.

That current year and the next, 1955, almost brought disaster to the Scout band, as they were constantly raided for players. This practice, worthy of the name piracy, went on as much then as it did in later years, and possibly today. The unit barely survived its ravages as other bands eager for success solicited members to leave their unit and transfer to another.



1954: Pre-Optimists Scout Band

A Drum Corps great, the late Pepe Notaro, was noted for his insistence on members staying with their own Corps. Some of this passion must have existed in the 18th Scout Troop Band because they did survive. They were, after all, still small and the loss of even a few members was serious.

Aside from street parades, contests were standstill affairs. This involved standing in concert formation and playing before a panel of judges. All entrants

played the same piece, and the winner was the one judged to have played it the best. This was not an interesting format. Competition was usually other Scout, Navy, or Air Cadet bands. From these beginnings were to grow competitive Drum and Bugle Corps, adding to those already in existence. Ultimately, this would produce a flourishing movement in Canada, which continues to this day.

## 1955 and A Sponsor

And so the band, now well established, moved into 1955, a year that would bring many changes and altered the character of the group forever.

To begin with, for reasons still not quite clear, the band moved next door and became the 157th Scout Troop Band. It may have had something to do with the fact that only one band could attend the Scout Jamboree, and the 157th was that band. This issue caused some dispute and was responsible among other things for Mr. Parker dropping out of the organization later in the year. However, the band continued its regular activities, mostly street parade work. This year was also the first year that records were kept of such things.

Out of total of thirteen parades, three were unpaid, five paid ten dollars, one twenty, one fifty, and one sixty, and two seventy-five. These sums seem tiny by modern standards but no doubt helped the band's finances in 1955. The smaller amounts were church parades, and the larger ones usually for businessmen associations.

A high point of the year was marching through the town of Preston as guests of the Preston Scout House band. Despite the seeming success of the band, time caught up and forced changes, as previously noted.

Many of the members of the band had, by this time, reached the rank of Queen Scout. This is about as high as you can go before having to leave the Scouts and go on to whatever came next. Leaving was mandatory at a certain age, similar to aging out in modern Drum Corps. Many of the boys would have to leave at the end of this year; enough that the band would virtually cease to exist. Nobody



1955: Opti-Corps members Bob Cook, Ron Cook, Hector Roberts



1955: Members of Opti-Corps at the CNE



wanted this. In order to prevent it, the band would have to quit the Scout movement en masse, and this would mean finding a new sponsor.

During the year, they actually asked for a sponsor over the P.A. system at a show. This did not work, so more shrewd minds went to work on more subtle ways to acquire what was needed. Mr. Parker who was still in charge at this time and Mr. Baggs, who had become much more involved since the early days, decided to approach the Optimist Club of Toronto, to see if they could gain their support.

## The Optimist Club

The Optimist Club, founded in 1919, was called Optimist International, even though all its original clubs were in the United States. Its founders wanted a truly international organization, and this dream was realized in 1924 when the first Canadian branch was opened. This was the Optimist Club of Toronto, which became known as the Downtown Optimist Club. Although there are now over fifty such clubs in southern Ontario, this is the one that now commands our attention. Its motto, "Friend of the Boy", is self-explanatory and no doubt provided the attraction for Mr. Parker and Mr. Baggs. Before sponsoring the corps, Mr Baggs was not a member of the Optimist Club; however, the Club agreed to sponsor the corps and he joined the club, eventually, becoming a lifetime member.

They attended a meeting of the club's boys' work committee and submitted their proposal. The offer was warmly received and was considered a very attractive project that fitted in with the club's boys' work. It was, however, rejected on financial and time-consuming grounds. These reasons were given for not undertaking the sponsorship of a large project such as a boy's band. The answer was sent in a letter to Mr. Parker, who passed it on to Mr. Baggs. Undeterred, he sat down and wrote back, explaining why he thought a



1957: Opti-Corps

mistake was being made and outlined the benefits of having a band. He pointed out that too much had been made of the costs involved, kinds of uniforms, and so on. Whose band it would be and who would control it was not even discussed. Mr. Baggs wrote diplomatically, in order not to offend, and stressed the fact that he and Mr. Parker were extremely anxious that the band stays together. He suggested that, under a committee organized for the purpose and with written contracts, the control and operation of the band could be determined.

The finishing touch was added with the mention of the Madison, Wisconsin, Optimists who sponsored a band in which over one thousand boys had received musical instruction. This reference to good returns for a relatively small investment, plus the obvious lure of attendant

publicity, might have been the turning point in persuading the Optimist Club to reverse its previous decision. The fact that Mr. Parker and Mr. Baggs were engaged in such delicate, protracted negotiations that were required to produce a positive result is an indication of how important the band was now considered to be.

This all took place in May of 1955. The band, although now under the sponsorship of the Optimist Club, continued to the end of the year unchanged.

After having overseen negotiations that ensured the future of the band, Mr. Parker left the organization in early 1955. Differences over which unit would attend the jamboree and family illness contributed to this decision. It is not known if he ever saw what developed from his original initiative, but he will always be remembered as the man who started the whole thing.

## Mr Baggs

The reins of control were now taken over by Al Baggs, the business manager. He would be the guiding force behind the development of the band for some years to come, holding the position of what would become known as the Corps Director.

Born in Toronto, Al Baggs was a clever man and will become a central part of this story. He lived at one time or another in Winnipeg, Toronto, Detroit, and Windsor. In the course of all this travelling, he had managed to become the youngest warranted scoutmaster in Canada. This helps to explain his position as a District Commissioner when the band was formed. He had worked for the Dominion Bank, the T. Eaton Company, and the Globe and Mail.

His interests were many and varied, including archery and the collection of guns and edged weapons; however, it was his connection with the Scouts that brought him into bands, and then the Drum and Bugle Corps.

Drum Corps became his overriding concern, while the scouting activity faded from his life. It was scouting's loss and Drum Corps' gain, particularly the Optimists Drum Corps.



Mr Al Baggs

## Opti-Corps

Right now, though, it was still a trumpet band consisting of twenty-eight boys. This small number was another reason that joining the Optimist organization was desirable. It was hoped that boys from other Optimist sponsored activities would be drawn to the band, thus increasing its size. The band consisted mostly of horn players, with some snare and tenor drummers. Now, with the sponsorship of the Optimist Club, new uniforms and instruments appeared.

The blue and gold colours of the Optimist Club were used to create uniforms. These consisted of blue pants, wedgie hats, and gold T-shirts, and later blue jackets with gold trim.



Along with all this positive change, it was decided to move the band from mostly street parades into the Junior Novice class. A few successes, in their new class, kept morale high and whetted



1957: Opti-Corps

appetites far more. In April of 1956, at Stouffville, Ontario, the band placed third and received an award for most improved unit; but, it was the end of the year that capped it all. They returned home from Merritton, Ontario, at the Canadian Novice Junior Champions. In one year they had risen to the top of their new class. Although no one thought of it then, this was a sign of the tenacity that was soon to make them Canadian Champions for eleven straight years.

The Drum Major was now one Phil Tachauer, who would later become active in other aspects of Drum Corps, such as judging.

Although some of the original instructors were still involved, a snare drummer and original member from the 18th Scouts named Harry Clark

was now instructing and arranging. Many years later, Harry instructed both the De La Salle and the La Crosse, Wisconsin, Blue Stars. His talents were, at this time, already apparent.

The Corps, as we may now call it, having mastered the Junior Novice Division in one year, were not content to rest on their laurels. They now made a move up to the Junior “B” Division. This level entailed the use of a counter march, a preliminary form of marching and maneuvering, used commonly by marching bands. No matter what this band did, success greeted their efforts. The enthusiasm, converted into work, brought them first prize in the Kiwanis, London, and Waterloo Music Festivals.

Along the way, having by now become a familiar sight, they picked up the name “Opti-Corps”.



1956: Junior Novice Championship Certificate

## The First annual Ontario Junior Drum and Bugle Corps Championship

During this year, the Optimist Club sponsored the first annual Ontario Junior Drum and Bugle Corps Championship. In competition were the Leaside Lions, 180th Squadron Sky Raiders, Danforth Crusaders, Preston Scout House, Western Tech, and Grantham Police Boys' Band. This was a Junior "A" competition, under the auspices of the then aptly named, Canadian Bugle and Trumpet Band Association. No doubt, Mr. Baggs had a hand in this. For a man who would be the first to admit that he did not know one note from another, or a drum rudiment, he was gradually becoming more involved in the business end.

As for "Opti-Corps" they watched at this championship, not being in the Junior "A" Division. The next major contest, in their own class, was the Canadian Championship in Galt, Ontario. The Corps capped an already successful season by winning the Canadian Championship in its debut in Junior "B".

They won by fifteen points, clearly indicating that the move up was legitimate. With their successes of the past two years, many of the membership had toyed with the idea of Junior "A" status. This was a big jump, like going from the minor leagues to the majors, in baseball. Though most of them were probably not aware of it, plans had been underway for some time, to ensure that this transition took place.



1956: Opti-Corps in front of Toronto's "old" City Hall



## Chapter 2: Barry Bell's Dream

Barry Bell started playing a plastic bugle at the age of twelve in a Boy Scout band. He attended high school at Western Tech, a most apt location for a person of his inclinations. He was soon a member of the band, coming under the influence of Mr. Don McIntyre, the director. Under Mr. McIntyre's guidance, Barry absorbed music theory and fundamentals of drumming.

At first he was issued a soprano horn with which he persevered for three years. He then switched to a baritone. Somewhere the drumming declined in importance, although he still retained some ability, and the baritone horn took precedence. His proficiency increased to the point where he was appointed section leader. Finally, he entered and won the Canadian Individual Solo Bugling Championship. Even after graduating from school, Barry stayed with the band for another two years.

This obvious enthusiasm and background was to prove adequate preparation for what was to become his destiny. At one time during his apprenticeship, Barry visited Rochester, New York, and saw his first real Drum and Bugle Corps contest. The spectacle impressed him and whetted his appetite for more. What was lacking was a vehicle by which he could pursue this objective and incorporate his own ideas.



Barry Bell (1955)

### Western Tech

Across town at Danforth Tech in the east-end of Toronto an ex-Western Tech administrator would provide the opportunity Barry Bell was waiting for.

Many Ontario schools had bands of some type or other. These bands varied in style from orchestral, dance, popular, to marching. The type of band often depended upon the preference of the person responsible or, if part of a study course, the type that fulfilled requirements.

Often the band was a unit of Army, Navy, or Air Cadets that was affiliated with a school. The City of Toronto had more than a few schools with such an arrangement,



1955: Western Tech Band

and the band used the school facilities. Most of the members would be students at a particular school, and they would perform when asked at whatever functions necessary.

This Danforth Tech 330th Squadron Air Cadet Band was the brainchild of their principal, Mr. Dean, also known as Colonel Dean. They were an extracurricular activity of the school and operated as part of the school's Air Cadet Squadron.

Before becoming the principal of Danforth Tech, he had been a vice-principal at Western Tech, the home of one of the best junior cadet bands in Canada at this time and the place where Barry Bell first honed his skills.

Mr. Dean, much impressed by this activity, had determined that his new school would produce a band as fine as Western's. From his determination the Danforth Tech 330th Squadron Air Cadet Band was destined for change.

This band, then, was strictly an adjunct to the Air Cadet Corps and was to remain so until 1956. The initial purpose was to parade the Cadet Corps at ceremonies and regular weekly parades. The school purchased the instruments, and the uniforms were those of the Air Cadet Corps. Rehearsals were conducted during the week, after the formal Cadet parade that was a mandatory affair.

Mr. Dean's ambition to have a band equal to that of Western led him to seek out Mr. Barry Bell. A shrewd move, as Mr. Bell had come well-trained from the ranks of Western Tech.

Barry accepted Mr. Dean's offer to take over the Air Cadet band. At the beginning of 1955 he was installed as administrator of the band. This year was to prove as propitious for Danforth as it was for the Optimist Trumpet Band, though in different ways. It eventually led to the demise of one unit and the growth of the other. However, not to jump the gun, the reference to Barry as the administrator of the Air Cadet band is by no means a misnomer. Besides being music director, he was also bugle instructor, drill instructor, business manager, and conductor of drumming classes. Although he may not have anticipated such a wide degree of duties when agreeing to take the job that is what he got. In this case, although providence was to cast a doubtful eye for some time, eventually it was to smile benevolently on this fledgling endeavour.

Danforth was and remained an Air Cadet band for the year 1955, the first year of Barry Bell's control. He still had the ideas that had been born of his visit to the United States, and the following year, 1956, he proceeded to put them into effect. The school approved this development, and the band now became possessed of a dual identity. Already a Cadet Corps Band, it now proceeded to become a Drum and Bugle Corps that included marching and maneuvering among its repertoire. Such developments had long been established in the United States, where many Junior and Senior Drum and Bugle Corps existed.



1957: Danforth Tech Crusaders (CNE)

Most of them were operated under the auspices of The American Legion (AL), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and Catholic Youth Organizations (CYO). Full competitions were a well-established form of activity in the regions where these units existed. In Canada, however, the evolution of a marching and maneuvering Drum and Bugle Corps was still in its infancy and Danforth, to its credit, was one of the first to go in this direction.

Barry, now that the new Corps was under way, designed a modern-style Drum Corps uniform of red, black, and white, and also coined the name “The Crusaders”. So, the band was now the 330th Squadron Air Cadet Band and the Danforth Crusaders.

Although the school approved the dual activities of this unit, to the extent that they were covered in the school yearbook, the new activities did not always find favour with the Air Cadets. Danforth, however, went its merry way and put together a full-length marching and maneuvering field-show for purposes of competition. They would be competing against other units of similar disposition and proceeded to get their feet wet.

### **Lorne Ferrazzutti**

For one man to do almost everything, at this more complex stage, would prove to be impractical; so Barry brought into the picture another young man by the name of Lorne Ferrazzutti, as drum instructor. This made an instructional staff of two.

Lorne came to Danforth at the beginning of 1956, and as time would prove, was the best selection that could have been made.

Another graduate from Western Tech, Lorne had started in that band at the instigation of a boyhood friend. The director, Mr. McIntyre, put him on a bass drum where he consistently frustrated the efforts of the band leader by always leading off on the wrong foot; however Lorne eventually overcame any impediments in coordination and drumming. He stayed with the band for years and rose to become a member of a championship calibre quintet. To cap this, at the time of his accession to the post of drum instructor at Danforth, Lorne was the holder of the title of the Canadian Senior Drumming Champion. Like Barry, his background and abilities were to stand him in good stead in the years to come. Lorne and Barry were to become one of the most successful teams to ever exist in Canadian Drum Corps. Under their tutelage emerged many fine drummers and buglers. Western Tech produced many people who would contribute to Drum Corps in ensuing years, and the name of Don McIntyre would be included in many histories of Canadian Drum Corps. Many years later, he was duly recognized with an award from the Ontario Drum Corps Association.



Lorne Ferrazzutti, 1955

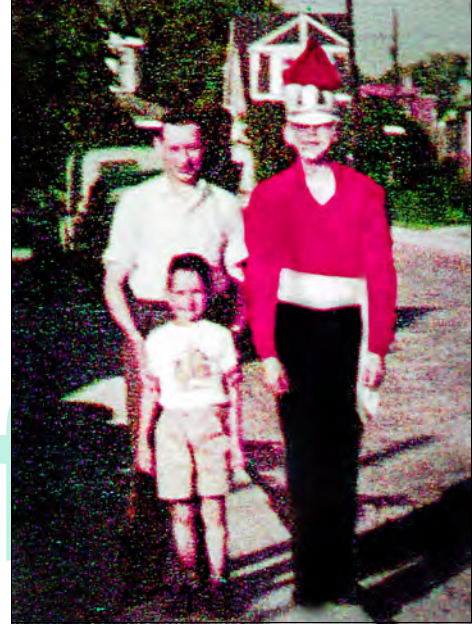
As previously noted, Danforth was among the leaders in introducing Drum Corps to Canada. The use of the term “Drum and Bugle Corps” rather than “Trumpet Band” and the creation and performance of a full-length show, when this form of activity was in its infancy, is evidence of this.



## Danforth Crusaders first year in competition

During their first year of competition, they survived but did not conquer, as had the Optimist Trumpet band. They gained experience and were preparing to continue in their new guise when, in the fall of 1956, the author of this narrative made his entry into the Drum Corps by joining their ranks. The event was not recorded, as it proved to be less than apocalyptic, but does give the next few chapters the benefit of an eyewitness.

At the beginning of Barry's tenure, the band consisted of twenty-four boys; however, when I entered its ranks, I seem to recall more than that. The 1957 Danforth school yearbook listed thirty-nine members. Possibly, the switch to the more colourful and varied activity of Drum Corps had drawn new members to the ranks of the band. To support this theory, one of my first observations was the pronounced enthusiasm of members of the band for Drum Corps activities rather than Air Cadets. This was apparent from the sight of band members arriving at practice with cadet uniforms in bags. They would be donned for the required parade in the school gym and then put back in the bags. The remainder of rehearsal was conducted in civilian clothes. This gave an indication of where preference lay among band members.



1957: Colin in his Danforth Crusaders uniform

Danforth had completed its first year of competition in third place overall, an indication that, in their league, they were not a bad Corps at all. Over them were Preston Scout House and Leaside Jungle Kings.

## 1957 Danforth Crusaders

Rehearsals for the coming 1957 season began in the fall, and through the winter months continued at the rate of two a week. They were well attended, but shortened somewhat by the necessity of fulfilling the requirements of the Air Cadets. Relations between the band and the cadets were less than perfect. When joining, you were directed to the cadets. If you wanted to be in the band, you had to ask where it was. It was not offered. That was my experience. This might have been because the band had ventured into the world of competitive Drum Corps. This



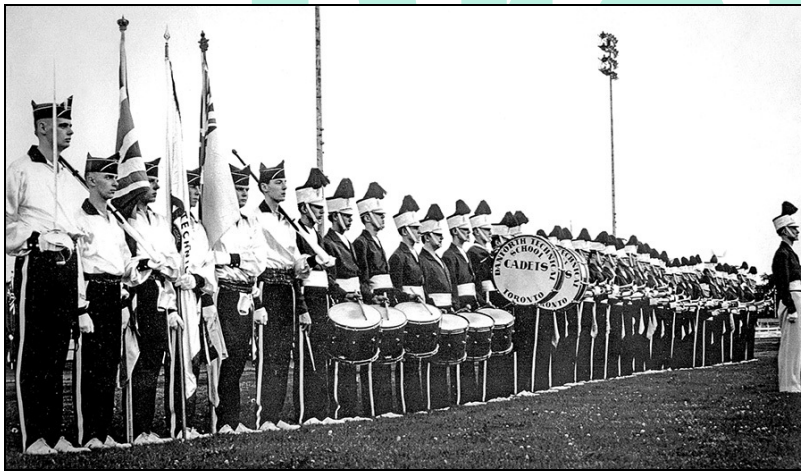
1957: Danforth Tech Crusaders (CNE)



activity was, really, still in its infancy in Canada, and in some places it wasn't looked upon with approval. It was simply tolerated.

There were many fine Drum and Bugle Corps in later years that, having originated from regular or reserve force units, severed relations with the Armed Forces. This was in order to be released from restrictions that inhibited their activities.

Danforth carried on, the general membership being unaware of all this high level political passion. The music was learned over the winter months and embraced a varied and pleasing repertoire. When winter rolled into spring, outdoor drill rehearsals began. These were conducted on the school playing field during the week, and at local plaza parking lots on Sundays. During the summer, we moved to a public parking lot at Yonge St. and Lakeshore Boulevard. Apart from a few lampposts, this location was ideal, as there was ample room to perform a full field show. It was also far removed from any residential area, a factor that had been a drawback at previous outdoor locations. Most people do not appreciate being disturbed by raucous sounds (music to us) during their hours of relaxation.



1957: Danforth Tech Crusaders, On the Starting Line

Rehearsal hours were not long. Although Danforth was a respectable band, no one was pushed to achieve. There were no rigid requirements to adhere to, nor any great goals at which to aim. It was all rather easy going, if disciplined, and reflected the fact that Drum Corps in that era, was still very much a hobby.

The Crusaders had a decent reputation. Their full field show was rarely used at school

functions, gaining most of its exposure at exhibitions and competitions. Practices remained at three per week, and Danforth was consistently the third best Junior Corps in Canada. Not a bad record. Individual members had won first place in drumming and bugling contests, bringing credit to the band. Of these, I was not one, but admired those who were.

Having the talent and instruction that this Corps had, it seems somewhat unusual that they never managed to climb higher in the standings. That was the way it was. Besides Barry Bell and Lorne Ferrazzutti, a couple of other people merit mention in this respect.

Ted Key, a French horn player, later went on to become music director of Canada's Marching Ambassadors, one of the better Senior Corps here, or anywhere. In addition to this, he became a major brass judge.

Norm Cardwell, at the time, holder of the Canadian Junior Drumming Championship, later became a judge, player, and instructor of the highest calibre. Although no longer with us, his overall contribution will never be forgotten. These and many other quality people were all in the Danforth Crusaders.

One ingredient that was definitely not lacking was enthusiasm. Rehearsals were still well attended, and to anyone who cared to notice, it was apparent that the people in the Corps were “all Corps”, as the saying went. During breaks and after practice, the talk was of Hawthorne, Skyliners and Reilly, or “Vinnies”, Holy Name or Blessed Sacrament. Not to forget the mighty St. Joe’s of Newark and Liberty Bell.



1958: Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights

It seems odd that in a locale so remote from the heart of top Drum Corps activity there was such a strong undercurrent of interest; but there was, and this intensity was part of what carried the events of the next twenty years, especially during the initial stages.

During the winter months, it became a custom to often adjourn to the Model Fish and Chip Shop on Danforth Avenue, and sit with chips and a coke until late, discussing Drum Corps. Records were eagerly sought after, those of Stetson P. Richmond and National being the best available. Although not of the quality afforded by modern technology, they were good and were traded and loaned eagerly. Also, magazines, Drum Corps World (the original one), Eastern Review, and Drum Corps News, Boston, were read in order to keep up with the latest news.

Finally came the competition season. There were not a great many of them in those days, especially when compared to the United States. New Jersey, which was a hotbed of activity, had countless Corps and weekly contests. This was one reason for the high level of performance that pervaded the area.

There were a couple of Air Cadet parades, which were compulsory, and then the Corps began to compete. These contests usually consisted of the same Corps who consistently placed in the same positions, so I will limit discussion to two events.

The first, at East York Memorial Stadium, was the first annual Ontario Junior Championships sponsored by the Optimist Club. This was where I first saw Preston Scott House. Although in 1957 they were not the reigning Canadian Champions, they were soon to re-establish themselves in that coveted position. They had not attended the 1956 Championships, and the title had been awarded to the Leaside Jungle Kings.



1957: Leaside Lions Jungle Kings



When Scout House took to the field, to my inexperienced eyes, they seemed flawless and invincible. Never had I seen such discipline and bearing, such flash and polish. The unique style and music that composed their presentation was so different from the others in attendance that even if they had not won they would have stood out. After the show, and indeed years later, people who attended on my behalf, relatives, friends, etc. invariably remembered Scout House. Many years later, in 1977, at a contest in the U.S.A., I was working with the Seneca Optimists and when it was announced that they were from Canada a lady sitting behind me said, "Canada, that is where Scout House comes from". That was the effect they had on people.



1958: Scout House performs their famous Toy Soldier routine (Galt)

Back to 1957, East York. Scout House, led by their white clad Drum Major, Paul "Peewee" Bauer, took top honours. Second place went to Leaside Lions Jungle Kings, and good old Danforth was in its customary third place. The pattern established at this show persisted throughout the year, with minor variations in scores.

At the Canadian Championships, Scout House again took top honours, and with no serious rivals on the scene at the time, it appeared that this situation could continue indefinitely. Developments, however, during this year would eventually alter this picture.

With the season over, those who were now too old for Junior Drum Corps activity handed in their equipment and departed the scene. Those of us who were left relaxed and were ready to begin preparing for the next season. Then a major surprise, Barry Bell, the leader and creator of the Crusaders had become familiar with the Optimist Trumpet Band and its executive. This happened because he lived near where they conducted their outdoor rehearsals. He had become acquainted with Harry Clark and Mr. A.W. Baggs, the director. When this relationship had ripened, Mr. Baggs had let it be known that he wanted a band that could win the Canadian Junior "A" Championship within two years. He made an offer to Barry Bell and Lorne Ferrazzutti to come and take over his band, which was to be the vehicle for this endeavour. Both were interested. The offer, with a stated goal, would come with the necessary support guaranteed.

The Optimist band had not, as expected, grown much in size because of its change of sponsor. The instructors, though competent, were often from within the band itself. This is not as effective as focussed instructors. Mr. Baggs needed such instructors and more people before attempting to move into the Junior "A" division.

Barry Bell, who had guided his Corps through two competitive seasons only to see them always in third place, realized that something was lacking. It was hard to put a finger on what was exactly the problem, but it looked as if Danforth was not ever likely to make great strides. Maybe a couple of more years would have done the trick, but it was not to be.

There were also problems with the school. The move into Drum Corps had entailed more support than the school was prepared to give. Initially, they had purchased the uniforms and instruments, but support had ebbed as time passed, maybe because the band had not lived up to the expectations of its originator.

So, what the Optimist Band needed was instructors and more people, and what the Crusaders needed was a sponsor, one that was prepared to fulfill any conditions that might arise. The stage was thus set for a merger that, in a sense, was not a merger. It was more of a voluntary realignment.

### **Barry & Lorne leave the Danforth Crusaders**

One evening in the fall of 1957, we, of the Crusaders, were asked to wait for an announcement. Eagerly curious, we waited. Barry announced that he and Lorne were going to leave Danforth to join the Optimist Trumpet Band as instructors. There was no effort to coerce or persuade people to come, as taking the members of the Crusaders was not on the agenda. It was just stated that anybody who wished to come along was welcome.

Some of us were familiar with the Optimist band, some not. They had not competed at our level, so we had not paid great attention to them. Myself, I thought, "The Optimist Trumpet Band", who were they? Many of us were sorry to see what could be the end of the Danforth Crusaders. Though not a really good band, it had always been fun to be in, and many of us still went to school at Danforth Tech. Without instruction, who would run it? As it turned out, that school still had a similar organization in the 1980's.

As for us, back in 1957, we were mostly desirous of still playing in a Corps and wanted to be where we could do this. Those who were interested were told to report at 7:30 p.m., on a certain Wednesday evening, to Jarvis Vocational School. This was the regular indoor practice spot of the Optimist Trumpet Band.

Most, but not all, of us light-heartedly bid the Crusaders a fond farewell and happily trooped off at the appointed hour to face whatever the future held.

## Chapter 3: September 1957, East Meets West

Now here we were, in the gymnasium of Jarvis Vocational School, located just south of the intersection of Jarvis and Carlton streets, in the heart of Toronto. This location, the practice place of the Optimist Trumpet Band, was to be the Corps “home” for the next few years.

Jarvis Street, around the turn of the century, was the site of grand homes and one of the haunts of the elite. Over the years it had deteriorated and was now known more as Toronto’s “red light” district. Our school was on the fringe of this, and on a few occasions this would lead to humorous, or pathetic, encounters. It would also generate rumours in later years that had no great basis in fact. These were to come later.



1958: Toronto Optimists first public appearance at the Ice Follies

### The First Meeting

Everyone who wanted to be part of the unit that was being formed stood in the gym, where things were to be sorted out. It seemed like a hundred people were there. I do not think anyone took an accurate count, as horn players lined the walls, drummers stood in the centre, and extra bodies stood wherever they could find a place. Those who had instruments held them.

One fact was obvious, with the average size of a Junior “A” Drum Corps being forty to fifty boys, in those days, not everyone here would gain a position. Competition for places would be intense, but relieved somewhat when some fell away, for a multitude of reasons.

With this gathering were included, of course, the leaders. Mr. Baggs was there. He would be the Corps Director, which entailed being responsible for the entire operation plus acting as a liaison between the Optimist Club and the Corps.



Barry Bell would be the bugle instructor, Lorne Ferrazzutti the drum instructor, and Mr. Eric Burton in charge of the colour-guard. There were no designated drill instructors.

In the Crusaders and the Optimist Trumpet Band, the task of writing and instructing drill had been undertaken by people who were in the band itself, or had been instructors in other captions. Barry and Lorne had performed this chore for the Crusaders. Although they, and in particular Barry, no longer had to worry about the business end of things, they would still be responsible for drill. This scheme would continue for some time, assisted by others of ability, from within the Corps itself.

Along with all of these people, there were others who came to serve in an assistant capacity of some kind. Some of their names will arise later in this story, and other will remain unsung but not intentionally forgotten. In these early rudimentary stages, along with the excitement of a new beginning, complete and accurate records were not always kept. Also, these events took place over forty years ago, and memory, a poor servant at the best of times, has a tendency to fade. Everyone who was there contributed and any omission is not to detract from this.



1958: Toronto Optimists "On The Line"

The job of sorting people out was made easier by the fact that most people already held the instrument of their choice. Having been the cymbal player in Danforth while dabbling in drumming, I managed to procure a tenor drum. This did not mean that I would get to keep it.

Not all of the members of the Crusaders had come to this new Corps, and the total of them and the Optimist band certainly did not reach one hundred. What boosted the numbers was the fact that many came from other Corps. When word got out that a new

Corps was starting, people came from Western Tech, Leaside, Sky Raiders, St. Mary's, and other established units. In later years, this trend would continue, with people coming from out-of-town to play in the Corps. Such things are commonplace today with, often, a majority of Corps personnel coming from somewhere else. In the Canada of the 1950's, however, this phenomenon was not customary.

The advent of this situation meant that no one was automatically assured of a place in the line. It also says something about the beginnings of the Toronto Optimists.

Most of these people were experienced to some degree at what they did, having already marched and played in good quality organizations. This made it much easier to start a new band with a reasonable expectation of some success. In the case of the Optimists, although

success was by no means assured, the outlook for the future was promising. In later years, others would cite this favourable situation as responsible for the rapid progress that marked the first years of the Optimists. To a certain extent, this is true. On the other hand, we were still all strangers to each other, often still with partisan mindsets. None of us had played in a top Junior "A" Corps before and we were unaware of the effort necessary to achieve this. The executive and instructors would also be breaking new ground in their quest to attain improved status. Without their dedication and perseverance, guided by the steady leadership of Al Baggs, and mixed with the all round enthusiasm of the members, the whole thing could have collapsed. The Drum Corps scene in Canada and the United States was solidly established. Long-standing units with smooth running organizations were in control of things and to crack their charmed inner circle would be no easy feat.

By comparison, we were a diamond in the rough, still in the rudimentary stages of organization and development that would acquire sophistication as time passed.



1958: Toronto Optimists (London, ON)

After things were sorted out, buglers here, drummers there, guard people elsewhere, it did not take long to get started. The drums ended up in the auditorium which would become their regular practice place, as well as the main meeting room for the Corps. The horns split into their respective sections and retired to separate rooms of the school, while the colour guard commandeered the gymnasium.

In the auditorium, the drummers, and those who would be, gathered to display their skills. It was a disparate group that individually displayed their skills, or lack of, before the discerning eye of Lorne Ferrazzutti. His job was to take this group of individuals and attempt to create uniformity.

At first, there was a surplus of drummers but, as time went by, some drifted away. It appeared that some had decided they were, after all, fed up with Drum Corps. Others felt that the new Corps would not work. None of us, at this stage, knew this either. This decreased the competition for places in the drum line. The same phenomenon occurred among the horn line and colour guard. This attrition actually helped to bring the Corps down to a manageable size. Some of those who left were very proficient and were a genuine loss. The road ahead would not always be smooth. However, the various sections began to work on their specialties and everybody was soon enthusiastically engaged.

## The Instructors

Lorne worked the drums, mostly on exercises, until the music was ready. Barry, with assistance from section leaders from different parts of the horn line, worked the horns. Mr. Eric Burton, from day one, ruthlessly drilled the colour guard. More familiarly known as “Burton”, Eric was the only one of the instructional staff who had not sprung from one of the founding bands.

Eric was a tenor drummer with the Jolly Jesters Senior Drum and Bugle Corps, who, in turn were the band of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps. Above all, he was a friend of Lorne Ferrazzutti, which explains how a drummer became the Optimists first guard instructor. When Lorne told Eric that the new Corps was in need of a guard instructor, he expressed an interest in the position. Al Baggs thought he would be suitable for the job, and Burton was hired. His knowledge of colour guards was virtually non-existent, but it soon became apparent that the right man had been selected. Taking the trouble to contact the National Commander of the Ohio Chapter All-American and the guard commander of the Syracuse Brigadiers, he soon familiarized himself with all aspects of guard operations.

Under his instruction, the Optimist guard would win trophy upon trophy and always be a credit to the Corps. Later, Burton would become chairman of the first Canadian Colour Guard Committee and, along with others, would help draw up rules for Canadian Colour Guards. He was no slouch.

The term “brass”, as was applied to the horns collectively, really meant that. They were made of brass as opposed to the chromium-coated instruments in use today. The only Canadian Corps that used chrome horns, as they were known in those days, were Preston Scott House. They had used chrome, B-flat bugles, which gave them their distinctive sound, for years.



1958: Toronto Optimists Colour Guard



## **The Uniform**

The choice of uniform design and colour scheme was soon known, when one was displayed for all to see. This creation was the result of more than one mind. Lorne Ferrazzutti and Eric Burton had taken a trip to Chicago and had been in contact with the Chicago Cavaliers Drum and Bugle Corps, as they were then known. Eric was favourably impressed with the design of their uniform and proposed that something similar would be appropriate for the Optimists. This was accepted, and then the colour scheme was decided upon.

Barry had, from his days at Western Tech, always wished for a Corps uniform that embraced his old school colours. They were green, black, and white, which also were the colours of the Chicago Cavaliers. When the design, with the colour scheme, was shown, we were all “Corps-conscious” enough to recognize the obvious similarity to that of the Cavaliers. Chicago had worn their uniform for years and made it famous with their enviable record. The uniform that we were shown had enough differences to make it distinctive, and it was adopted with the general approval of all concerned. Whether we had a choice, or not, was never revealed.

## **The Corps Name**

So, knowing the main colour of the uniform, it still remained for the Corps to be given a name. The rank and file passed around many flashy and obvious names. Emerald Knights and Emerald Cadets were two of them. Then, one night, it was announced that the Corps would be called “The Optimists”. This name was chosen in honour of our sponsor, the Downtown Optimist Club of Toronto. In our immaturity, some of us did not think too much of the name “The Optimists”! What kind of a name was that for a Drum Corps? However, when it was looked at as the “The Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps”, it did not sound too bad at all; in fact, it was not too long before anybody who would have dared to suggest changing it would have become decidedly unpopular.

## **Happy Music**

Because the name of the Corps was associated with looking on the bright side of things, it was decided to base the theme of the show on “happy” music. Although this policy actually only lasted for about two years, during those years, this type of music would dominate the performance. For the coming season, some of the music played was:

- ▶ “When You’re Smiling,”
- ▶ “Hello, Everybody, Hello”
- ▶ “Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams”
- ▶ “The World is Waiting for the Sunrise”

These numbers comprised over half the show. We got down to work in the fall of 1957 and began learning the music. Early on, the ensemble sessions showed signs that something solid would emerge from the whole affair. Due to the experience in the horn line, the music started to sound recognizable almost immediately. Individuals and sections would learn their parts under the guidance of Barry and section leaders. The section leaders were responsible for their section being up to par.

At the end of the night, the entire Corps would assemble in the auditorium for ensemble

practice. All sections, drums, horns, and guard would march and play through the show as far as they had learned. This would be done in a semi-circle, either standing still or marking time, dependent on how advanced the number was. This evening routine became permanent and remained our way of doing things for years.

Although Barry Bell conducted the Corps, during these sessions, he was not the person who would lead the Corps on the field. He had performed this chore with the Crusaders, as well as all his other jobs, but here somebody else was to be selected. The position was given to one Phil Hennings, whose height, physique, and bearing made him suitable for the job.

He gradually took over the conducting of the Corps during ensemble and, by the time the season came, he had mastered the task well and was looking like he always belonged there.

Gradually, the Corps settled down and really started to become “The Optimists”, rather than “Danforth Crusaders” and “Optimist Trumpet Band”. There never was any friction between the two, as sometime happens during mergers. This was because everybody was very enthusiastic about Drum Corps, this one in particular. All anybody every wanted was for this Corps to be good. Anybody who joined quickly became imbued with the same spirit.

Eventually, the green, black, and white jackets of the Toronto Optimists replaced the red, black, and white jackets of the Crusaders, and the blue and yellow of the Optimist Trumpet Band.



1958: Toronto Optimists Drumline

## Enthusiasm

The genuine undercurrent of enthusiasm that pervaded the Corps was evident to anyone who cared to notice. Across the road from the school was the Atlanta Restaurant. On any rehearsal evening, it would be occupied by green jackets, often well before practice time, and long after. What they were discussing is not hard to imagine, and often instructors and executive were in attendance. This phenomenon, though doubtless not unique to the Optimists, was genuine and rubbed off onto others. It also contributed more than might be imagined, to the future success of the Corps. Enthusiasm, however it manifests itself, is a must for success in any field, and we had it in abundance.

As the year 1957 rolled into 1958, the Corps steadily improved, with the music being learned and the show and membership being finalized. The drums had worked on exercises as well as learning their music, in order to bring everybody to the necessary degree of proficiency. The

horn line also followed this method.

Due to the good sense of the instructional staff, the musical arrangements when acquired were within the limitations imposed by the ability of the players. Nothing sounds worse than attempts to perform at a level beyond ones capabilities. In later years, as proficiency increased, arrangements would become more complex.

## Drill

The first outdoor drill rehearsal took place at the Canadian National Exhibition grounds on the parking lot east of the Shell Tower. It was the month of March and cold enough that it was necessary to wear gloves, so drumming was not really possible at that time. Bugling was also difficult, with valves freezing and mouthpieces sticking to lips. However, these conditions were no impediment to learning drill and were common to all those who engaged in winter activities.

Nobody complained and the drill and music progressed. At the weather warmed, we all acquired that mark of Drum Corps membership, the first suntans of the year. Those in Corps would be outdoors all day, sooner than is generally normal. The little sun available would give one a tanned, wind-burned look long before the uninvolved.

## First Appearance

So, of course, the time approached for the first appearance of this fledgling unit. There was to be a pre-show standstill exhibition at the famous Shipstads and Johnsons Ice Follies, held at Maple Leaf Gardens. What would prove to be the first of many unusual situations, encountered over the years, now made its



1958: Toronto Optimists at the Shipstads and Johnson Ice Follies

appearance. We would have to march out on sheer ice and play. This problem was overcome by the wearing of oversize socks over the thick-soled white bucks that were part of the uniform. It worked well, and nobody slipped and fell, thus preserving our fragile dignity.

## The First Competition

It was not long after this that serious business approached in the form of our first competition. This was what it was all about.

The date was May 3, 1958, the location was the University Avenue Armouries. This was the



University Street Armouries



home of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps whom we have seen before as the Jolly Jesters. Most important to us was that Preston Scout House, undisputed masters of the Canadian Junior Drum Corps scene, would be there. We, as well as others, were eager to see how we would fare against them.

The show was an indoor performance of approximately 7-8 minutes duration per Corps. This was because the armouries were not large enough to present a full field show. It also might have been because, in those days, Canadian Corps were not ready at that time of the year to present their complete marching and maneuvering routine. We certainly were not. The second half of the show, drill-wise, was yet to be learned. This situation would change as the years passed. When Canadian corps became more competitive, necessity dictated that a full show be ready to go earlier than was necessary in 1958.

Finally, the day arrived, and an excited collection of youth was assembled on the second floor of the armouries, clad in their bright, new uniforms, spotless white bucks and instruments gleaming. I do not recall there being an inspection that evening, but for modern day types I shall elaborate.

Inspections before going on the line were an accepted part of competition. Had this show been of full length, there probably would have been one. Before entering the field of competition, the Corps would line up and each individual member was inspected from head to toe. A judge provided for the purpose did this. Tenths of a point were deducted for lack of uniformity in dress or bearing, and for lack of cleanliness or polish in uniform or instrument. The Corps would stand at attention until the procedure was complete contests could be lost on the inspection line.

Now, back to the armouries. When Scout House, who were on before us, were performing, we were instructed to take a look at them in order to see how it was done. Sure enough, the lines were ruler-straight and they sounded as good as ever. Their unique style and quality of performance was a never failing source of delight to any crowd, always evoking great applause. We did not really expect to defeat them the first time out.

Finally, it was our turn and away we went. In the armoury proper, where the show was being held, acoustics were awful. I could not understand why conditions were not perfect for a Corps show, or how anybody could understand what was being played. People lined the walls and filled the second floor balcony. One group of people, twenty to thirty, sat in a bloc together. They were all wearing identical gray jackets with a large "D" on the front. I wondered who they were. It was not long before I found out.



1958: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation (on field at De la Salle)

At last, our Drum Major signalled and the rough but powerful strains of “When You’re Smiling” filled the air of the armouries. We went through the marching part of the show, then the standstill concert, and it was done. We had shown the new Corps to the public. The show, though far from perfection, was performed as well as could be expected at that early date. The receptive crowd showed its appreciation with loud and prolonged applause.

It appeared as though we had arrived. The final results, though, reflected reality, as we placed second, a full four points behind Preston Scout House. This was not, to us, a failure. We had leapfrogged over other established units who were there and were only beaten by the reigning champions.

While still on the floor, after hearing the scores, it was announced over the loudspeaker that “The Optimists”, on the strength of their performance, were invited to a contest one month from that date, at Batavia, N.Y. When we heard who else was going to be there, reaction was mixed. It would be St. Vincent’s Cadets of Bayonne, N.J., Audubon All Girls (the Bon Bons) of Audubon, N.J., and the Holy Name Cadets (now Cadets of Bergen County) from Garfield, N. J. These Corps were three of the best in the junior circuit, in the United States, and were names I had only heard and read about. However, Mr. Baggs told us that we would be going. We were all very excited, though mature enough Drum Corps wise to know that we had about as much chance of getting anywhere as rain has of falling upward. These three U.S. Corps were all outstanding and had been for years. The experience would prove invaluable and sobering.

There was much work to be done.

# Version

## Chapter 4: 1958 – Pressure

Completion of the second half of the drill and music now took priority. This would have been the case anyway, but the premature introduction to first class competition lent a more urgent note to the whole affair. Batavia was not to be a 7-8 minute show, but a full 13-15 minute performance. We had to learn and polish the remainder of the show as well as could be done, and do it in approximately one month.

The advent of the Batavia contest provided strong motivation to finish the learning and concentrate on polishing as quickly as possible. Without this spur to our ambitions, things might not have come together as rapidly as they did.



1958: Toronto Optimists Full Corps photo (in front of De La Salle College)

Urgent as the situation seemed, it did not result in a great increase in rehearsal time. The Monday and Wednesday evening indoor sessions, and all day Sunday for drill and music combined, remained the norm. There were some extra rehearsals, but individual sections accounted for most of the time spent over and above regular practice. This practice, started now, was to become commonplace in the years ahead, as people strove to improve their performance. It was not demanded, or even requested by instructors or executive. Everyone just did it because they wanted to. It was another example of the spirit that existed in this Drum Corps.

To hold scheduled practice every night of the week and all day Saturday and Sunday was not only unheard of in those days, it would also have been impractical. There were those who would have been willing to do this, but not many. Had such a rigorous schedule been implemented, or even suggested, half of the Corps would have quit. School, full or part-time jobs, girlfriends, family, marriages, and vacations all would have been affected by blanket devotion to one activity. Already, these things were disturbed by the influence of the Corps, even during these less dramatic times. Eventually, with increasingly difficult competition, the Corps would gradually increase its rehearsal time.



In those balmy days, such dedication was not generally widespread. In speaking of this, it must be said that this attitude applied only to the Corps in general. There were those who could only be described as hard core fanatics. These were the ones who lived, ate, and breathed the Corps. Nothing got between them and the Corps, and their presence would make itself felt in later years.

Meanwhile, back at the Shell Tower in the Canadian National Exhibition grounds, learning the rest of the drill continued. As the weather improved, it became increasingly difficult to rehearse at this location. A popular place for the citizens of Toronto, this was a public area and could not be commandeered by anyone for private use. Also, the annual Canadian National Exhibition would have made this site unsuitable for summer long rehearsals. So, we had to find another location, and we did.

Driving around, searching, on a Sunday afternoon, we discovered two Corps-sized fields at the foot of Yonge Street, just south of Lakeshore Boulevard. These fields were ideal, being of the right size and far away from any residential area.



1958: De La Salle (Nationals, Galt)

That afternoon we found, to our surprise, that one of them was occupied. It was another Drum Corps, and they were wearing grey and red jackets identical to those we had seen at the armouries. This, we learned, was the De La Salle Oaklands Drum and Bugle Corps. Their story as a Drum Corps was to run nearly parallel with that of the Optimists. This chance encounter would eventually develop into ferocious rivalry that lasted for twenty years, until the demise of one of them. Because their name will appear often in this narrative, a bit of background is in order.

De La Salle, or “Del” as they became more familiarly known, had begun as a school brass band in 1910. They had achieved international stature in their field and became an integral part of the extracurricular activities of De La Salle College. This is a high school, run by the Christian Brothers, a Roman Catholic religious order, now located on Farnham Avenue in Toronto.

After a suitable preparatory period, they emerged as a competitive Drum and Bugle Corps in 1958, taking almost everybody by surprise. Unheralded, except possibly in their own circle, the first inkling we had of their existence was on that Sunday afternoon when we discovered them rehearsing.

The two fields, one of which “Del” was using, were adjacent to each other. We occupied the other one, and a situation began that endured for years. Both Corps used the fields, on the same days and evenings, for a long time to come. All this was in the future. For now, the task was to concentrate on completion of our show.

Our instructors were all home grown, so to speak, and they had to learn as they went along, as did we. In order to even attempt competing at the level that would be encountered in Batavia, everyone had to give his or her utmost cooperation. Attendance at rehearsals was very good, seldom dropping below 85%, and then only for good reasons. Fellow members would prod the few lackadaisical types that did exist, in order to improve their attitude. It was not often necessary.

With Barry and Lorne, and people from the Corps itself instructing, enough results were produced so that when the time arrived to go to Batavia, we were ready to perform a full field show.

## Into the Lion’s Den

We were not expected to upset anybody at this show, nor did we expect to. This was the first time that a Junior “A” Canadian Corps had competed against Junior “A” American Corps, but it would not be the last.

The attitude was of light-hearted boisterousness as we headed for the competition. Bus trips were much more fun when this attitude was prevalent, and contrasted starkly with those of later years. Not too many years later, either. We arrived at Batavia, N.Y., prepared to do or die, come what may. There was nothing to lose and experience to gain.

We saw, near the contest field, St. Vincent’s Cadets. They were playing a concert number, standing in a semi-circle. Listening to their rendition, someone remarked that they did not sound that good, contrary to all that we had expected. Actually, they did not, and as we found out later, they were playing part of their concert for the following year 1959. This would not be indicative of their field performance

In the evening, watching and listening, we were rudely brought down to earth. The driving force of “Victory at Sea”, into “El Capitan” was enough to dispel any notions we might have formed from their previous display. St. Vincent’s were still great. Then that same evening,



1958: Toronto Optimists

who could but be amazed by the swinging skirts, precision horn and drum-line, and perfect company fronts of the Audubon girls. Later, the sweet tones of Don Angelica’s solo work, in Holy Name’s version of “And the Angels Sing”, was all that was necessary to remind us of where we were. However, out we trooped to do the best we could.



The Corps was well received by the generous American crowd, and the score sheets, though accurately reflecting the deserved scores, were not uncomplimentary. At the end of the evening, we stood in fourth place, about thirteen, twelve, and eleven points out of first, second, and third places, respectively. Audubon girls won the show.

At another time and place, this result might have been devastating, but not then. We all knew we were out of our league that night, but what in introduction.



1958: Toronto Optimists (on the field at De La Salle)

Things would not stay that way. Mr. Baggs, as he would do so many times in years to come when similar situations arose, addressed the Corps. His conservative appearance and restrained language always had the proper effect. Whether we had just been fairly annihilated on the field or, as in later years, had distinguished ourselves, his words always provided the tone of moderation to suit the occasion. It would not be too far wrong to say that his example set the tone for the image that became synonymous with the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. About one thing there was no confusion, he was the boss, and anytime, as did occur, his code of conduct was broken or ignored, we would be sure to hear about it. Also, when credit was due, it was forthcoming. Al Baggs, to most of us, was the rock on which the Corps was built.

Now, after that educational foray into the upper reaches of Drum Corps, it was time to get back to basics at home. We had to prepare for the Canadian Drum Corps season. The main target was, of course, Preston Scout House, the Canadian Championship, no less. Although to some this line of thought might have appeared presumptuous for a new Corps, the results of the armoury contest had opened up that possibility. We had been a solid second and had a whole summer in which to narrow, and hopefully eclipse, that four-point margin. If the rapid progress that the Corps had made since its inception in the fall of 1957 could be maintained, this goal was attainable. Other local Corps, though not far behind and true to the name of the Corps, were

encouraged to look ahead, not back. De La Salle were, as yet, an unknown entity not having appeared on the competition field and, therefore, were not included in our calculations.

We were told that in order to defeat the champions by one point, we had to be five points better. The titleholder is often perceived to have an edge, whether it is psychological or otherwise. It was felt that a performance should leave no doubt in anyone's mind when attempting to win the title. This spur to our ambition was provided by the fertile mind of Barry Bell.

## Back to Work

With the end of the school year, students could now more readily concentrate on the Corps. Rehearsals were well attended and slowly we began to polish the rough edges that had to be eliminated. Like a rough-hewn piece of wood being transformed into a fine piece of furniture, the whole unit progressed to where a much-improved product would take the field at the next competition.



1958: Grantham (Nationals, Galt)

At that time in Canada, competitions were few and far between. South of the boarder, the pace was far more intense, as anyone who read Drum Corps World or Eastern Review could recognize. In Canada, every contest was eagerly awaited and prepared for. Although the regularity and degree of competition contrasted poorly with that of the United States, the intensity and excitement were easily on a par. Mixed with this, for us, was the fact that we were not in a position to lose anything. This, in contrast to later years, was an asset when going on the line. A much more relaxed attitude and feeling of, "Well, let's see how we do this time", provided a pleasant atmosphere for competition. Compared with gut-wrenching tensions of later years, it was positively idyllic. The excitement was provided by the prospect of moving ever closer to our increasingly well defined goal.



Preston Scout House had started the season strongly, having retained much of their show from the previous year. It was a show that contained many landmark features unique to Scout House and these were not easily discarded. They were probably close to peaking when they first



1958: Preston Scout House arrives for a show

appeared that year. Conversely, we were far from any peak and, therefore, improvement was easier to accomplish. There was so much imperfection. Others were, no doubt, in the same boat. Retaining one's show from the previous year, or large parts of it, was common practice much more so than today. It removed the trouble of having to learn a new show over the winter months, and the time thus saved could be spent polishing the material to achieve ever-higher scores. We, ourselves, would often follow this method.

This being our first year the whole show was new. There was nothing to repeat. The performance had received favourable comment from both Canadian and American judges that we had encountered. With further practice to improve execution scores, there was no way to go but up.

Thus came our next trial of skill. The Waterloo Band Festival was really the top event of the year in Canada. Its results were as important as the Canadian Championship. It had been a showplace for Corps for many years, and 1958 was no exception. Both Scout House and Western Tech had earned honours here, and this year the Optimists would be there for the first time. Ironically enough, Western Tech alumni led them. Although many Corps of good quality were in attendance, this narrative concerns only The Optimists and Scout House, for obvious reasons.

All of the Canadian Junior Corps of that era would be in attendance. This appearance was the first time that we had performed our full-length field show, in Canada, under competition conditions. All were very interested as to what the result would be.



1958: Some members of from St Mary's and De La Salle (on left)

When the smoke had cleared, and the scores announced, we stood again in second place. The major difference was that we were now only 1½ behind Preston Scout House. This was a 2½ point jump from the first meeting only a few weeks before. The accelerated preparation for Batavia had made its effect felt.

Practices now picked up in frequency because it was realized that we had a shot at pulling off an upset. Interest was also kindled on the local Drum Corps scene in general, as the only true challenge in years for junior dominance materialized. Scout House, who had now won at Waterloo for the tenth year in a row, were clearly in our sights. Without derogating others, it must be said that they were the only ones we were much concerned with. There were, of course, other shows, competitions, and parades to be attended, which we did. Without constant activity in this endeavour, it is easy to lose any edge that has been developed.

We also ran into other Drum Corps, the most surprising being the new De La Salle Drum Corps. They first appeared in competition at the Ontario Championships, sponsored by the Optimist Club of Toronto. We were, of course, the host Corps and performed in exhibition. De La Salle, in their debut with a full field show, jumped over other well-established Corps and placed a close second to Preston Scout House. Their horns were excellent, and lo and behold, there was another major contender on the local scene.

With the Corps now gradually improving, the more evident flaws in execution that had at first been our undoing were eliminated, some totally. Attention could now be focussed on the finer points.

As an example, we can look at our company fronts, a common formation. Many hours of practice were spent not only on company fronts but on learning how to practice them. Techniques developed for executing these, and other complex formations, were retained or discarded depending on their effectiveness. This, to hearken back a bit, well reflected the school motto of Danforth Tech “Faciendo discimus”, “We Learn By Doing”, though I doubt if anybody related to



1958: Phil Hennings, Toronto Optimists Drum Major



1958: Toronto Optimists Colour Guard



this at the time. These months, haphazard as they were, produced results slower than if a fully experienced drill instructor were present. Yet, results were produced and the drill moved forward to a level that could only serve to improve our field scores. Likewise, the horn and drum lines. Their consistency and proficiency was steadily improving. All rehearsed enthusiastically to weed out technical flaws and to improve the ensemble effect of the entire unit.

## Falconer

As we stumbled and groped our way to an improved Corps, it came about that we were to appear at a contest in a place called Falconer, N. Y. This was one of those nice little American towns set in the rolling countryside of upper New York State. It would be a pleasant trip, as was any to the United States. Our itinerary kept us mostly in Canada, and to cross the border was always an adventure. This contest was unusual in that it was to be a mixed junior and senior show. Categories would compete against each other. This format was not uncommon in those long ago days and was probably due to the fact that there were not that many Corps around in this region.

In Falconer itself, who should turn out to be in attendance but Preston Scout House. Their presence added a new dimension to the show for us. We had another chance to go against the champs, this time under the discerning eyes of the N.Y. State Judging Association. This was beneficial, as different eyes, minds, and score sheets would serve to throw light on our somewhat parochial outlook. If anyone else was aware of what was underway, I do not know, but Preston and us certainly were. Scout House was well aware of our ambitions and had been observing our progress. No one had given them a serious challenge for a long time, and it was possible that one was now taking shape.

Excitement ran high. The presence of Preston affected our attitude and nobody was prepared to perform at less than the level of perfection.



1958: Preston Scout House (Nationals, Galt)

Early in the evening, we filed onto the line after duly enduring inspection, nearly flawless if I remember correctly. It was one of those cool, slightly misty evenings that always seem to enhance the sound of a Corps. As the opening notes of our fanfare split the night air, and we stepped off the line, you could tell it was going to be a good one. You can feel the good ones. The whole show ran smoothly, until after the concert. Somehow, at this point, the Corps and Drum Major got their signals crossed, and we made a false start out of concert formation. This, due to nervous tension more than anything else, must have cost us a couple of points. We started again, and performed the second half of the show as well as we had the first. That false start not only cost us tenths, or more, but probably the contest as well.

When the results were announced we stood in second place again, but this time by a margin of 0.25 points. Now we knew that our goal was attainable. We had to repeat this performance without any major blunders, improve upon it, and do this in Canada.



1958: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Galt)

Returning home, the awareness of what we had almost accomplished at Falconer added impetus to our efforts, and we resumed the march to the seemingly elusive goal. You only got one chance at it, the Canadian Championships, and it was now only two months away. Practice time became more imperative, but would still not compare with the time spent in modern Drum Corps. To put in the time required by today's top Corps would have been considered odd to say the least.

We carried on in the more easy going fashion of those days, cleaning up tenths here and there, sometimes visiting other Corps to observe their progress. We were not the only ones who wanted to capture the title. De La Salle was a strong Corps and capable of giving anyone a run for their money. We knew that we had the best chance of pulling off an upset and were being mostly watched by those who were interested. Preston had remarked, in a magazine column, on how we had been closing the gap, but were, of course, still behind.



## The Nationals

Then, as time slipped away, came the day of the Championship contest, September 13, 1958. It was held at Dickson Park, in the town of Galt, Ontario. Today, the towns of Galt, Hespeler, and Preston have been rezoned into one community now known as Cambridge. This shows how close they were. It meant that the contest was more or less in Scout House's backyard, and this added more drama to an already pregnant situation. The weather was co-operative, and on a fine Saturday morning, we climbed aboard the bus to go where all the truth would come out in the wash.

On the bus itself, utter chaos ensued. Everybody had a ball, without a care in the world. At times, the melee got out of hand, and Mr. Bell had to enforce discipline, sometimes physically. Had he not done so, nobody would have been in any kind of shape for a contest let alone attempting to win one.



1958: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Galt)

Thankfully, it was not a long trip, and we arrived at Galt still capable of functioning. We had arrived early because the junior division of the show was to be held during the afternoon. The winner in this category would give an exhibition after the senior contest, which was to be held in the evening.

Considering the importance of the occasion, the whole day was handled quite matter of factly. Despite the fact this was the one time of year that mattered more than any other, a calm businesslike attitude prevailed. The instructors and executive, including Mr. Baggs who was on



hand providing stability and confidence, engendered this. In this case, we had come so close to Scout House, but in the U.S.A. Now we were attempting to do what nobody had done for years. Defeat them at a full-length field show, at the championships no less. Had we done this earlier in the season, the atmosphere surrounding the affair would not have been so electric.

Rehearsal, relaxation, recreation.

Time to go.

On the line.

The crowd was quite large, no doubt swelled by the expectation of a true challenge for the title.

Off we stepped, and, for the next fifteen minutes, nobody thought of anything else but their part to be played. When the last note sounded across the finish line, everybody knew it had been a good one.

It was done. Nothing major had gone wrong. Marching off in single file to prolonged applause, we took positions on a nearby hill, under a tree, to watch the other Corps perform. These included Scout House, De La Salle, Grantham Police Boys Band, and others. After the whole performance was completed, the tension began to rise again as scores were tabulated. Came the moment of truth and all pretenses at relaxation were abandoned. What was done, was done, and nothing could alter it now. Apprehensively, we stood as the voice of the announcer droned over the P.A. system.

Royal Knights . . . 66.97  
 Sky Raiders . . . . . 73.33  
 Grantham . . . . . 75.42  
 De La Salle . . . . . 77.09

Then, as announcers do, the second place score was given as 80.11. A nerve-wracking pause ensued; then the words "Preston Scout House" echoed across the park. The green-shirted group under the tree exploded in a frenzy of youthful exuberance and had to exert the utmost self-discipline in order to hear their score. It was 81.61. We had won by a margin of 1.5 points. A solid victory that had been accomplished by wins in the execution captions.

Everybody straightened up, adjusted uniforms, and formed up in single file. We marched down the hill to bask in our newly won glory, and also to endure some verbal brickbats from disgruntled rivals.

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## Toronto Band Takes Title From Scout House

BAND FESTIVAL COLORFUL EVENT

**Canadian Junior Honors Won By Toronto Optimists**

By ROY FRANCIS

Colorful marching pageantry, borne by the rocketing blazes of brass and trumpet, brought rounds of applause from almost 10,000 Galt district supporters at Dickson Park Saturday during the 1958 Canadian Junior and Senior Band Championships.

In the junior championships, a new ruler was crowned. Preston's band, Scout House Band, personal victors, took second place to the green-clad Optimists, the Toronto Optimists' Club Drum and Trumpet Corps.

Superb musical tone and astounding melody gave the senior champs, the Marching Ambassadors, a first-place edge over the Paducah-like Jolly Jesters and Guelph's rising Royalaires.

For the elite, the Durham High School band and host effort before finished.

One of the largest crowd cheering came late in the day, when Scout House Drum Major, Paul Bauer, staggered away from the presentation desk under the weight of two king-size trophies. All senior bands, with the Optimists, were lined up under the lights for the final presentation, with Toronto CJRC's anniversary Bruce Smith being a most glib master of ceremonies.

Optimists' band moved the thermometer to 50-60 degrees in the afternoon sun. Band chief inspecting judge Hugh McKenna, of St. Catharines: "You know, the junior bands have the most trouble." He asked why. "Well, they won't cut—butterflies, you see." In other words, nervous.

For the elite, the Durham High School band and host effort before finished.



Optimists' band members (left) and Scout House Band members (right) are shown in the photo. The Optimists' band is wearing green uniforms, and the Scout House Band is wearing white uniforms. The photo is taken from a low angle, showing the band members from the waist up.



Toronto Optimists' Club Drum and Trumpet Corps (left) and Scout House Band (right) are shown in the photo. The Optimists' band is wearing green uniforms, and the Scout House Band is wearing white uniforms. The photo is taken from a low angle, showing the band members from the waist up.

### TORONTO JUNIORS DEFEAT SCOUT HOUSE BAND

District band supporters have cheered for years if any junior band could defeat the old Preston Scout House band in the Canadian Junior and Senior band competitions. On Saturday in Dickson Park, the trick was turned by the plumed, green-shirted Toronto Optimists' Club Drum and Trumpet Corps. Here the band goes through a standard number. The Toronto band won 81.61 points to 80.11. A result announced wildly by a large Toronto contingent. About 10,000 people jammed the Galt park at night for the 1958 senior contests, won by Canada's Marching Ambassadors, a collection of musical masters. Close to 4,500 crowded the park in the afternoon as well. Durham's High School Girls' band won the feminine prize once again. (Reporter Photo)

1958: Toronto Optimists win Nationals

## The Deed Was Done

In one year, from fresh beginnings to the 1958 Canadian Junior Champions! The repercussions were immediate. Lorne Ferrazzutti, our drum instructor, who had to work on Saturdays, was driving up to the show and heard the results on his car radio. He was as shocked as anyone. This, according to plan, was supposed to have taken two years and, even then, was not a foregone conclusion. He arrived near where people from the opposition were gathered. Some were crying, and all were downcast. Scout House was a local institution, and Canada had been their territory for years.

Eventually, as was Preston's way, the trauma would subside and give way to generous good sportsmanship. The disappointment, though, was not easy to cover. The members of the band itself, executive included, were quite philosophical about it, saying that it had to happen someday. This stance, had we but known it, was in the future to apply equally to the Optimists.



1958: Optimists on cover of Drum Corps World

As for us, being the winners, there was still an exhibition to perform after the senior competition in the evening. This was done, performed as well as was the afternoon show, to prove that the contest result was no fake.



1958: Eric Burton with Optimists' first Nationals Flag

After the senior show, the trophies were awarded for all categories of Bands and Corps that had competed on that eventful day. As the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps was named the 1958 Junior Canadian Champions, everyone was aware that an era had ended. No one knew, as yet, that a new one was about to unfold.

When the day's proceedings had come to a close, we boarded our bus for the trip home. There had been no parties laid on in expectation of victory, as we were not really prone to

overconfidence. We just went back to Toronto, now champions, enjoying a happy if uneventful bus ride. We were told that rehearsals would continue on a regular basis, as our season was not yet over.

The following week we had to do an exhibition at the International Contest in Toronto, and the week after that was the St. Catharines Grape Festival Show. This was another annual affair, and we cemented our position somewhat with another victory over Scout House. The same day, in the evening, we appeared at a standstill contest in Buffalo, N.Y. Although we placed third, behind two Senior Corps, our show, for some undefined reason, really caught on with the audience. A prolonged thunderous standing ovation was our reward, along with many shouts of “encore”. This had never happened before and the effect was to send us home tired but happy. The show provided a fitting conclusion to what had been an exciting, successful season.

That was the way it was!



1958: Championship Crest

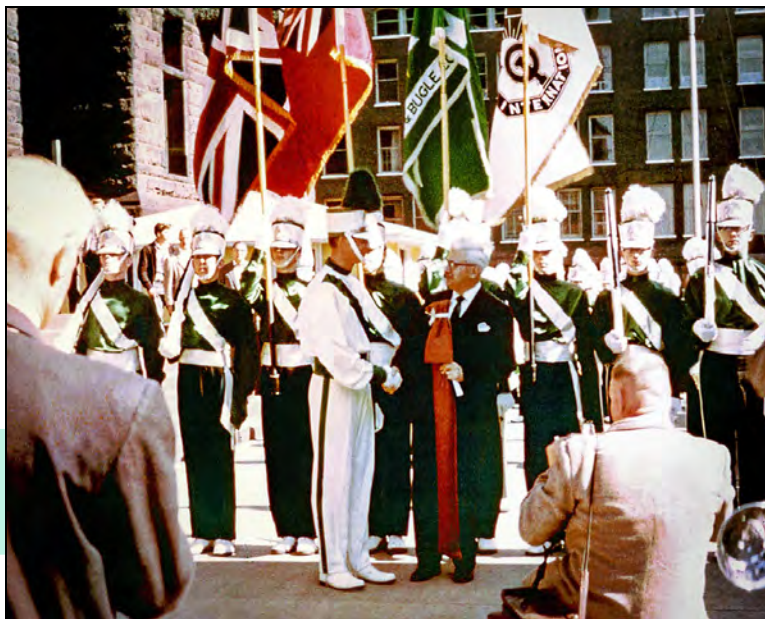
Version



## Chapter 5: 1959 – Composition, Characters, Continuation

After the excitement of our victory at Galt had subsided, it took quite some time before it truly sunk in that we were the Canadian Junior Champions. A championship crest, to be worn on the Corps jacket was issued to all. It embodied the symbol of the Optimists Drum Corps and had been suggested by one Don Chisholm. As the years passed, the design and size of succeeding crests would be altered to accommodate the growing number of years to be displayed.

After the 1958 season ended, the Corps was accorded a civic reception by the City of Toronto. We paraded up the concrete canyon of Bay Street to Old City Hall. There, the incumbent mayor, Nathan Phillips, presented us with a City of Toronto flag in recognition of the honour that had been brought to Toronto. This flag was the first of a collection that would grow, each one having its own significance.



1959: Mayor Phillips presents City of Toronto Flag to Phil Hennings, Optimists DM

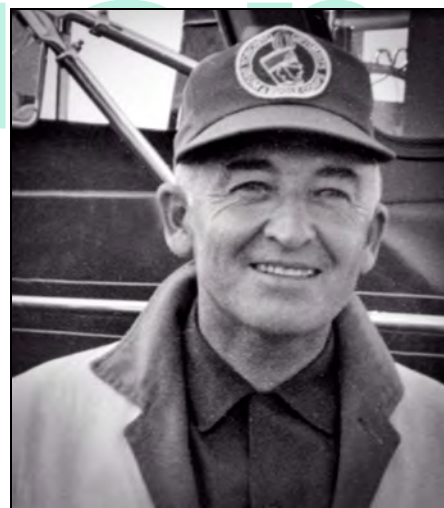
Rehearsals continued more or less as before, in order to ensure continuity. If things had been allowed to go on too long without activity, momentum, and even interest could have waned. This can happen and the unit becomes a one shot wonder.

### Bernie Beer

Now that the Corps was more or less established, the dividends of success began to make an appearance. New people came down to join. Not only playing members, but also those willing to help out in subsidiary but essential ways; drivers, supervisors, equipment, etc. Some of these people had youngsters in the Corps, and some did not but were just interested.

One of these was to remain with the Corps for a long time. In conjunction with others, he made a definite impact. After his association with the Optimists, he would take his knowledge and experience elsewhere; namely, the Canadian Commanders and De La Salle. This was Mr. Bernie Beer.

Mr. Beer, or Bernie, had joined the Optimist Club in 1958, purely through a desire to assist in boys' work. He



Bernie Beer



immediately became active on the “boys’ work committee”, but first saw the Corps at the 1958 Championships in Galt. This show confirmed that if he was going to be involved in boys’ work, this was the side of it that he wanted to be in. Bernie, who was born in England and came to Canada as a young boy, had played for sixteen years as a cornet soloist with “Dovercourt Senior Band”. Most likely, a school, or service club organization.

His interest in the Corps was such that he travelled with us throughout 1959, becoming familiar with that world. He was also, at this time, Vice-President and Chairman of the “boys’ work committee” for the club. At the beginning of the following year, 1960, he was appointed Assistant Director of the Corps and relinquished his position with the boys’ work committee. Almost at once his influence was felt when he obtained a Sunday, indoor rehearsal spot for us at A.E. Long Co., in East York, his place of business.

There was also a Dr. Schilling. He was a member of the Optimist Club, and his assignment was to report to the sponsor on the activities and progress of the Corps. He had been around since the beginning but so quiet that most of us were unaware of his presence. Around this time a Mr. Keith Morgan and Mr. Bruce Brodie made their appearance. Where they came from, we did not know, but they came, providing assistance in controlling and directing the group. We were sometimes less than gentlemen.

The full size of a Junior Drum Corps during this era seldom exceeded fifty marching members. Usually one bus was all that was needed to transport the Corps and most of its equipment. This is in stark contrast to the four large busses I saw in use by a modern Junior Corps at a recent D.C.I. contest.



1959: some corps members

It was during the 1959 season that we acquired neat, green uniform bags, to replace the motley collection of individual bags that has previously been used. These bags fitted neatly onto numbered chrome racks that were stowed securely in the bus’s luggage compartments. Also, just about every other piece of equipment fitted into these compartments, leaving only personal items to be taken onto the bus itself. As most of our trips were of less than a full day’s duration, not much in the way of personal luggage was necessary.

### **A bit of background on our staff**

Often, for a variety of reasons, not all of the executive or instructors would attend the weekend trips. In explaining this, it is also a good opportunity to delve a little further into the background of these individuals. We had gotten to know each other quite a bit better since the beginning of the Corps, and things had settled into a more or less acceptable pattern.

Mr. Baggs was an employee of the Toronto newspaper, The Globe and Mail. His position as a trouble-shooter for them often meant his absence from Corps trips. He would, however, always make himself available for very long, extended ones, or for very important ones (i.e. The Championships). Whether this was to the detriment of his profession, we never knew, but he would always be there when it mattered. His presence always mattered.



1958: Lorne Ferrazzutti, Eric Burton & Mr. Baggs

The man in charge of the Corps for most of the trips was Barry Bell. This displayed another facet of his character, as things seldom got out of hand, or went wrong. If they did, it was only due to unforeseen circumstances. Barry was a draftsman by trade, who liked Drum Corps, fast cars, and Drum Corps. He also liked Drum Corps. He was able to attend almost all of the trips and would take the responsibility for discipline and organization before, during, and immediately after bus trips. There were seldom any reasons for severe measures, as the Corps was composed of a generally cooperative, amenable if diverse bunch of kids. Any situations that got out of hand would usually be the result of over excitement and could be suppressed by a sharp, well-placed rebuke from Barry. This was rarely necessary, but one occasion deserves mention.

It was a habit among a certain element in the Corps to make insulting remarks, from the safety of the bus, to people on the sidewalks of towns through which we passed. Barry said that he would stop the bus and have us get out to face these people if this practice persisted. It soon ceased. As a consequence of measures like this, The Optimists were seldom, if ever, barred from or unwelcome at any location or event. To have been would have put the name and reputation of our sponsor in a bad light. Almost any behaviour was tolerated on the bus, as long as it was confined to the bus. Thus did Barry exert another form of influence.

The most noticeably absent, of any of the instructors, from trips was Lorne Ferrazzutti. His job required that he work every Saturday. He worked in the produce department of a Loblaws Store and could only attend shows that were local in nature. Nearly all of his drum line work was done from score sheets.

Mr. Eric Burton, the Guard Instructor, was able to come on some of the trips and always fielded a capable section. In fact, the guard won more honours and was remarked upon more often than most of us were aware. Eric, a locksmith by trade, was often the host of Corps parties at his home on Ontario Street, from which would emanate gossip, rumours, facts, and speculation, all part of the Corps scene.

This short summary of the backgrounds of the primary staff members reveals the fact that not one of them was remotely connected to music. Other than their interest and activity in Drum Corps, they were not involved in the field of entertainment in any form. Hence, were they true

amateurs. The fact that, when hired as instructors, these people were promised remuneration does not really detract from the meaning of amateur. The money was not always forthcoming. Even when it was, it would never be a substitute for a regular job as a livelihood. This situation never deterred them from performing their tasks, which indicates that interest, not money, was the prime motivation.

Of course, the dedication of the staff would not have been evident without someone to instruct, which brings us to the members of the Corps itself.

## Our Corps members

The Corps as a whole was a genuine cross-section of society, in miniature. People came from all over the City of Toronto and even from out of town to belong to it. Other Corps, especially if affiliated with a school or church, might have been restricted to people who attended certain institutions. We had no such limitations. If this was an advantage, its reverse side was that we never had a permanent base of operation. Everybody always took their entire equipment home and even the practice school, Jarvis Vocational, was subject to change. This occurred in later years. Thanks to the influence of people connected with the Corps, we never, for long, lacked an indoor rehearsal spot.

Some of the outdoor ones, though, were unusual, almost bizarre. Any place of proper size, location, and accessibility would do, if it was in a non-residential area. When it rained, we would move under the Gardiner Expressway, or to the porch of a building, usually in the Canadian National Exhibition grounds. The best was four floors down, under the ground in the main City Hall parking lot. The empty, cavernous space provided shelter from the elements and caused the music to float eerily through all levels. It was akin to a huge echo chamber, and the Corps never sounded better



1958: Some members of Scout House and Toronto Optimists

These minor inconveniences never dampened enthusiasm. If anything, they enhanced it by fostering a spirit of cohesiveness and persistence. This spirit strengthened as the years passed and had a great deal to do with the continuity of a group composed of such diverse elements.

From George's Spaghetti House and the Zanzibar Tavern to Mama's Pizzeria on Eglinton Avenue and beyond, from the sprawling suburbs of Scarborough and West Hill to the polyglot regions of the West End, the guys gathered, of one mind, to form the Optimists. It was fun and for many of us the focus of our lives. Also, the diversity was evident in the fact that there were high school and university students, motorcycle gang members, ex-reservists, working people, and others who combined to form the Corps.



Some, as previously mentioned, left their hometowns to take up residence in Toronto for the sole purpose of belonging to the Corps. These would mostly be people with full-time jobs, of which we had a fairly high proportion. Often they were objects of curiosity to those of us who were local, the majority. Why come all this way just to play in a band. It was a measure of the appeal that this Corps exerted on some people. Today, this sort of thing would not be considered at all unusual.

Considering this was a Junior Corps, the number of those who held full-time jobs was quite high. The age limit was twenty-one. This, whether good or bad, was good for the Corps. Those in school would understandably miss rehearsals, especially during exam time. Sometimes winter practices would consist of anywhere from eight to fifteen people, or less. Those who were at work would almost always be in attendance, plus some that were still in school. Also during winter, interest would wane, and it was the small nucleus that helped keep it going. Those who turned out consistently provided something to be built on when interest again picked up.

During the coming season, it was apparent, when we learned the schedule, that we would be busier than previously. There were two main reasons for this. One was that, being the Champions, we were now a bigger draw at shows and, thus, were invited to more contests and exhibitions. The other reason was that the Drum Corps movement in Canada was growing and activity was increasing along with it.

The Niagara Peninsula in particular was becoming a very popular area for shows. Many of these were combined senior and junior contests, where divisions would compete against each other. This type of activity also extended into New York State and Pennsylvania. It was a format that did not find favour with all and was to mostly cease not too far in the future. The primary reason for it was a lack of contests, especially in the junior division.

As far as new playing members joining the Corps, we did not recruit all of those who had an inclination to come. Some came because they liked the Corps and some came because they wanted to be in a Championship Corps. This, of course, is never guaranteed from one year to the next.

Then there were those who would have liked to come but were deterred by the fact that we were the current champions. They thought that they would not make it. In this fashion, some people, who would have been valuable assets, were lost. This attitude was negative. Most of us were very ordinary individuals with ordinary capabilities. Those who stood out, in one for or another, were few and far between and were just a part of the whole.



1959: Toronto Optimists (Guelph)



To return to the actual operations of the Corps itself, 1959 was to be almost a repeat of the previous year. We acquired some new horn players and, more noticeably, drummers. Also, new members for the Colour Guard, all of who were male. Drum Corps in those long ago days were usually all male, or all female. Those that were mixed were few, and then usually only a male Corps with a girl Colour Guard or Drum Major. Today, however, there are few that maintain this status quo, it is no longer prevalent. The modern mixed gender of Corps is a sign of how Drum Corps have changed parallel to the society in which it exists.



Merritton Grenadiers (Waterloo)

The horn line was full in all sections, with spares ready to jump in if necessary. With one year of experience under their belt and not too many new faces, they could be expected to perform at least as well as before, if not better. This expectation was bolstered by the fact that very little new music, or drill, was to be incorporated into the original show.

A drawback to this was that, if repeated too often, the show could become boring to those who watched it. Repetition induced boredom, leading to lack of positive crowd reactions, and could be reflected in general effect scores. There have been units that died due to failure to change their style or material as trends dictated. The Optimists would encounter this hurdle year later. This year, as most other Corps in Canada were in the habit of doing the same thing, any negative effects were evenly spread.

Of the new faces in the line, most were already experienced players from various sources. Not all came from other Drum Corps. Some were from High School Bands, Salvation Army Bands, and who knows where else. Most of these people would immediately become playing members, while others, not being able to play, would be accepted and taught. The basic purpose of the Corps was to give young people something to occupy their time in a worthwhile manner, not to create an elite of only those with certain abilities. Those who had to wait for a spot either did so or drifted on to other things. One fellow, Frank McKittrick, who could not seem to master anything, even with extra help, was willing to stay and become a water boy. So much did he want to be a member, and he is fondly remembered to this day.

As the winter rolled into spring, with the slightly attended drill and music being put together as weather permitted, we began to look forward to the competition season again.

Actually, we held our first outdoor drill rehearsal on January 11. In Canada, this is synonymous with biting cold and fierce winds. Such was the spirit that a full turn out was evident, replete with hats, gloves, scarves, and overcoats. One thing never in short supply was “esprit de corps”.

The Colour Guard had acquired some new members, some of whom would achieve distinction within, and without, the Optimists. Two of these were Len Perrin and Ivor Bramley.

Also, a second Drum Major was added. This was Don Chisholm, previously mentioned in connection with the crest. In contrast to the very military Phil Hennings, Don's style was more flamboyant, different in manner and dress, when most of us were dully conformist. Don had been a soprano horn player during his first year in the corps. His natural flair for the

unconventional, added to a real talent, made him an effective, if controversial, addition to the straight-laced Optimists. Possessed of a rapier wit, that occasionally caused hostility, this, combined with his style, caused him to always be more than just a presence. As an aside, he was the only person I ever saw who could cause Mr. Baggs to lose his temper in public. No mean feat!

Apart from Don's talents, or otherwise, depending on one outlook, one of his major contributions was the introduction to the Corps of a young man named Ivor Bramley. They both worked in the office of the weekend Telegram Magazine, the predecessor of today's Toronto Sun. Don brought Ivor to a rehearsal, but he was not too excited until he saw his first show. That was the armouries show of the previous year. Possibly seeing Scout House had something to do with it. Few who first saw them in their prime could fail to get excited. Ivor joined us and took to the Corps like a duck to water. Things would never be quite the same again.



Don Chisholm



Ivor Bramley and Len Perrin

Possessed of a volatile personality that matched his red hair, he soon became a well-known figure. Having no experience of horn or drum, he joined the guard and before long was assisting with instruction as well as marching as a rifleman. This was to lead, in years later, to instructing on a larger scale, beginning with other guards and graduating to Drum Corps proper. Before his Corps career was finished, he was a well-known figure throughout Canadian Drum Corps, as well as certain parts of the United States.

The Corps continued preparations for the coming season, hoping to repeat the successes of the first year.

## The 1959 Season

Our first show was, again, the Ice Follies at Maple Leaf Gardens. This became an annual affair and usually the first public appearance of the Corps. This was followed by standstill contests,

exhibitions, and parades and, on May 22, an appearance at the Scout House Spring Show. This was an annual event that was very popular, and people came from miles around to see it. It featured Preston Scout House, performing variations on their show, and always one guest Corps. This year, in a magnanimous gesture, Scout House had invited us. The affair, always held in Kitchener Memorial Auditorium, was well attended, well received, and conducted in total harmony. It was a tribute to the name of Scout House.

The next show was one that we had known about for some time, and, to-date, was the biggest show in which we were to appear. This was the Preview of Champions Contest, to be held on May 31, in Roosevelt Stadium, Jersey City, New Jersey. It was against some of the top name Corps in the United States, and us in only our second year of full-fledged operation. We had been invited, no doubt, because we were now Canadian Champions. We would bring a different style to the occasion. To us, it was like an aspiring artist being asked to perform at the Hummingbird Centre for the first time.

All the Corps in this show were from New Jersey, which at that time was the centre of top Drum Corps activity. Most of today's top Corps (the 1990's) did not exist then. Notable exceptions were Madison Scouts, Cadets of Bergen County, and Rosemont Cavaliers.



1959: Audubon Bon Bons (Varsity Stadium, Toronto)

During 1958, our drum line had only two snare drummers, instead of the customary three.

Now, having acquired a competent third snare drummer, Brian Williams, we could go to Jersey with a full drum line.

Our participation in this show would be the first time that a Canadian Junior Corps had ever competed at such a big show. It would serve to reveal our shortcomings; however, the knowledge acquired would be useful later on, not only in the USA but in Canada as well.

At this early stage in our existence, to achieve success in the United States had never been seriously considered, or presented to us as something to be aimed at. Being good in Canada had been tough enough, especially as we had fared better than had been expected. However, nothing ventured, nothing gained, and Mr. Baggs was never hesitant about taking his Corps into the lion's den. In later years, as we visited the USA more often, it became apparent as we began to score some success, if minor, that eventual major inroads were possible.

Exposure to different judges and standards would gradually point the way to limited success. This was years in the future. For now, we were just beginning on this great adventure.

Follow the Yellow Brick Road.



## Chapter 6: 1959 – To Jersey and Back

This trip was our biggest yet. Not only would we be up against some of the best Corps in the USA, it was also further than most of us had ever been from home, five hundred miles, no less, to the fabled heart of Drum Corpsdom. We were all very excited and nobody missed this one without a good reason<sup>1</sup>. As a friendly gesture, we took along Brother Eugene, Director of De La Salle. He was likely interested in becoming acquainted with big time competition, its demands and necessity. No doubt, he had visions of his own Corps one day being in the same position. It would be, but in another time. Also, this would be our first all weekend tour, leaving early Saturday morning and not returning until the wee hours of Monday morning. Those of us who had jobs would have to get off the bus when it returned and go straight to work, equipment and all. So what! This was what it was all about.

We climbed aboard the bus at Jarvis Vocational School and away we went. Crossing the border at Fort Erie/Buffalo, we were soon rolling down the New York Thruway. Mile after mile of green, pleasant countryside rolled by, punctuated with restaurant/gas station combinations, farmhouses, and occasional stands of trees. It was hard to believe that this, at one time, was all part of the Great Eastern Forest that stretched from the Mississippi to the East Coast. After about ten hours, we began to suffer from aching bum syndrome and leg cramps, familiar to all Corps people who endured over long bus trips. Finally, into view loomed the unmistakable skyline of New York City. Passing through a part of this inimitable concrete labyrinth, we finally arrived at St. Patrick's parish church in Jersey City, our home for the night, under the friendly supervision of Father Gaffney, our host, and moderator of the St. the Patrick's Drum Corps. We were assigned to our sleeping quarters in the church hall, told when curfew was, and given some free time. Jersey City area was not Toronto and we were somewhat taken aback by local customs. For example, bars would be open until 3 a.m., or later. Not that we were into that, but there are always one or two in any crowd that feel they have to do their own thing.

In general, discipline and cooperation prevailed, so that most of us were in bed at the proper time, in order to be in good condition for tomorrow's contest. Somehow, the staff found time for us to make an excursion into New York City proper. Entering through the Port Authority bus terminal, we travelled up Broadway, marvelling at the number of movie theatres, saw the clutter of Times Square and ended up at the Empire State Building. That alone was worth the trip.



Roosevelt Stadium with SAC & Cavaliers

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<sup>1</sup>. Bob Owens wrote: *The trip to New Jersey may have resulted in holes in the line if Mr. Baggs had not stepped in and helped myself and two other members. I had just graduated from Danforth and had my first job. My boss would not grant me permission to take the Friday off so I could be in New Jersey. Mr. Baggs organized tickets to fly to New York La Guardia airport and then be transported by helicopter to Newark. He picked us up and took us to St. Patrick's. That was my first experience flying and was an unforgettable experience.*



It is debatable if, today, a Drum Corps in a top contest would take the time to do this sort of thing, such is the pressure of modern competition. However, in those earlier days, things were more relaxed and fun was had by all.

Of course, we did rehearse and at last boarded the bus to take us to the field of competition. This was Roosevelt Stadium, in Jersey City, and it appeared gigantic. We were not used to such large stadiums, and that along with the Corps we were up against made the whole thing a little intimidating.

In competition were:

- ▶ Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights
- ▶ Garfield Cadets
- ▶ Audubon Girls
- ▶ Paterson Cadets
- ▶ St. Vincent's Cadets

Not a weak one among them.

Three of these Corps we had met the year before; St. Vincent's, Audubon, and Garfield (Holy Name). Blessed Sacrament most of us had only seen on the back cover of Drum Corps World, advertising Getzen bugles or Leedy drums. Paterson we had only heard on records.

Although it no longer exists, Roosevelt Stadium in those days was a mecca for Drum Corps shows. They included the annual Dream Contest, always held later in the year. It featured top junior and senior Corps, as did the show that we were about to enter.



Audubon Bon Bons

Before we were due to go on, Barry spoke to the Corps. He said that we knew where we were and what the competition was. All we could do was go out there and give it our best shot. One cannot swim without first getting ones feet wet.

Finally, dressed, polished, and ready, off we trooped to do our thing. We were on during the early part of the show, and although there were some gaps in the line, the show started well. If anyone

was nervous, it was not apparent, and confidence grew as the performance progressed. Applause from the crowd and an absence of major blunders helped smooth the way for us greenhorns (no pun intended). Crossing the finish line and turning to play the closing fanfare, the feeling was that we had done the best of which we were capable. Marching off the field, the crowd reaction, a standing ovation, made us feel very good about the whole thing. The crowd seemed enormous and it was. We were used to a few hundred, or a few thousand at most. This one was many thousands and a sophisticated, knowledgeable crowd at that. Shows of this calibre were often a weekly event to many of these people, living as they did, in the heart of Drum Corps land.

So it was with great pleasure that we accepted the ovation. Being from a different region, our style was very different from that of the local Corps. This fact helped us gain approval from the crowd. It would not help us with the judges, whose job was not to be generous but to be fair and accurate.

We retired to the stands to watch the other Corps and to see how it was done. They were all good, of course, and we knew that to even place would be an accomplishment.

At the time and place of this writing, accurate records are unavailable and memory is a poor servant. Suffice to say that we were in nine and one-half points out of first place, occupied by St. Vincent's or Blessed Sacrament<sup>2</sup>. This, for us, was hardly an improvement over our first, less sophisticated attempt the year before in Batavia. We had much to learn and do to climb this hurdle.



St Vincent's Cadets

Our pre-show conditioning had prepared us for such a result, so we were not too disappointed. The contest chief judge, Charlie Nabors, had commented on the score sheets how nice it was to see the old straight arm swing and slower cadence. Such things and others had long since disappeared from the routines of the local Corps and pointed up the differences between us.

Everything now over, we packed up and headed back to Toronto, full of stories about our first taste of big time competition for the folks back home. We would be back.

After our return to Canada, the score sheets from Jersey were scrutinized closely and the lessons thoroughly digested. We discovered many things about our performance that would lead to changes, not only in our show but also in our whole concept of this activity. The detailed scrutiny that we had endured served to reveal many flaws in execution. For example, I myself lost 8/10 of a point for a carelessly protruding little finger on a drumstick. This and

others were technical flaws that could be eliminated. A general change of style or material would have to wait for a while, as the show for this year was already set.



Holy Name Cadets (about 1957)

We now got back to rehearsals, as approximately one month from now we faced our first full field show in Canada. This would be against our local rivals; namely, Preston Scout House, De La Salle, and Grantham. All of these Corps were good in

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<sup>2</sup>. *Sac and Vinnies tied at 88.2, Opti was third with 79.05 follow by Paterson Cadets with 77.2 and Cambridge Caballeros with 75.65*

Canada, and we could not stay idle if we wished to maintain our position. As yet, we did not practice to a much greater extent than usual. We had for the Jersey show and did for our upcoming one, but the time spent would still not compare with the activities of today's Corps.

## The season begins in Canada

The date for the first show was July 1st, and the location was the pleasant town of Woodstock, Ontario. The occasion was the Western Ontario Championships. As far as the other Canadian Corps involved, we had no idea of what to expect, not having been in contact with any of them.

As a further reference to the more relaxed ways of those days, the girlfriend of one of the instructors has prepared a picnic. Some of us, the time being available, enjoyed this interlude in the fine sunny weather of that day. Drum Corps was truly still a hobby in Canada in 1959.

Before a local crowd of a few hundred, the competing units performed their shows. When the smoke had cleared, we stood in first, a full six points ahead of Preston Scout House, with De La Salle a close third and Grantham fourth.

For the other Corps, this was their first competition, while we had already been at it a month. While this did not detract from our success, it did partially explain it. High score in all captions was ours, with the biggest spread on drums and general effect. To "out general effect" Scout House was no mean feat in those days. It possibly happened because they finally had new material that, as yet, was imperfectly executed. The six-point spread, between us and the

rest, would not be allowed to delude us into thinking that the remainder of the season would be a pushover. The Canadian Nationals were still over two months away and both of our closest rivals would improve a great deal between now and then.

This show was the first full field show of the Canadian junior season. Although we would be pretty busy for the rest of the season, it was a very late start for Drum Corps activity compared to the Jersey area. If we had not been a participant in the May 31st Preview of Champions, this would have been our first field show. It highlights one of the differences between Canada and the USA, at that time, at least the New Jersey area. They had already been at it hot and heavy for over a month. This contrast, although to diminish somewhat in later years, would never entirely disappear and is a partial explanation of the regional disparity of the different areas, Corps-wise. Much longer rehearsal hours would help alleviate this disadvantage in years to come. Other factors that would contribute to greater



1958: Toronto Optimists receive Seaway Flag (Don Mills)



competitiveness by Canadian Corps would be more sophisticated shows, with better arrangements, as technical ability improved. Also, exposure to different, mostly stricter, standards of judging would help to close the gap.

Surprisingly, we were, later this year, to score a major success, from our viewpoint, although with a qualifying factor involved. But that would be further on in the season. Right now, we plunged into a weekly round of competitions that kept us on our toes and helped prepare us for this upset to come.

Throughout the month of July, every weekend saw us in competition against Senior Corps, both Canadian and American, and once with one other Junior Corps. Because of this schedule, we were the only Canadian Junior Corps to be active competitively for the entire month. This gave us a definite advantage over our rivals in the junior division. No matter how much one rehearses, competition is what hones a performance to the fine edge necessary for success. Preferably, competitions against Corps better than one's own. Such was our position in this month, when we competed every weekend, mostly against good Senior Corps. Only once, on the 25th, in Welland, Ontario, was another Junior Corps involved, which was De La Salle. Why such a situation? Possibly other Corps had declined to compete, feeling themselves not ready. Not very likely! They probably had not been invited. As for us, being the current champions, we were a good crowd draw and, therefore, a worthy addition to flesh out small senior contests. Had the shows been distributed on a more equitable basis, results at the end of the season could have shown a marked difference in scores, or even placings. All the world loves a winner, and we were not about to refuse entering contests for philosophical reasons. Such inequities, if that is what they were, have to be overcome by one's rivals.

These contests consisted, almost one hundred per cent, of Senior Corps from Southern Ontario, Upper New York State, and Pennsylvania. They were, though not of National Championship calibre, all very good in their own right. We did not win one of them, though according to ourselves it could have occurred on July 18th at Niagara Falls. After three attempts at beginning our show, the affair was called off due to heavy intermittent, and then constant, rain.

These shows did a lot for our season to come, and the placings, one fourth and two seconds, were not disappointing. The Senior Corps that defeated us were good. Jolly Jesters of Toronto, Eric Burton's former Corps, were consistent contenders for Canadian Senior Champions. Also, the Niagara Militaires whom we did manage to defeat once. A most impressive unit, whom we never did best, although coming very close, was the Hilton Crusaders of Hilton, New York. This Corps was always neatly, cleanly consistent and clearly marked for better things. After reorganization, they became the Irondequoit Crusaders. Subsequently, joining with the Rochester Grey Knights, no mean Corps themselves, they emerged as the Fabulous Crusaders of Rochester, N.Y. Under this name they achieved national prominence, competing on a par with the top senior units in the United States.

Through all of this they had Mr. Vince Bruni, who is today active with the D.C.A. senior circuit, as part of their staff. He is now, as then, recognized as a leader in his field, marching and maneuvering. (Vince passed away on August 29, 2003)

The intense activity of July, continuing into August, had prepared us for our first victory in the United States.



## Rome, NY

On August 15th, after a parade and exhibition the previous weekend in Sarnia, Ontario, we packed our bags and made the long bus trip to Rome. A small town in Upper New York State, Rome was later to acquire a special significance for us; today, however, it became noteworthy as the location of our initial victory in the United States and not against unworthy opponents. The St. Catherine's Queensmen of St. Albans, N.Y., were there, as were the Garfield Cadets. Less than four points separated the top three Corps, with us in number one position. In second place was the St. Catherine's Queensmen, and bringing up third was Garfield. Garfield! We had never even come close to them before, let alone defeat them, and there was a qualifying factor involved.

Having broken with their sponsor, Garfield (formerly the Holy Name Cadets) had not only lost uniforms and instruments, but, no doubt, some members as well. The remaining members had, with determination, managed to buy and borrow instruments and had outfitted themselves with an all-white version of a uniform. This uniform was very similar to that of Preston Scout House, with whom they had a close connection. Under this makeshift arrangement, they had fielded a Corps for this year, and though still good, were not of the calibre of previous years. Many Corps would not survive such a blow to their organization, but Garfield, as they now called themselves, were not an ordinary Corps. This year, a setback in their long history would prove a minor obstacle to future success. The ensuing year would bear out this observation, and modern types are all familiar with Garfield and their prominence in D.C.I. Now known as The Cadets of Bergen County, they continue to represent the best in Drum Corps achievement. Yes! That day in 1959, we did beat them. But .....?

On August 22nd, the Optimist Club sponsored the Ontario Championship at East York Stadium in Toronto. Being the host Corps, we performed only in exhibition. This show was two-dimensional in that it featured the Ontario Junior "A" and Junior "B" championships. Such a format was organized in order that more Corps would have a chance at competing, helping to provide some much needed contests.

In the Junior "A" division, Preston Scout House took top honours, with De La Salle placing a close second. Grantham was again third. De La Salle was already displaying the tenacity that was to serve them so well in years to come. They contained, as yet unrealized, the seeds of greatness.

The obvious current potential of Scout House, De La Salle, and Grantham was not lost on us. It was apparent that any relaxation of effort on our part could only have calamitous results. In this respect, being able to observe our rivals first hand helped us as much as they were helped by participation in competitive activity.

This was brought home to us on September 5th when, performing at less than peak, we just barely edged out De La Salle for first place at the annual Canadian National Exhibition contest. Only a week later we soared to a full eight points and fourteen points over second and third places, respectively, of which De La Salle was one. This late in the season such inconsistency is unusual, to say the least, and definitely not healthy. How to explain this? Possibly it was an indication of apprehension regarding the fast approaching Nationals. More likely, it was a sign of a not yet fully developed maturity as a competitive Corps. We were still not yet two years old as a Junior "A" unit, and some cracks were still showing. A combination of these factors and others not doubt had their effect.

## 1959 Canadian Nationals

Finally, as last loomed, unavoidably, the first defence of our hard won National Title. The Canadian National Drum and Bugle Corps Championships, would be held again in Galt, Ontario, on September 12, 1959. We had been watching our rivals closely, and, although we had defeated them all throughout the year, the scores had often been within easy to overcome range. The big question mark was Scout House, whom we had seen but not competed against since the first Canadian field contest of the year. They had been improving steadily before our eyes. Only one year out of championship status themselves, still very powerful and popular, they constituted the biggest threat to our position.

A sure indication of the mood surrounding the approaching drama was the short bus trip to Galt. The previous year the trip had been a riot of unrestrained chaos, until curbed by cooler heads. During the entire length of this trip, you could have heard a pin drop. WE were now the defending champs, with nothing to gain but another title, but with everything to lose. In subsequent years, such tensions would almost always be present, varying only in degree, to an extent that sometimes affected the performance.

Off we went, grim, determined, but of course full of optimism. As with the previous year, Championship day dawned bright and sunny, and things were conducted in the usual businesslike manner. Interest was high among observers to see if the Optimists could retain their title. Scout House had been receiving additional instruction from a local Senior Corps and were as primed for this as they could possibly be. As an aside, such partisan activity was not uncommon. The Optimists themselves would develop ties with a Senior Corps in later years, though in a different capacity.

Again, the contest was held in the afternoon, enabling the victorious Junior Corps to perform after the senior contest in the evening. By doing this, the evening crowd was entertained while scores for the senior show were tabulated.

There were many Corps in junior shows and memory does not recall them all. They all put on fine performances, contributing to a good afternoon's entertainment; however, the Scout House, Optimist, De La Salle, Grantham line-up was what was attracting the most interest.

Scout House appeared flawless, new music and routines having been perfected, and they bowled over the crowd. Everybody in the Optimists was aware that anything less than our best would lose the day.



1959: Toronto Optimists at Nationals (Galt)

With the opening fanfare echoing around the park, all tension disappeared and we stepped off the line, as we had done many times before. The show unfolded smoothly, and, after having trampled a hundred yards of field, we were owners of our second national title.

This time the margin was a full two points over Preston, who were second, with De La Salle third and Grantham fourth, a now familiar pattern. The score difference was a half point wider than the previous year and served to firmly establish our position.

Whereas, the previous year our win at this show had produced a spontaneous outburst of elation, a similar reaction this year was tempered with relief. We were still champions. From now on when this title was on the line, relief would always play a part when favourable results were announced. As the years passed and the list of titles lengthened, tension would grow, especially when a capable challenge was evident; most years there was. It was one price of success, not that anyone would have had it any other way. We had won the major contest of the year, again, but our season was not yet over. There were still more shows and contests, facing yet again our junior rivals.

Exactly one week after our victory, we appeared at Varsity Stadium in Toronto, as part of the junior portion of the 4th Annual International Drum and Trumpet Corps Championship.



1959: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Galt)

Leaside Lions and the Canadian Bugle and Trumpet Band Association sponsored this contest. Notice the titles of the contest and the association. They were, considering the state of Canadian Drum Corps at this stage of the game, somewhat anachronistic. This situation would shortly change as Canada, bit by bit, pulled itself into more up-to-date terminology. It had to do with the origin of the species in Canada, which was a little different from that of the United States.

The contest was a junior and senior show. It featured top U.S. and Canadian Corps competing against each other in their respective categories. Last year, Scout House had represented Canada in the junior division.

Our competition was the Audubon Girls, from Audubon, N. J., who had thoroughly trounced us during the last two years. They had beat us again, now, but the total spread was only 1.17, and we actually swept the three execution captions; drums, bugles, and M & M, by small margins.

The season was, even now, not yet ended, as we had to meet Scout House and De La Salle again, for the last time this year, as it turned out. This was on September 26th in Auburn, N.Y., for the New York/Canadian Association title. This association is now non-existent, but, then, it was a prestigious title to possess. Preston, now way down because they had failed to regain their Canadian title, put on a sparkling performance. They tied us on two captions and won another handily. We only took first place by the slim margin of 0.55. It was an unpopular



decision, and Scout House had the crowd with them all the way. This, however, was a phenomenon that one had to learn to accept when appearing on the same field as Scout House. In their prime, as they still were, they nearly always had the crowd. It was their unique style and quality of performance that contrasted with all others who were basically the same, differing only in degree.

It was also at this show that a group of knowledgeable, non-partisan observers noted that unless they modified their style, there was not a future for them in competitive Drum Corps.

The final contest of the year was held at the Annual St. Catharines Grape Festival, one week later. Thus appeared a first blemish on a hitherto clean record. We pulled out of it. Because both Preston and De La Salle were involved in this show, immediate reaction among some was that we had pulled out to avoid a late season defeat by Preston.



1959: Toronto Optimists (Toronto City Hall)

The official explanation from our side was that it was now October, the official release month, and reorganization was already underway; plus, everybody was very tired after a strenuous season, and there would be many holes in the line. There was some truth in this because not everyone was a total Drum Corps fanatic. After winning two major titles, some were indifferent to another show. Most would have come, but whatever the truth, Grape Festival organizers and local fans were not very happy. We were the number one Corps and the

one that everyone wanted to see. The fact that our three major rivals would also be there added further drama to the situation. It would have been a repeat of the championships, but, by pulling out, we converted it into just another contest. Forfeiting a posted bond, the decision stuck and the situation remained unchanged. Strange are the ways of men, but most of us were glad the season was over. We were tired and had had enough, almost. Toronto's stalwart mayor had again arranged a civic reception to honour the Corps. Again, we marched up Bay Street to the steps of Old City Hall, waking up those asleep at their desks. The appropriate pleasantries were exchanged, and then it was over. Well, if nothing else, people in New Jersey had at least now heard of Toronto, Ontario.

Next year? Nobody was thinking that far ahead yet, at least not the rank and file; but others were, and their plans and ambitions were to bring about many changes.

On with the show!



## Chapter 7: Winter 1959/60 – What’s New, Pussycat?

The Corps was now a well-established and increasingly well-known unit. Exposure in new areas and almost one hundred percent favourable coverage in Drum Corps publications served to spread our reputation. Certain standards were now expected on the field as well as off. When the Corps was performing, it was expected to be good, and, when wearing a Corps jacket in public, it was hoped that your behaviour would create a good impression.

In order that this growing reputation be maintained and enhanced, it was necessary to make changes. We would, of course, make a run at a third consecutive Canadian title, aware that this would not be easy.

With the expanding movement here, more hungry contenders would appear, to join those already in existence. Our thoughts turned south, toward the United States. We had experienced moderate success there and hoped to return to try again. Both of these goals required that changes be made, to stay abreast of the times.

In order to achieve success in the U.S., it was apparent that we would have to become more American in style.



1960: Jim, Bill & Ron cleaning their horns

Since the United States was where the whole business began and developed, they were the best at it. The name of the game became to do what they do, only do it better. Beat them at their own game, so to speak, in their own backyard.

This, of course, was easier said than done, but the attempt had to be made or we would, ourselves, be overtaken by others in Canada with similar ideas.

This was what we all wanted, and, in the future, we would often measure ourselves against, and aim for, U.S. Corps; soon, one in particular. By this method, we hoped to be able to remain ahead of our Canadian rivals. One of them, in retrospect, was of the opinion that their quest after us was what kept us moving up. There is more than a grain of truth in this, but our aspirations toward American Corps was also a major factor influencing the extent and range of our activities.

### Changes were needed

The first casualty of this expanded ambition was the “happy type” music theme adopted at the inception of the Corps. It had originally been introduced because it suited the name of the Corps and was in keeping with the concept of the Optimist Club. Now, for competition purposes, it became a limiting factor. Enough of this type of music existed that could have

fuelled such a theme for years. It also could have produced stagnant, predictable performances, or even repetitious, that could have had an effect on scores, mostly through the general effect captions. There are Corps that do adopt this policy successfully; the most obvious, the Hawthorne Caballeros, but we were through with it. Retaining only the official Optimist Club song, "Hail to Optimism", we moved on.

The result was to be a much harder driving show. It featured a mix of semi-classical, march, and old-time popular music for the bulk of the field presentation. The cadence was stepped up from our hitherto leisurely 124 paces a minute to a peppier 134. This pace would often be exceeded later on, due to enthusiasm and exuberance.

That was change number two. It was also an innovation that was not revealed until the first public airing and was immediately picked up and used by others in Canada. That gave us an edge at the opening of the season, as we had spent all winter rehearsing at the new cadence and our execution was attuned to it.

The horn line was now to begin experimentation with slides and rotary valves. Arrangements of greater complexity required the full capability of the instruments. It was a matter of improving technical proficiency, a definite must for further inroads south of the border.

To refer to the previous chapter, the observers, mentioned at the New York/Canadian contest at Auburn, N.Y., who commented on Scout House, also noticed the relative simplicity of our show. Much block chording in the music and straightforward drill patterns. Scout House, at the time, had a more complex music and drill routine than us. Simple but effective could summarize our show. This was alright, unless you had ambitions to move up. Then it was not good enough. Accordingly, we were the ones to modify our style in the direction of greater difficulty. In the future, such observations would not be repeated. It was a step in the right direction.

The people who made these remarks about Scout House and us were off-duty American judges. Their opinions could be considered valid and had appeared at a later date in a Galt newspaper.

To some more advanced units these things were already elementary, but to us it was all new. The greater technical ability involved allowed greater range and variety in the repertoire. When mastered, it would make its presence felt on the field.

The colour guard, still under the control of Eric Burton,



1959: Seaway Flag (Don Chisolm, Bob Cook, Phil Hennings)



and increasingly feeling the influence of the ambitious and enthusiastic Ivor Bramley, moved into more intricate routines. The rifle squad, especially, had become more specialized in their drills, involving spinning and tossing. It had come as a surprise to some that they used nine-pound Lee-Enfield rifles, the real thing, not lightweight imitations.

The flag line was growing in size as new flags were added, always by virtue of having been won, or presented to represent an occasion or institution. At the 1959 Civic Reception, we had been awarded the City of Toronto flag and, later, the St. Lawrence Seaway flag.

Major changes, but the least evident, took place in the drum line. To the unschooled observer, one drum line looks and sounds much the same as another. To those who are aware, there can be, and are, great differences.

It began when Lorne Ferrazzutti, still drum instructor, required that all current members of the line work on snare drum rudiments. This was before the days of the matched-grip and thirty-piece percussion squads. The only members of the line who played the full range of rudiments were snare drummers. Now everybody would become familiar with them.



1958: Don Mills Sky Raiders (Nationals, Galt)

During the previous season, we had acquired two new snare drummers due to the breakup of the Sky Raiders Drum and Bugle Corps, who were also 180 Squadron Air Cadets. In 1958, we had used only two snare drummers but had acquired a third for 1959. With the two more now added, we had, at the moment, a total of five. A couple of weeks later, I walked another one, Ronn Prokop. He had drummed with Sea Cadets and then spent one year in Scout House. People seldom left Scout House for other Junior Corps, and this could be seen as a sign of the times.

Although Mr. Prokop would eventually achieve international fame, he was, right now, just another new guy.

## The “Big” Drum Line

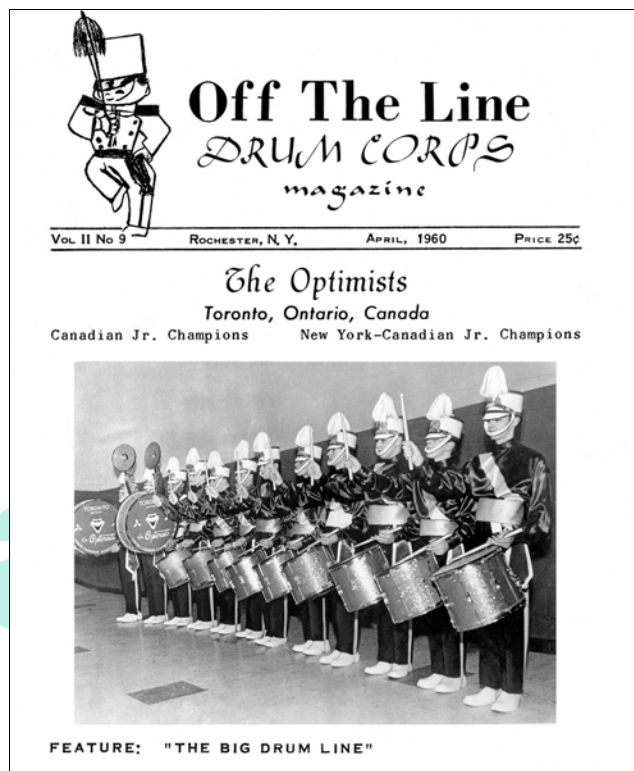
We now had six snares, which, along with the three tenors, two bass, and one cymbals, gave us a total of twelve people working on rudiments. Anybody else who was interested was invited to try out on tenor, bass, etc. The offer was taken up by more than a few. All winter the regular drummers worked on rudiments, all of them, even some Swiss. The old standard drum solos; “Connecticut Halftime”, “Old Dan Tucker”, “Army 2/4”, and “Three Camps”, became familiar to all. A few actually managed to play them.

At this point, it was realized that we had a very good chance of fielding a six-man snare drum line. Modern Drum Corps types will say, “so what”. Well, in those days, this size of line was unheard of. Three snare, three, tenor, two bass, and one cymbal was the standard line and was almost universally in use. A few Corps had tried other combinations. Four and four, even two and two, but usually stuck with three and three. This was mainly due to the requirements of execution and the size of one’s horn-line. Techniques for eight, or ten, well-executing snare drums, along with twenty or more other percussion pieces had not yet been developed. It would be some years yet before drum lines grew in size and complexity to become the large, well-executing percussion sections that are the norm today.

Thus, with our six snares, we were a bit ahead of our time; nevertheless, it was planned to use them – until circumstance and practicality intervened. Further along we shall see how, but, meanwhile, no less than Wild Bill Hooten, leader of The Reilly Raiders had visited us in January. Having watched the six in action, he had been most impressed.

Drill-wise, the major change, as mentioned earlier, was the increased cadence. This took some getting used to. The fact that we had the fall, winter, and spring rehearsals to master it was an asset. Also, style changes were introduced. The arm-swing was altered from stiff-armed to a more relaxed, bent-at-the-elbow position. Snapping horns and body into position became the norm, rather than a casual moving into position. More emphasis was placed on military bearing and, for the first time, a genuine effort was made to standardize leg heights when marking time. In addition to raising leg heights we began the first experiments in using a measured pace. Many hours were spent trying to find the best methods for doing all of these things.

To everyone in every section, all of this was innovation. Everybody was eager and strove to grasp everything for the beginning of the new season. Of course, the coming season would be the most challenging yet.



1960: “Big” Drum Line (Maple Leaf Gardens)





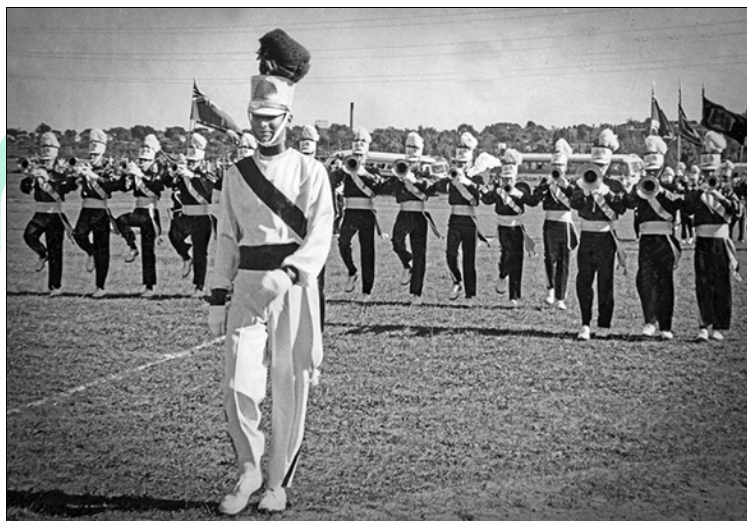
1960: Grantham at the Grape Festival Parade

their fans. Most of the time it was friendly and the two Corps often mingled and exchanged ideas. For years, the two Corps practised on the adjacent fields that we had found on that day in 1958 when looking for a new practice spot. That day, De La Salle was already there.

This rivalry, though healthy and friendly, revealed its depth when we acquired a former De La Salle member, Frank Gabriel, the only one we ever got. At the time, in local circles, this was akin to one of the Hatfields joining the McCoys.

## Change of Drum Major

To round off our slate of changes, we lost the services of our flamboyant second Drum Major, Don Chisholm. He had distinguished himself at the 1959 Nationals. When we were on the line, ready, as winners, to perform the exhibition after the senior contest, he marched out to his starting position in a parody of the Scout House style. This entailed almost the full width of the field, and it was unmistakable. It caused both humour and unrest, but not enough of either to cause any serious disruptions. Needless to say, Mr. Baggs was not amused. Don was a genuine loss, his wit and irreverence served to create many an uproarious bus trip. We would not see his like again.



1960: Barry Bell as Drum Major

Phil Hennings was still with us, as Drum Major, and as military as ever. It was felt, though, that with the added variety of music, someone more musically inclined should be doing the actual conducting.

The responsibility fell on none other than a slim, slightly stoop-shouldered, and overworked fellow by the name of Barry Bell. He had done this before with the Danforth Crusaders. As musical director of The Optimists, his plate was full. He did not really need or want it now, but nobody else suitable was available. Ever compliant with necessity, he took it over.

## Corps Spirit

The overall spirit that existed in the Corps had yet to subside. It was as pervasive now as it had been at the beginning. In an army, this would be called morale, and it was an important factor. It had its ups and down, of course, but it was mostly up, likely due to the almost constant run of success that the Corps had enjoyed.

Its manifestations were varied. There was seldom a lack of volunteers for anything that had to be done. Section rehearsals, on ones own time, had become almost second nature to many, as well as individual practice to increase ones ability.

One fellow, a baritone horn player had, I saw it, worn a smooth groove in the concrete floor of his basement. This had resulted from many hours of marking time playing his horn, on one spot. Needless to say, he was one of our more concrete members. His playing and marching ability was admired and imitated by others. His name was Al Punkari, and he was one among many similar stories.

Also, as at the restaurant near the school, when at the waterfront practising, people would stay after practice. They would often stay until one or two in the morning, or later, talking about Corps. The presence of more than a few of the aforementioned people, not only then but also later, helped the Optimists on their gradual climb to success.



1960: Corps members with restaurant owners near the waterfront rehearsal site



As a unit, the members, instructors, and executive got along remarkably well. If there were any disputes between instructors and executive, they never reached our ears. There was friction of course, and this is almost unavoidable, even healthy, in a large organization such as a Drum Corps. The staff ironed out cases of disagreement or dissension that surfaced in the Corps itself, and friction never lasted long.

Many had different ideas about things and were usually allowed to try them out. Often, they were adopted, to the advantage of all.

An every growing sense of unity, “Corps Spirit” as it was called, focussed on the desire for a better Corps. This “spirit”, “esprit de corps”, “elan”, or what have you, would in the future reveal its extent when disaster was imminent. As yet, we had encountered no major emergency.

If all this sounds like a regimented unit of willing slaves, it was not exactly that at all. Rehearsals were carried on in a mood of good-natured application to the task at hand and were interspersed with breaks. There was always fun. Many associated with people outside the Corps itself, doing things that all other normal people do. (It was thought that people in Corps were not quite normal.) Cliques and groups existed but not to a rigid degree, and it was just one, big, usually happy, family.

## The “Tough Guys”

Our practice spot at the corner of Carlton and Jarvis streets served to be the source of rumours and theories that had no great basis in fact. This was part of the tenderloin district. Interested parties often thought that one reason for our success was the fact that we were from a “tough” area. Being “tough” kids, we had to fight harder for what we got. This attempt to explain our repeated dominance of the local scene was not only misplaced but also indicative of much deliberation in this direction. It was wrong because actually very few of us were from this area itself. Some were, and were “tough” kids; but, as described before, many came from all over the city and from out-of-town. This theory



1960: Barry Bell, Dave Hanks, and corps by the waterfront

holds less water when it is realized that “toughness” does not a good Drum Corps make. Skill, dexterity, planning, and creativity are just a few of the requirements. Toughness may only play a part in the length of hours put in. This is also called dedication. As a sop to the theorists, I will say that those who did originate from that area really were tough. They had to be. Humourously, as ordinary young men who often like to think themselves tough, we did profess a certain, maybe misplaced, pride in this circumstance. Unofficially, we adopted the name, “The Jarvis Street Commandos”.



This area, however, did produce its pathos and humour. One very warm night, we had opened the doors of the auditorium to the outside to let some air in. The music floated out onto Jarvis Street. Unobtrusively, a young lady of the night had come right to the door and stood observing the proceedings. We were having ensemble practice, and she stood looking in on a world she had not been aware of before. One of our members approached and spoke with her, but it is not known what she thought. Although some of our members were familiar with her world, she was obviously, until now, unfamiliar with ours. Eventually, she slipped away, to who knew where, and we remained in our comfortable niche.

On another occasion, one of our members encountered a local resident performing an act usually confined to the washroom. He was prompted to make uncomplimentary remarks, whereupon she went to bring her mate. He was about 150 pounds heavier, but fortunately a streetcar came along at that moment and our man made his exit safely. Due to past, and present prominence, the name is being withheld, to protect the guilty.

All this had nothing to do with the Corps and its operation; it was where we practised. Just part of life in the big city.

### **Finalizing the show**

Before the season came around, the show required finalizing and membership, again, finalized. We still had some music from the previous year, but most of the show was new, both music and drill. The concert had been slated for change, but this did not happen. The first number, "Serenade from the Student Prince", was a beautiful vehicle for solo horn work by Joe Gianna and Al Morrison and it had proven itself popular for the one year that we had played it. It provided a fine contrast for the now trademark, "In The Mood", that we had played since 1958. This was the number to be replaced, but later, the selection chosen, when aired, would prove to be a flop. So, "In The Mood" stayed for the third year. The fans loved it, we loved it, and the judges as well.

The horn line had been boosted into the thirties, from the original 27 to around 33. In those days, 36 was considered big. The colour guard had twelve men and, with our bigger drum line, we would have close to 60 members on the field. What a contrast to today, when 128 is considered the normal, and anything less can endanger one's chances for top contention.

The drum line by now had sorted itself out. Those who had left tenor, bass, or cymbals, to practice snare for the winter, returned to their original places. Those who had tried for their positions went back to where they had come from, leaving us with six more snare drums. If Lorne had been searching for some hidden, missed talents, he was unsuccessful, but the experience was good for all.

The six snares formed a competent line, but it would not last too long, which would lead to some difficulties. Of the new members on snare, Ronn Prokop, who was already a good drummer when he joined, showed real potential to become extraordinary. Coming into contact with Lorne Ferrazzutti had taken its effect and he really began to develop into a snare drummer par excellence. Others would too, but, if one was around Prokop, it was to usually be in the twilight, rather than the limelight. This was evident to all, even those with little or no knowledge of drumming. To Ronn's credit, he never allowed himself to be affected by any admiration or flattery, always being a solid lineman and a first-class Corpsman.

## The Social Side

The changes referred in the title of this chapter not only apply to style and material but also additions to the Corps in various departments. This was how it grew bit by bit, and, at this time, the ladies decided to get in on the act.

Mrs. Nonie McKolskey, who had a son, Terry, in the Corps, together with a number of other enthusiastic “mums” began what became the Ladies Auxiliary. This was the year that they started, and it took them a while to get themselves organized. Once they did, they began to assume responsibilities and, the following year, their influence began to make itself felt. Coincidentally, Mrs. McKolskey herself, after being with the Corps for two years, would become the wife of Bernie Beer.



1960: At a dance

There was another ladies organization that had been around for a while to help the Corps. Less obvious, but no less effective than the Ladies Auxiliary was to become, was the Opti-Mrs. They were the wives of the men of the Optimists Club. Seldom heard from and even less seen, they nevertheless played a big part in activities like dances and parties. Such people helped make the world go round.

On April 17, 1960, a dinner / dance was held and a tradition began. The first 5-year rings were issued; it being five years since the Optimist Club had assumed the sponsorship of the Corps. Seventeen were given out that night. All was well with the club. There had never been a word



1960: First Recipients of 5 year rings

of regret, at least publicly, about the reversal of opinion that originally led to the sponsorship. The Corps had exceeded all expectations, while bringing the club much good publicity. It was a living advertisement for their good works.

During the previous year, the Corps had set up another band composed of much younger fellows, at Oak Park Public School in East York. They were

called the Bantam Optimists, and they were what was known as a Feeder Corps. Run by various people during their existence, they were initially organized by Bill Jay, an ex-Optimist bugler, and Fred Johnson. Fred later became a successful Scarborough politician. Members of the Junior Corps itself would go, one or two nights a week, to instruct. The idea was to create a reserve pool of talent from which the Corps could draw new players. It was rapidly becoming harder for someone new to join the Corps without some prior training. By this year, the Bantams a thriving enterprise. In the future, it would prove its value beyond all doubt.

All these things described were new, adding weight and complexity to the whole organization. Where would it all end? Who knew? Who cared? This was a rolling stone that gathered moss as more people jumped on the bandwagon (no pun intended).

## Our Competition

Rumours were more rife this year than usual, and reports reached our ears that De La Salle and, particularly, Scout House were red hot and raring to go. We could check out De La Salle, if we cared, but Preston was harder to observe. Now, some units often held closed rehearsals, which was supposed to hide something. It was the beginning of the cold war, one strange report that reached us was that Scout House would only enter two contests this year, one of which was the Nationals. This proved to be true, with results that we shall cover later. De La Salle were never to be taken lightly, and seldom were by us. Many who had been around for a while generally found it best to ignore rumours and wait to see what was real. This was because they were usually the same every year, and it took the first show to confirm.

As for us, we were again scheduled to be busier than ever. We would again open at the Ice Follies. By this time, we should have been doing it on skates. The Corps was sounding the best we had ever heard it, and all were eager to see how the new style and show would be accepted by both fans and judges.

There stretched before us a full season of tough competition, against both American and Canadian opponents. We were not the only ones to make changes and progress, as this year would demonstrate.

As so, we anticipated much activity, but, at this early stage, uppermost in our minds was the fact that we were going back to New Jersey. What better place to test ones new ideas and innovations.

And the band played on.



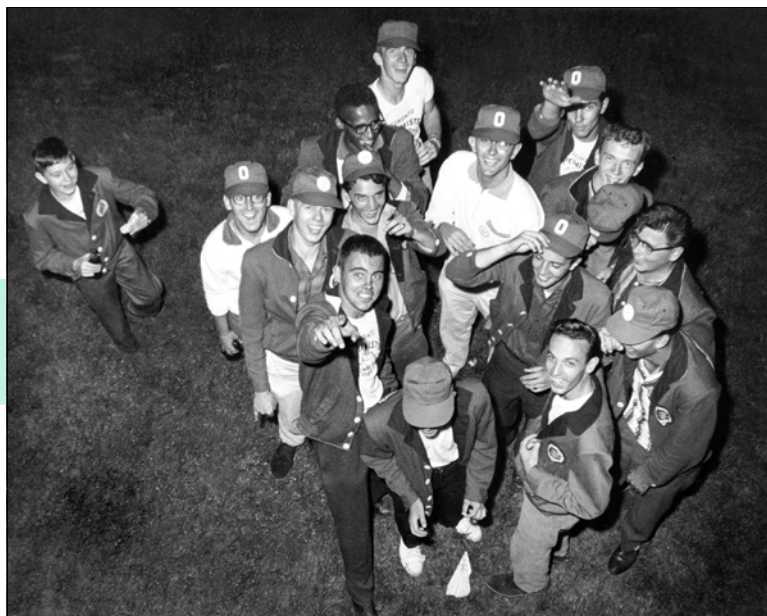
1960: Toronto Optimists rehearsing (from the Toronto Star)



## Chapter 8: 1960 – And On And On

As the Corps grew its influence was felt in more ways than on the field. Many of our people, instructors and members, were instructing other Corps. This was a common practice, not unique to us, even extending indirectly to helping ones rivals. Being the current champions, though, did increase the demand for Optimist personnel to act as teachers to others, a logical occurrence.

For instance, Eric Burton, the colour guard instructor, besides still being responsible for the Optimists guard, was also instructing four other guards. One of these was Grantham, one of our chief rivals. Also, Mike Layton, our guard captain, was the instructor of the Guelph Royalaires, a top Canadian Senior Corps. People from the drum line and horn line also participated in this activity. Later in the year, it reached a degree with one Corps that served to cause repercussions.



1960: casual shot of some Optimists

An interesting highlight of the off-season that had nothing to do with us occurred in February, in the New Jersey area. There was a testimonial to Charlie Nabors, the Chief Judge of the Eastern Judges Association. He had been the chief judge when we first appeared at the Preview of Champions in Jersey City. His Drum Corps career had spanned forty-eight years. Forty-eight years! And we thought what we were Drum Corps nuts. It is noteworthy that he was head of the Eastern Judges Association. At that time, in the USA, there was more than one judging association. Canada, of course, had its own.

In the USA, we had so far encountered the N.Y. State and Eastern Judges Association. Later, we would encounter the Mid-Atlantic Association and others. Because of this situation, there were different score sheets and standards. Much of this has now disappeared due to the standardization of things under the D.C.I. banner. This is much better.

To get back to the theme of this story, (it is hard not to digress) we had quite a bit of activity to keep us occupied during the later winter and early spring period. There was, of course, the Ice Follies. It was a good opportunity to try out new music.

Canada's Marching Ambassadors, one of the better Senior Corps anywhere, annually organized a military ball. It was called, aptly enough, "The Ambassadors Ball". These affairs were grand, glittering occasions, attended by any or all Corps members who cared to come. The men wore their respective uniforms and the ladies wore evening gowns. Always colourful and well attended, they were reminiscent of military balls of a bygone era. This year, it was held at the

Tam O'Shanter Club in Scarborough. This site has long since gone, having been destroyed by fire. The balls have also gone, as have the Marching Ambassadors, and the Canadian Drum Corps scene is much the poorer for it.

## A Corps Song

Around this time, it was decided to have a contest within the Corps itself, to come up with a Corps song. This would be another tool to help engender Corps spirit. Not that it was flagging. It never had. Six good entries were received and judged. Glen Durish, who lived in Windsor, Ontario, and commuted to practice weekly, a long trip, won it. His entry entitled "On, March On" was adopted as the official Corps song and was hereafter sung lustily at all contests, usually before the show.

There were also other unofficial songs sung only in the confines of the bus, away from public ears. Some of these were entitled:

"Lulu"

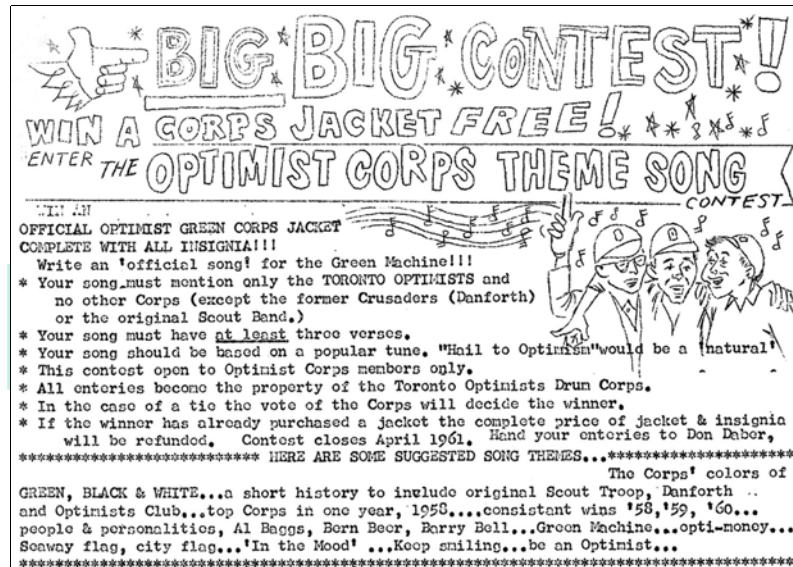
"The Backseat Boys, and

"The Ollie Miller Moses Long"

Though not suitable for public airing, they were fun, harmless, and almost equally as effective as spirit raisers.

This year the annual Canadian Drum Corps Association convention was held at Prudhommes Motel, near the City of St. Catharines, Ontario. Usually, the whole motel and its neighbour, The Beacon, just down the road, was taken over for the weekend by Drum Corps. Apart from much partying, many things were accomplished, which was the intent in the first place. Drum, bugle and drill clinics were held with the purpose of spreading knowledge and ideas to any that were interested. This year, we provided the demonstration drum section. Lorne conducted the clinic and was well received. The six snares were used and created much interest and speculation. Also, new tenor drumsticks of unique design, created by Lorne Ferrazzutti and Eric Burton, stirred much curiosity. They became sought after by others.

Dates are very indistinct for this period, but around this time, we were involved in two events. For the first time, we sent a four-man drum squad to compete in an American individual contest, in Philadelphia, PA. The four of us, of which I was one, competed as a drum quartet, and Ronn Prokop entered the solo snare drum contest. None of us fared very well, our material and standards



1960: Competition to create a Corps Song

apparently not on par with more experienced entrants; however, it was a learning experience, and we saw what was probably a final appearance of the famous Liberty Bell Cadets, on the streets of Philadelphia. We were also entertained with first class recordings at the post home of the Archer-Epler Musketeers Senior Corps in Upper Darby, PA. That alone, was worth the trip.

The second event was our participation in a local standstill contest. This featured local Corps, and, for the first time, we used the six snares in competition. It was also the last time. Besides winning the competition, we topped the execution drum caption by two points, even though our closest competition used only two snare drums. This was a statement on the junior drum lines of the time, and a bright omen for our big line. But it would not last.

## Woodstock

In May of this year, there was a long weekend called “Empire Day” weekend. This occasion was a national holiday and is still in effect, though the name has been changed to one more appropriate “Victoria Day”. We spent this interval in a fashion that was then rare but is now commonplace. A three-day camp had been arranged in the town of Woodstock, Ontario, and the purpose was to practice, preparing for our trip to New Jersey.

Woodstock is a very pleasant town, situated approximately one hundred miles west of Toronto. Its pleasant atmosphere was more than enhanced by the friendly nature of the people. For three days, as guests of the Woodstock Imperials Senior Drum and Bugle Corps, we were housed and fed by the local residents. Since most were city kids, it was a wonderful experience being out in the country for three days. Those who were there have never forgotten this occasion, and the Optimists Corps was ever grateful to the town of Woodstock. Apart from this, uppermost in our minds was the fact that this was a work weekend, to prepare for our second appearance at the “Preview of Champions” contest in Jersey City. And work we did. Three days of solid practice culminated in a street parade and exhibition. The six snares were used, as it turned out, for the last time, until big drum lines became a common thing.



1960: Practising for Preview of Champions

A lot of things were settled at this time. One of them was the dropping of “Blue Skies”, the replacement concert number, and the re-introduction of “In The Mood”. This was the third year of its use but this was offset by a new arrangement. Also, the drum line was dropped back to its regular size. This move caused some disturbance.

The people in the snare line, themselves, had determined that the use of six snare drums in New Jersey would set us at a definite disadvantage, in that much tougher area. They approached



Lorne with this conclusion and it was decided to use only three snares. This decision forced some hard action. Only the three best, or most compatible, would be able to remain, and the other three would have to find new positions. As it turned out, one drifted away with no hard feelings as he had not been there very long anyway. A position on tenor drum had been open for a while, when one of our members married and wisely left the Corps. This spot was taken by one of the now excess snare drummers. The third man, Jim Reynolds, left the Corps, and this was unfortunate. He had been



1960: guys from Optimists & Garfield

a conscientious member from day one, being an original from Danforth Crusaders. His attendance and efforts were beyond reproach and, due to our ambitions, he became a victim of expediency. This was the one that hurt, although the general membership was unaware of it. All this maneuvering was done behind the scenes and all that we saw was the end result. As a consequence, we were all happily ready to go to New Jersey, unaware of any hard feelings, and thinking ourselves well prepared for anything they could throw us.

## 1960 Preview of Champions

They threw it, and we caught it, again. It was not as bad as before. Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights took top honours, with a score of 86.90 points. We were fifth, and last, scoring 80.0. In between were Chicago Cavaliers, Garfield Cadets, and St. Catherine's Queensmen. This score was a definite improvement over the previous year and served to vindicate the style and material changes that had been adopted. Also, it still showed that we were not, at this time of year, fully prepared to compete at this level. Results later in the season would bear out this observation. There were other, positive, signs.

Our abbreviated, but now normal size, drum line had scored only 1.1 behind that of the Golden Knights, and 0.1 from that of the Chicago Cavaliers. This was a definite plus, as both these lines were known for their precision. Also, our public image was improved when a columnist, Jim "Ratsy" Warfle, made the following remarks in the June issue of



1960: Toronto Optimists (Preview of Champions)

“Off The Line” magazine. “Impressive drill, music as good or better than the rest of the Corps”. He also used the term “green machine”, referring to us. This colourful term had long been applied to the Chicago Cavaliers and was well known as their name. Well, now we were to hear it more often, as “Go, Go Green Machine” began to be heard at competitions. This name had first been heard at the 1959 Grey Cup parade, but now, with the wider publicity, it began to stick.

Still on the subject of names, the Corps had, by now, acquired a few unofficial ones. Within the Corps, in a humorous vein, we would sometimes refer to ourselves as “The Toronto Optimists Drum and Bungle Corps”, or “Barry Bell’s Bugged Up Bugle Band”. Heard many times, more publicly, would be “Opti-Corps” or just “Opti”. Occasionally would be heard “The Green Latrine”. Terms like these were all part of the Corps scene and were all taken with a grain of salt. Of course we also had names for other Corps. At this stage of the game, any names directed at us were somewhat flattering compared to what others would call us later.



1960: Getting ready to practice drill

When describing the past, present, and future success of the Corps, one important element must be included, musical arrangements. Music was arranged for us by a variety of people. Foremost in this category was Truman Crawford of the U.S. Air Force Drum & Bugle Corps<sup>3</sup>. The use of his musical arrangements was a strong factor in the success achieved to date. Barry Bell also did some arranging, and his work had stood the test, or we would not have scored as we had. This year, for the first time, we played a number arranged by Jack Bullock of Geneva, New York. His expertise in this department would be recognized by anyone who had ever heard his Corps, “The Appleknockers”. With probably the smallest horn line in Senior Drum Corps circles, they would always bring down the house with their classy arrangements and superb playing.



1960: Toronto Optimists leave the field (Preview of Champions)

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<sup>3</sup>. Truman Crawford was with the U.S. Air Force Drum Corps from 1953 until it disbanded in 1963. In 1966, he was asked to join the U.S. Marine Drum and Bugle Corps as chief musical arranger. He stayed for the next 30 years.



This use of outside talent to help the corps to improve in the music category would later extend to the marching and maneuvering caption, writing and teaching drill patterns. Strangely, though, it did not extend to the drum line. It was not necessary, as the line constantly improved. This says something about the instruction. Not until many years later, and after great changes, was outside instruction brought in, and then the results were less than ideal.

Rehearsals were still Monday and Wednesday evenings at the school, and Sunday at the Waterfront. During the winter, Sunday rehearsals were held at the A.E. Long plant in Scarborough, the workplace of Bernie Beer. When at the waterfront, people who worked downtown would go straight from work, to secure the best of the two fields. One had fewer potholes and better grass.

## The arrival of Don Daber

One night, a few of us were there early to stake our claim when we noticed someone standing nearby. He was a sandy haired young man who obviously wanted to get acquainted. We invited him over to join us, and thus began a long and fruitful career in Drum Corps.

This was Don Daber, and the Optimists Drum Corps, and Drum Corps in general, would never again be quite the same.

His purpose, he explained, was to write a freelance article on Canadian Drum Corps which, he hoped, would interest one of the major Toronto newspapers. We were immediately all for it since newspapers seldom, if ever, had any news about Drum Corps. We, of course, thought that all Corps news should be on the front pages. Don had been to Scout House and De La Salle but neither were very interested. He had found us by chance, not knowing of our existence, or that we were the current Canadian Champions.



1960: Clare Reid, Don Daber & Mike Andrews

After this meeting, it was not long before he became a full-fledged, albeit, non-playing member of the Corps. At a Sunday rehearsal a couple of weeks later, we officially drummed him into the Corps. By profession a commercial artist, by inclination a photographer, his influence soon made itself felt. Publicity in the form of drawings, paintings, and photographs soon began to appear all over the place. His instrument was the camera, his subject the Optimists Drum Corps, and later all Corps and associated activities. From here on he becomes an integral part of this story. In fact, it was not too long before it was wondered how we had ever gotten along without him. Like a piece of a puzzle, he fitted into the growing mosaic that was the Corps.



Another, more frivolous, part of the scene was the frequenting of two taverns by some members. The Graymar and Merchant House on Front Street, in downtown Toronto, became a sort of unofficial meeting place after practice. That some (most) were underage never seemed to bother anyone, least of all the proprietors. These establishments were directly adjacent to each other and were definitely not what would be called



1960: Toronto Optimists (Preview of Champions)

upscale; however, they had a certain air about them that suited us perfectly. Interestingly, the Graymar was reputedly the oldest hotel in Toronto, and its appearance did not belie this rumour. Also, a waiter named Frenchy Belanger worked there and would regale us with stories of his younger days. He claimed he had been a championship calibre boxer. No one took him seriously until the time his picture was spotted in the Canadian Sport Hall of Fame, at the Canadian National Exhibition. Thereafter, he was regarded with greater respect. We loved those places!

Meanwhile, back in the Corps world, there was still a full season ahead to contend with. An April issue of "Off The Line" magazine had commented on the lack of contests in Canada. This, unfortunately, was true, but we were lucky enough to face a fairly busy schedule. Socially, Phil Hennings, drum major, and Fred Johnson, a founder of the Bantam Corps, had both acquired wives. Whether these were already "Corps Girls" or not, they certainly were now. Both couples had Optimists honour guards at their weddings. Social functions were often part of corps activities.

Technically, we began to use back sticking on drums. It was a technique picked up in the United States. We were the first to use it in a field show in Canada.

Regarding the general scene in Canada, Scout House were still one of the biggest box office draws, but De La Salle were increasingly being touted as the chief contender for the championship. The end of the season would put all this speculation into place.



1960: Dave, Roman, Warren, Terry & Neil

June was not very busy, with an exhibition for a Junior "B" contest at East York stadium in Toronto. This was actually our first full show in Canada this year and a good opportunity to gauge the effect of new material on the public. Apparently, it was acceptable, even "In the Mood" was still being well received. It was the month of July that really saw the corps come into its own, the new music and drill proving their merit.

After a July 2 exhibition at the senior “Tournament of Drums” contest at Rochester’s Aquinas Stadium a columnist for “Drum Corps World” magazine wrote: “Optimists, almost whole new show, music and drills. ‘In The Mood’ back by popular demand. Wild new arrangement!”. This last statement was a half truth. Demand for it did exist and this number had become sort of a trademark, however, coincident to this was the fact that a suitable replacement had not been found.



1960: Drums practising (the author with a cigarette)

Further to this positive summary: “Optimists driving hard, hotter than ever. Faster cadence. Horn powerful, very clean, excellent tone. Drums outstanding. Only using three snare instead of the six planned”. “Had to bolster the tenor line”, another half-truth. The tenor line had been filled, as was necessary, but only as a result of cutting the snare line for New Jersey. No matter, the end result was what counted. This attitude, when expediency overcomes all else, is a common factor in human affairs; in successful enterprises, it’s sometimes a necessity.

Finally, the guard was noticed for its new intricate rifle work, and the Corps in general for a fast, company front, duck and spin.

At this show, Al Baggs took his field test for All-American Judge in the field marching and maneuvering caption, having already passed the written test. He was already a qualified Canadian General Effect Marching and Maneuvering Judge, and now would become the first Canadian Judge to become an All-American Judge. Not too far down the road, this situation would lead to great political uproar, as we shall see.



1960: Toronto Optimists practice “Duck & Spin” (Falconer, NY)

To vindicate all this written glory, on July 16, we again competed at Falconer, New York as the only Junior Corps in a field of seniors. We took first place by almost six points, topping all captions. Significantly, the drums scored 18.5 in execution. The drum line was really pulling its weight, a factor that before now, and later, would often prove decisive.



## August 6, 1960, Back to Rochester

Back to Rochester, this time to defend our New York/Canadian Association Title. Whereas, the previous year we had barely won it over Scout House, this year rumours were confirmed when De La Salle came second to us by only four tenths. They also were using much new material, with lots of solo horn work that was a big hit with the crowd.

The Canadian Championships were just over a month away. Full attendance and extra rehearsals were the order of the day. This sense of urgency was to pay off before then, on August 27, at the Eastern Junior Drum Pageant, at Rome, New York. As was expected, the Golden Knights won the affair, but we were only one and a half points behind them. Derision was evident when a Knight horn player kicked his horn in disgust at the close score. We were still the hicks from the boondocks. It was probably about this time that we began to often gauge our performances against those of Blessed Sacrament. They were the best, and no harm could come from aiming at them, even if one might never fulfil ones aspirations.



1960: De La Salle's Colour Guard

As the season ran on to its climax, there was the C.N.E. contest to contend with before the Nationals. Because of our busy practice schedule before this, we were in good shape. Our closest rivals, De La Salle and Grantham, were defeated decisively, by six and eight points respectively. This nailed down our third C.N.E. title and led to the Canadian Championships (Nationals) at Hamilton's Civic Stadium (now Ivor Wynne Stadium) on September 10.

## 1960 Nationals

This was to be a landmark contest for various reasons, which revealed themselves as the day moved on. The stadium was speckled with only a few spectators for the daytime preliminaries. These few would be witness to some Canadian Drum Corps history, albeit of a sad nature.

In the junior standstill division, the scores were:

Brantford Belltones. . . . 74.5

Trafalgar Police Boys. . . 72.7

Renown Sea Cadets. . . . 72.0

Renown Sea Cadets were the band in which Ronn Prokop had began his drumming career. Of more significance was the Trafalgar Police Boys, whose existence was shortly to be an interesting addition to the Optimists' story.



The Junior “A” preliminary began at 10:30 a.m. Three of five entrants would reach the finals, along with four of seven in the senior division. A change in procedure was introduced when it was required that each Corps play only the marching portion of its show, omitting the standstill part.

The rumours heard at the onset of the year, that Scout House would only enter two contests this year, were found to be true. This, the Nationals, was the second one, the first being only one week before, in Quebec. Thus, they were largely on unknown quantity, but the results of this policy were evident that day. For the first time in as long as anyone could remember, Scout House did not make the finals. They were overshadowed by The Optimists, De La Salle, and Grantham; the two latter Corps doing it for the first time. Preston sounded very good and, as usual, had the crowd with them all the way. It was not enough, and, whatever the reasons, not competing had to have something to do with the outcome.

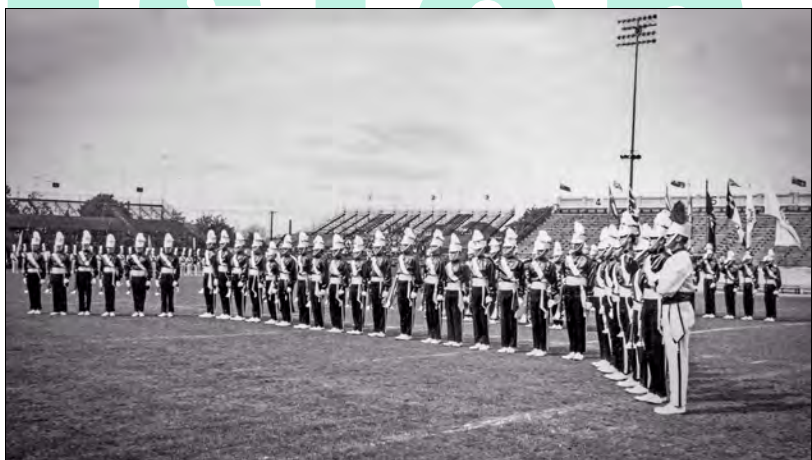
Now, for all intents and purposes, they leave our story. Although Scout House was to remain on the scene for many years, they would never again pose a serious threat to the dominance of the Canadian Drum Corps scene. They would continue as a competition and exhibition band, even pulling themselves up to third place at a Nationals in the future. Finally, after many trials and tribulations, demises and regenerations, they would disappear, probably forever, in 1983.

That September day in 1960 was Canadian Corps history, as were Scout House themselves. Their eventual disappearance left a gap never likely to be filled, let alone equalled. In the ongoing search for a Canadian identity, Scout House was a piece of Canadiana that cannot be denied and they represented Canada in unique and incomparable fashion in many places and their like would not be seen again.

Back to the more conventional Drum Corps. The fact that Scout House had declined has to be in contrast to the fact that everyone else was getting better. Our improving scores against U.S. Corps and the close challenges of our Canadian rivals stood as confirmation of this.



1960: Toronto Optimists Colour Guard (Nationals, Hamilton)



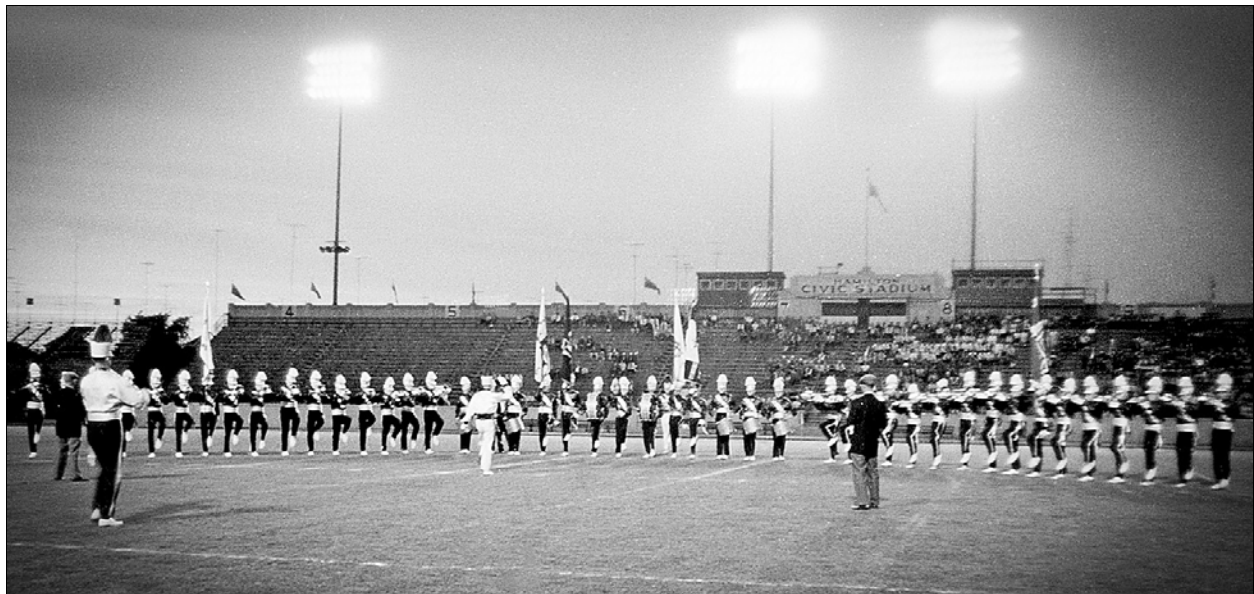
1960: Toronto Optimists at Nationals (Hamilton)

De La Salle made a tremendous impression at the preliminaries where they displayed new, white uniforms with capes of scarlet and green. These new uniforms had been introduced at the New York/Canadians in Rochester. As quoted in "Drum Corps World", along with the colour, they gave a "superb, class 'A' performance" on the field. Likewise with Grantham, whose show was noted as "inspired, sensational, horn line overshadowed Del, with crystal clear tone".



1960: De La Salle guard in their red capes (Grape Festival)

The Optimists? The rough edges on the new show had mostly disappeared, thanks to a year of dogged practice, interspersed with frequent competitions. This showed at the Nationals when others applied comments such as "very polished look, tremendous all round, fabulous sound" to the show.



1960: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Hamilton)

Optimists, De La Salle, and Grantham made the finals, and although, for some reason, the scores were withheld, a leak occurred. We had scored 88.67 to Del's 84.0, a comfortable margin but not one to induce complacency. Everybody was genuinely sympathetic to Scout House as it was recognized that we were witnessing the end of an era.

At the night finals, there was high drama. De La Salle took high field bugles and high general effect marching and maneuvering. This was not a great surprise, as these captions were always



among their strong points. Grantham, with their first real shot at a title on the line, received a foul stroke of fortune. During their performance, seven people collapsed from food poisoning, due to having eaten beforehand in a strange restaurant. This ill luck detracted from a fine effort, but they still managed to top the general effect bugle caption. What would have happened had their misfortune not occurred is known only to the gods.

When the outcome of the day was revealed to all, the Optimists stood in first place by only two points ahead of De La Salle, and three and a half in front of Grantham. We now possessed our third consecutive National title. De La Salle had now established themselves as the main contenders for first place, a position they would seldom relinquish.

What made the biggest difference between first and second place was a large spread in the drum scores. This situation had existed since 1958, the Optimists drum line was yet to be defeated in Canada. It often was the determining factor in other contests as well, but here it really paid off. Del's drum line was good, but not quite good enough, possibly due to having a competent but part-time instructor. We had the services, full time, of one of the best. Del's horns, music, and drills were on par with anyone in Canada. If they could plug this one gap, we would have real problems. As it turned out, they could, and we did.

An interesting sidelight to this contest was that Al Baggs served as a G.E., M&M judge at the senior portion of this contest. His judging activity was eventually to culminate in his appointment as Chief Judge of the Canadian Association.



1960: Karl Bossert, Terry McKolskey, Doug MacKenzie & Doug Yarker

## Post Nationals Shows

There was still much activity in store before the season was complete. At Varsity Stadium in Toronto, we, along with Del, appeared again at the Leaside Lions International, a junior and senior contest. The Audubon Girls were again in attendance, but this time we were better prepared. Taking every caption, we won by over three points. This was also history. Not only was it the first time that we had defeated them, it was the first time that a Canadian Corps had beaten a major U.S. Corps. Some attributed this to overconfidence on the part of the visitors. Whatever the reason, it happened. De La Salle was only 0.78 behind Audubon.

Optimists took the trophy for highest score of the evening, over top U.S. and Canadian Senior Corps, as well as that for highest score for Canadian Corps. The former trophy had, until now, been won by an American Senior Corps, while the latter was regarded somewhat as a consolation prize.



Into October and the Annual St. Catharines Grape Festival parade and show. This was the one that we had so unceremoniously pulled out of the year before. This year, the show was all exhibitions, and the only contest was for the street parade. De La Salle, Optimists, and Scout House placed first, second, and third in this event.

Another step in the progress of Drum Corps in Canada was the fact that CHCH-TV of Hamilton taped this parade, and CFRB radio of Toronto began giving results of Canadian and U.S. contests. Actually, not much has, if at all, improved in this respect to this day. Only half of D.C.I. finals are shown on TV, if one lives in the right area. A true indication of where Drum Corps really stands in the scheme of things.



1960: Scout House and Optimists guys (Grape Festival)

At this time, one facet of Don Daber's influence became evident, with the appearance of "Optimists money", green dollar bills made with Optimists symbols and along with this came Corps buttons, emblems, pennants, and a record (remember those?). These were all his creations, publicity gimmicks.

Previously in this book was mentioned the fact of Drum and Bugle Corps breaking away from their service sponsors. Just before this year's Grape Festival, The Marching Ambassadors had severed their connection with the army. As a consequence, they had no instruments with which to perform, although being in attendance. Using instruments borrowed from Grantham and Guelph Royallaires, they managed to put on a commendable performance. This type of action became increasingly common as Drum Corps and army philosophies clashed.



Optimists Money

The competitive season was now almost over for this year, and on October 18 a rally night, which would become an annual event, was held. One hundred and twenty people were in attendance, including, of course, current members of the Corps. Others were new recruits, alumni, Optimist Club officials, executive, and instructors. A good time was had rehashing the past year and anticipating the one to come. There were also innovations, to add to the growing appendages that were accumulating around the Corps.

Contracts were introduced, to be signed by all members. This, no doubt, was an attempt to bind people all the more closely to the Corps. An Optimists alumna was created, and their function was social events, booster club, and fund raising activities, etc. In this capacity, we already had the Ladies Auxiliary and the Opti-Mrs., but the alumna were a welcome addition.

New recruits were now introduced all around. They numbered about thirty-five and were all hopeful of getting into the main Corps. It was concluded, amid much convivial partying, that 1960 had, to date, been the most successful year in the history of the still young “Green Machine”. They had placed first in every field contest in Canada. This was a repeat of 1959, but minus any dubious last minute cancellations.



1960: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Hamilton)

A new executive and slate of instructors was introduced, much swollen in comparison to the original staff.

For the year ending 1960, into 1961, the officials would be:

Corps Commander (Director) . . . .	A. W. Baggs
Assistant Corps Director. . . . .	Bernie Beer
Equipment Manager. . . . .	Warren Copp
Musical Director. . . . .	Barry Bell
Drum Instructor. . . . .	Lorne Ferrazzutti
Colour Guard Instructor. . . . .	Eric Burton
Publicity & Public Relations. . . .	Don Daber
Bugle Instructor, Drum Major. . . .	Al Morrison
Drill Instructor. . . . .	Doug McPhail
Bugle Instructor . . . . .	Ed Nanni
Corps Adjutant . . . . .	Jim Patton
Guard Captain . . . . .	Mike Layton

Contrast this total list with the beginning of 1958

Corps Director. . . . .	A. W. Baggs
Bugle Instructor. . . . .	Barry Bell
Drum Instructor. . . . .	Lorne Ferrazzutti
Guard Instructor. . . . .	Eric Burton

Just an indication of how this organization had grown in size and complexity. Many of these new people on the staff had been playing members of the Corps, and others had come from the outside.

One more show remained to be attended, and it produced an ominous blip on the horizon. On October 29, the International Standstill Contest at Buffalo, New York, was held. To our chagrin, we placed last, albeit with a 1.0 penalty for overtime. This puzzled us as we had taken pains to ensure this would not happen, but it did, and we lost.

First were Irondequoit, formerly Hilton, who we had never beaten. Niagara Militaires who we had beaten before, though not consistently, followed them in second place. Third was De La Salle, who were jubilant at having beaten us for the first time ever. We, of course, were fourth, the penalty dragging us down to eat humble pie.

Although no one could see into the future, less than a year from now, three factors would combine to create what was arguably the most disputed result in Canadian Drum Corps history. These factors were the Optimists – De La Salle rivalry, the election of Al Baggs to the position of Chief Judge, and a penalty. Such things can “do one in” as Eliza Doolittle might have said before she became a lady.

Don't leave yet, were not finished.

## **Optimists personnel instructing other Corps**

On the first page of this chapter, the fact of Optimists personnel instructing other Corps was noted. Also cited was the fact that this activity caused dissensions in another Corps, due to the intensity of involvement. This was true. It concerned one of Canada's better Senior Corps, The Jesters, formerly called Service Corps, reflecting their army origins. They were located in Toronto and, this year, our three main instructors Lorne, Barry, and Eric were also instructing them. Added to this was the fact that many ex-Optimists people continued their Drum Corps activities in The Jesters. Some friction developed between factions because in some quarters The Jesters were beginning to be regarded as a “Senior Optimists”.

They had many members of long standing; Eric Burton had been one, and a long tradition of their own. The acrimony that developed caused some of their membership to leave, some going to the Marching Ambassadors, their biggest rivals. Among certain people, there had been plans afoot to create an “Optimist League”, so to speak. This would have Optimists influence controlling the Bantam, Junior and Senior Divisions in Canadian Drum Corps. These plans never came to fruition, which was probably a good thing. Drum Corps partisanship runs deep, and this would have been too much for some people.



1960: Glenn (wheel man), Mel, Joe & Bob





1960: 12 of the 13 "Age Outs" (Ed Nanni is missing)

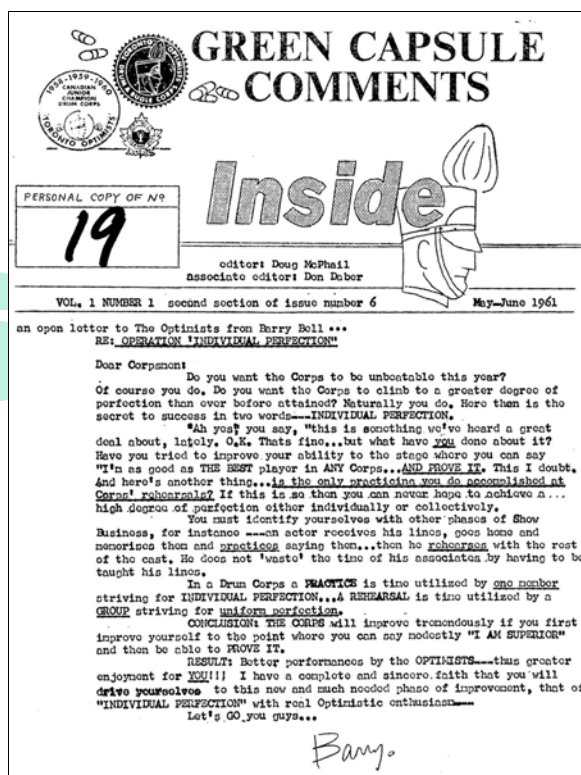
Altogether, at the end of this year, thirteen people left the Optimists, the largest group yet to leave en masse. Their names are now lost to posterity, but mostly it was due to overage. Still others would leave in ensuing months for a variety of reasons. There were replacements available, but those who left were experienced veterans and would be missed.

Nobody worried too much about such things. They were all part of the Corps scene, and a year-end victory dance was held, the tab being picked up by the Optimist Club. The debacle at Buffalo was forgotten, and it was announced that Al Baggs was now on the Board of Directors of the New York/Canadian Association.

To cap the year, the first issues of "Green Capsule Comments" rolled off the presses. This was the brainchild and product of that master of publicity, Don Daber, who hand-rolled the first three page editions. G.C.C., as it was known, became the official publication of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps.

Finally, after yet another civic reception, the year was laid to rest, all successes and failures going permanently into the record books.

Only fate knew what lay in store, and it was to unerringly show its hand in the near future.



1961: Front page of May-June GCC



1960: Al Morrison, Solo, and Optimists (Civic Reception at Toronto's City Hall)

# Version



## Chapter 9: Hangin' In There

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

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

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

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



1960: Toronto Optimists and Bantam Optimists (Union Station)

Of the new recruits, many had come from the Bantam Corps, which was now proving its worth beyond estimate. Often called the “Peanut Squad”, those who came from it were familiar with the basics of a Drum Corps. All could march and play with some degree of skill, and they were fitted into appropriate places in the line. The drum line, out of a total of nine, needed four new members. Other deficiencies were mostly in the horn line, with a few in the guard. Our two



drum majors of the previous year were now replaced by one, Al Morrison who was previously a soprano soloist. During the early winter months, and later, other people left, for various reasons, not many, but enough to bring the total number of departures to about twenty. This was close to fifty percent of the Corps. More perceptive people began to realize that the coming year might prove more difficult than previously imagined.

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

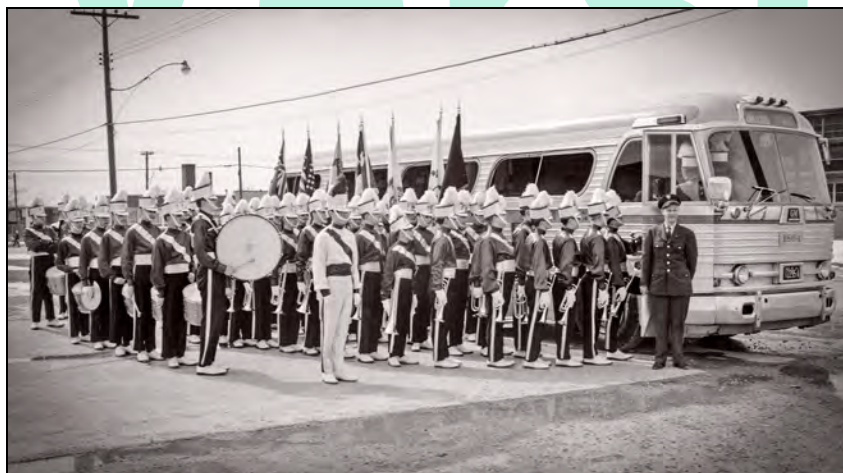


1960: Bill Thorne, Joe Gianna and Dave Shaw

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

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

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



1961: Toronto Optimists in promo shot for Gray Coach Lines

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Changes in the Canadian Judges Association

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

Mr. Baggs had been a qualified Canadian General Effect M&M Judge for some time. Marching and maneuvering was an important aspect of Drum Corps performances



1960: Bernie Beer & Mr Baggs (Falconer, NY)

in those days and he was experienced in both facets of it, general effect and execution. This, though, was not the prime reason for his election to this important post. To get the job, it was necessary to be elected by the other judges, and Al Baggs had been popularly elected on the strength of his abilities as an administrator. Because of this added responsibility, he resigned his position on the Board of Directors of the New York/Canadian Association. He was now Chief Judge as well as Director of the Optimists, a situation that was fraught with pitfalls. One of his judges, Mr. Vince Macciocchi, was later a chief judge himself. When asked if Al Baggs was a competent, able, chief judge, four words sufficed. "No doubt about it!" Later, we shall see many repercussions that resulted from this.

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

The responsibilities of Don Daber now increased as his influence began to expand. He was already the Public Relations Manager for the Optimists, and now assumed the same duties for the Canadian Drum Corps Association. On top of this he was the editor of his creation "Green Capsule Comments", which was shortly to increase in size to nine pages. This periodical was rapidly becoming well known, both inside and outside the Corps. Contributions were solicited from inside and outside, along with those that, by now, were regular columns. One of the contributions, written by Mr. Baggs, was an explanation of each one of the flags now carried by the Corps. This is worth looking at, as they had all been acquired during the first three years of its existence. There were ten altogether.



1961: Toronto Optimists Flags

## Flags carried by the Optimists

The Canadian Ensign	Used as National Colours before the adoption, in 1965, of the current Maple Leaf flag.
The Union Jack	Used in parades, not contests, to represent the traditions of the British Commonwealth.
The American Flag	Carried in the US and Canada as a mark of courtesy to the United States. It also indicated the international aspect of the Optimist Club.
The Optimist International Flag	The flag of the Optimist Club, our sponsor.
The Ontario Flag	It carried the emblem of the Province of Ontario.



The Corps Flag

The Canadian Junior  
Championship Flag

The New York/Canadian  
Association Championship Flag

The City of Toronto Flag

The St. Lawrence Seaway Flag

Designed by Barry Bell, it carried the Corps crest.

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

Presented annually to the title winners.

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

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

Quite an impressive list, made more so by the fact that each and every one of them had a meaning and purpose.

For the Corps itself, activity began quite early. Again, we performed at the Ice Follies, on January 30, at Maple Leaf Gardens, and on February 28 participated in a standstill contest. This was in Rochester, New York, and was a senior versus junior affair, with us being the only Junior Corps involved. The Optimists were not very good that night, placing third, although the Senior Corps were of a good calibre. There was more reason for our mediocre performance than the early date. It was a sign of the



1960: Our author (L) is thinking about meeting local corps fans (Rochester)

Corps being down this year and an indication of some rough times ahead; however, we were not miserable about it, never being too serious. We were, though, full of admiration for the Garfield Cadets who put on superb exhibition. They were right back up to their old form, maybe even better.

There was a prolific writer for Drum Corps World named Bob Mannhardt who had liked our corps from the beginning. His columns reflected this, though he would not hesitate to criticize if he thought events warranted it. He had done this when we pulled out of the 1959 Grape Festival. Regardless, the admiration was mutual, and at this show he was pulled into the dressing room and made an honorary member of the Corps. On this occasion, we also had the “Drum Head Draw”. The old bass drum heads were raffled off and the money raised used to buy new ones. The old ones were well decorated and showed our three national titles.

That standstill contest, by the way, was probably one of the last of its kind. By this, I mean that the format of Senior Corps going against Junior Corps was on its way out. We had not been invited back to Falconer, New York, this year, because Senior Corps would not compete against us. Whether this was because they did not like the idea of possibly losing to juniors, or just did not think it a good concept, is not known. Probably a bit of both; whatever, it would occur again but increasingly rarely as time went by.

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

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



1960: Ed Nanni (no uniform) with Harry Clark on his right

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

Ivor Bramley. . . . . Chairman  
Colin Hedworth. . . Treasurer  
Al LaVigne. . . . . Transportation

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



1961: Nut Committee Report & Cartoons

The method adopted was for those willing to participate, and there were more than a few, to meet at a certain, different, location on sales nights. This would usually be one night a week. Having met at an agreed spot, each would load up with peanuts, the tinned variety, and then spread out to blitz the area. It worked quite well and sales moved along briskly. It was still very cold, and, except for one time, only inclement weather deterred us from our mission. The one time exception was the evening that we visited the Borough of Leaside, near Leaside High School. The “Jungle Kings” had for years used this school as a practice spot. People who lived in the vicinity were well acquainted with Drum Corps, having had to endure many occasions when one was rehearsing in their backyard. As soon as “Drum Corps” was mentioned, doors were slammed, cutting into a string of uncomplimentary epithets. After a few incidents like this, it was decided to abandon that night’s work. We understood, and a few nights later were out again, somewhere else. The whole campaign produced quite good results, a total of over \$800 being raised. Not much by today’s inflated standards, but a considerable help to the small Corps budget of those days. The only negative aspect of the whole thing was the prodding necessary to get people to bring in their money. One dollar here, two there, five somewhere else. It all added up, until finally the treasurer, fed up with the pleading and cajoling, paid the last \$100 owing for nuts sold. The account was closed. Altogether it was a successful and satisfying affair.

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

## Trafalgar

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



Ivor Bramley with Trafalgar’s guard (CDCA Convention)





1960: Ivor Bramley

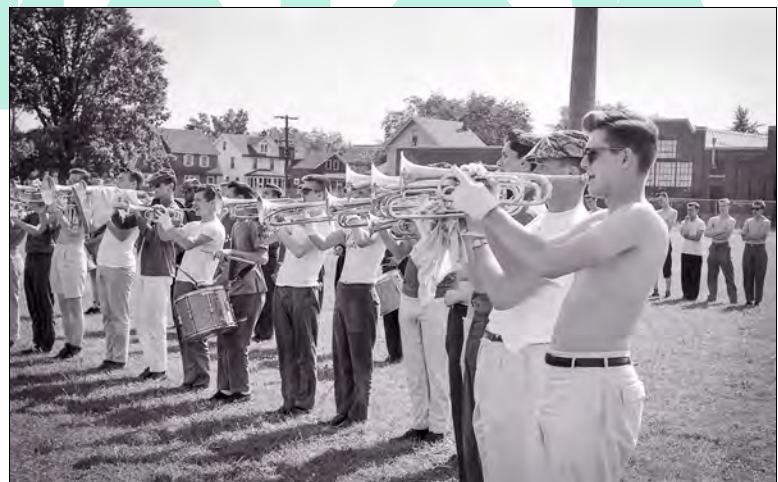
However, that day, when we arrived in Oakville, he found the ideal outlet for his energies. A colour guard and a Corps were practising, seemingly with no direction or leadership. This was the Trafalgar Police Band mentioned in the previous chapter. They were a Junior “B” Corps and had never risen above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

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

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

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

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



1960: Toronto Optimists rehearsing (Rochester, NY)

Let the battle begin.

## Chapter 10: 1961 – The Challenge

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



1961: Toronto Optimists Full Corps photo (Ottawa)

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

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

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

Prior to this show, the Optimists and De La Salle drum lines had begun their own separate rivalry, as distinct from the two Corps themselves. The individuals in these lines were familiar with each other, and it was a friendly though intense rivalry. Some members?

Optimists Snare.. . . . Prokop, Williams, Krukliś  
Optimists Tenor. . . . . Burak, Bignall, Hedworth

De La Salle Snare.. . . . Mosley, Jacko, Voytek  
De La Salle Tenor.. . . . Kelly, Newman, Altilia



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

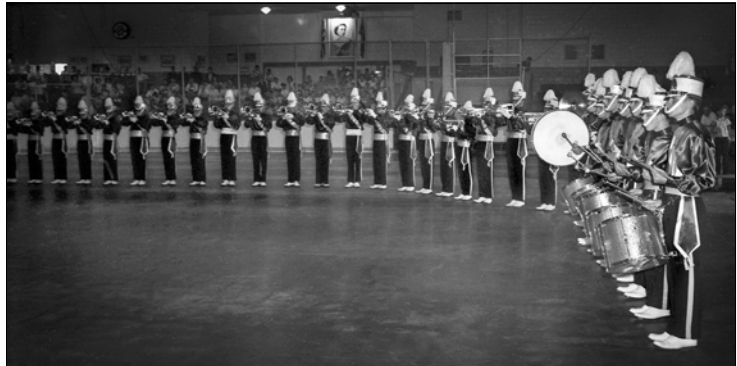


1961: Optimists Tenors (Orest Burak, Colin Hedworth & Dave Bignall)

## Leaside Show

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

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



1961: Toronto Optimists (Leaside)

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

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



1961: De La Salle (Leaside)



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

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

## Phillipsburg and the Preview

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

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

The next day, after a parade in Hoboken, New Jersey, where we were now an annual favourite, it was into the "Big House", Roosevelt Stadium. Needless to say, our position remained as it had in the past, last place, far out of contention for any honours. The surest indication of our condition was the crowd reaction. American crowds, always generous when merited even if the scores were not always high, were also good judges, especially this one. The polite applause that followed our performance was a far cry from the tumultuous standing ovations of previous years. So it was.

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



1961: Toronto Optimists (Phillipsburg, NJ, SAC in background)

In June of this year, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry Drum Corps sponsored a Senior International Contest in Hamilton, Ontario. We had been invited to appear as the exhibition Corps, which gave us an opportunity to display our full M&M show to an audience before having to compete with it, in Canada. The more shows we did the better, as each one gave the new people more experience. Although Al Baggs was now the Chief Judge, he served at this show as a G.E.

M&M Judge. The sponsoring Corps, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, were soon to follow in the footsteps of others. Severing their links with the army, they became the Hamilton Viscounts. This was just another step in a continuing trend.



1961: Toronto Optimists (Windsor)

## Ontario Junior Drum and Bugle Corps Championships

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

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

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

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



1961: Ivor Bramley, Glenn Copp and Frans Rood

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

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

## Within the corps

Other things were now happening around the Corps.

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



1961: members of Optimists drum line look like bellhops for the Daffodil Parade

As mentioned in the previous chapter Ivor Bramley had, by this time, become thoroughly immersed in the affairs of the Drum Corps in Oakville. Now called the Trafalgar Patrolmen, they figure in this story because their activity attracted more than a few members of the Optimists to their rehearsals. They had a lot of good people of their own and just seemed to need a spark to get them moving. This had been provided by Ivor. Five members of the Optimists were now involved

in instructing, writing, and arranging for them. These included Ronn Prokop, Ivor Bramley, Robin Weatherstone and Al Morrison. Robin, who lived in Oakville, was another former Scout House man.

Along with the contributions of their own capable people, they were really beginning to make progress. Optimist involvement, all unofficial, would sometimes see as many as twenty or more people in attendance at their practices. Quite a few friendships developed out of this,



and, coincidentally, much wild and riotous partying. This Corps, Trafalgar, had an attractive female colour guard, so it is not surprising that four marriages eventually ensued from these circumstances.

The four couples were:

Len Perrin and Nancy Roy

Mel Dey and Judy Gasson

Chuck Clutterbuck and Pat Folland

Peter Burton and Shirley Anne Brown

It was a good Corps relationship but got so intense that the Optimist management felt it necessary to comment on it. They hoped, they said, that this development would not interfere with the operations of the Optimists themselves. They were assured that it would not. The only adverse things that developed were rumours that the Trafalgar guard was being used to try out things before being adopted by the Optimist colour guard. Whether this was true or not, both Corps benefited from this association, as later events would bear out.

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

Organizing a Christmas Dance and the previously mention Silver Ring Dance were just the first of their accomplishments. Along with this, they raised money that was contributed



1961: Toronto Optimists step Off The Line (Windsor)

towards the purchase of practice flags for the colour guard. Any excess was put into a Corps fund. From this were bought gift parcels that were given to any Corps member who became ill or were hospitalized. They added a veneer of civilized amenities that had previously been lacking.

All the items dreamed up by Don Daber,

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

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



1961: Toronto Optimists (Rochester)

Things were tightening up and heading for a climax. Again we went to Rochester, New York, and again successfully defended our New York/Canadian Championship title. The challenges were increasing all around as the Corps strove to maintain its standing. It was not easy, but the results of our efforts revealed themselves at Rome, New York, later on.

This show had always seemed to be a good one for us and served to indicate any progress that had been made. This year was no different. There were usually only one or two Canadian Junior Corps in this contest, the others being American Corps of good calibre. We were only three points out of first place, which was taken by the Garfield Cadets. Second was Blessed Sacrament, in one of their rare losses. They had defeated us by thirteen points at the beginning of the season, and so we could measure our progress by this result. Progress had assuredly been made but would it be enough for continued success back in Canada. Only time would tell.

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

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



1961: Toronto Optimists on the line (Merritton)

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

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

What was helping the Corps to survive this year, still in first place, was the fact that for the first time we had a full-time drill instructor. Doug McPhail had come through the ranks of the Corps, learning the business as he went.

The intricate drills he wrote and taught had proven to be adequate and were helping to keep us in contention. The season was drawing to a close, and, although we had been able to remain undefeated in Canada, there were still some stiff contests remaining. Our rivals had smelled blood and were not about to let up. So, when the next competition rolled around interest among fans and Corps alike was at a high. This show would see us defending our Canadian National Exhibition title, which we had held since its inception. We knew it would not be easy and so it turned out.



1961: Doug McPhail and Bernie Beer

## CNE

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



1961: Opti & Del waiting for scores (CNE)

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



up, until there were only two remaining. Tenths separated the two top positions as the scores, unavailable now, were given first, and then the Corps.

In second place, from Toronto, “The Optimists”. It finally happened! For the first time since mid-1958, we had lost a field show in Canada, to a Canadian Corps. Mixed cheering and booing greeted the result, with first place going, of course, to De La Salle. They had earned it and were jubilant. To cap it all, our drum line was beaten by a very slim margin, by the same Corps, although they dropped down to two snare drums to do it. No matter, a win is a win is a win however you do it. This saying was shortly to be proven again, emphatically.

So we had lost. So what! Nobody dropped dead, and life would go on. It did not take long to sink in, along with the realization that the Canadian Championships were only two weeks away. Here, now, was where the often mentioned Optimists Corps spirit showed its depth. One of our members, much concerned, approached Barry Bell, the chief instructor, and asked if the Corps could practice the rest of the weekend, all of the following weekend, and every weeknight between now and the championships. Although such hours were still unheard of in those days, consent was given on the condition that the guys would come out. Going back to the corps, this individual (I might as well admit it) announced the proposal, citing the fact that we were in real danger of losing our Canadian title. Nobody said much, just packed up and went home. Not much had to be said.



1961: Barry Bell and corps after loss at CNE



1961: Toronto Optimists on retreat (CNE)

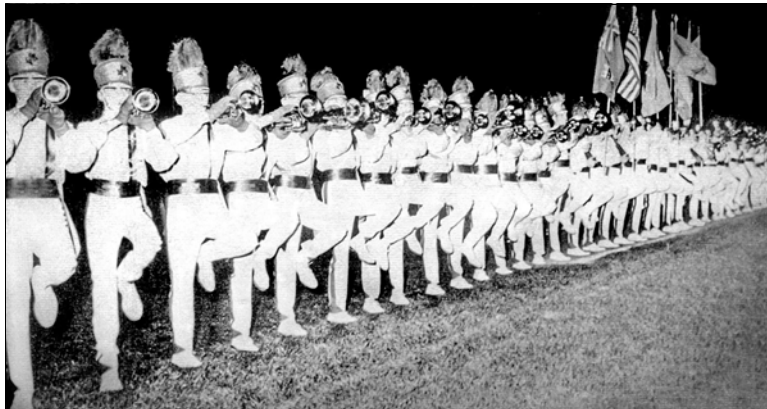
The next day, everybody showed up for practice. And the next day! And even the next!! Nobody intentionally missed a rehearsal for the next two weeks. It was possible that the loss was a blessing in disguise, as our subsequent activity was to have some effect on events.

The two weeks that we had in which to polish up our show were not wasted. Too late in the year to make major changes in drill or music, little things were attended. Difficult music parts were eliminated or changed, to save a tenth here and there. Likewise with drill patterns. Ivor Bramley,

who now had some experience teaching drill, took off his bass drum and concentrated on drilling the drum line. This definitely paid off, as the line was less than perfect in this category. Everybody gave it everything they had for two weeks and, at the end, felt that we could not have done much more than we did. All now was in the hands of fate, and the chips would fall where they would.

## 1961 Nationals

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



1961: De La Salle Off The Line (Nationals)

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

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

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

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

There must have been only about four or five hours before the final showdown, yet, gathering what zeal



1961: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Waterloo)



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

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

When a Corps is on the line, all the crowd sees is a solid line of faceless, uniformed figures. What is going on inside those uniforms is a different story. Tension ran through the line like an electric current. Some were compelled to express their feelings in muted “side of the mouth” comments, and visible nervous tension was rife. No matter, the clock ticked on and away we went. The long green line took off down the field, and, horrors, it has a big curve in it. Normally supposed to be ruler straight, white-faced instructors and fans deduced that the affair was blown right there; however, it straightened up as training and concentration asserted themselves. From then on, according to eyewitness reports, the drill was as precise as it had ever been seen before. The Corps picked up, and it became obvious that everybody was giving it everything they had. One thing was certain, this Corps was not going down without a fight.

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



1961: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Waterloo)



## The Retreat

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

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



1961: Toronto Optimists at Inspection (Nationals)

The scores were given first.

2nd Place, the score was 83.50

1st Place, the score was 83.55

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

From Toronto (both were from Toronto)

De La Salle!

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

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

They had won all the general effect captions, but we had come out on top in execution drums and marching and maneuvering. Our drum line, which had really exerted itself during the

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

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

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

A judge who awards such things is not aware of the rest of the unit he is watching. He concentrates on his specialty and does not know if his judgments have a decisive impact on the overall result, especially one so controversial. Therefore, when protests are lodged, he is often required to leave the final decision to a higher authority. This happened here, and that higher authority was none other than Al Baggs, the Chief Judge. He was also, of course, still the Corps Director of the Toronto Optimists, so this was akin to pouring kerosene on a fire.

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

As it turned out, he opted to support his judge and uphold the penalties. If he had not, one possible side effect could have been a loss of confidence in him by other judges and Corps. This also meant, among other things, that we remained in first place and were still champions. It also meant that any future shows we won where he was



1961: Toronto Optimists (Titusville)

presiding would be seen to be influenced by this. This was completely unfounded, as we repeated wins in the United States under totally neutral judges.

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

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

## Grape Festival

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

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

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



1961: Toronto Optimists (Grape Festival Parade)

St. Mary's Drum Corps folded at the end of this year. Some of their horn players came to us and filled out the horn line. Among this group were two brothers, Hans and Richard Boehnke. Richard was to eventually have a larger impact than just being a horn player. The vacancy in the drum line was filled by Ron Kaiser who, though having been with the Corps for some time, would not play in it until he could play snare drum.

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



## Chapter 11: 1962 Winter – From Rags To Riches

After the conclusion of the previous season, nobody was seriously considering the future. They were just happy that we had survived intact and were still considered the number one Corps. The higher your get on the ladder, the harder it is to keep your balance. Eventually it is bound to take a toll somewhere. It did, in a rather subtle fashion that gradually crept up and took hold.

A comparison of this year's Corps to that of the last year would definitely favour this year. The six new playing members compared most favourably with the over twenty of the previous year. Also, these new members were experienced at the business, all but one coming from full-fledged Drum Corps. The one, drummer Ron Kaiser, was a graduate from the Optimist Bantams. He had marched with us in parades, exhibitions, and rehearsals, and so had some experience and would fit in easily.



1962: Toronto Optimists Full Corps photo (Varsity Stadium)

The people who had been novices the year before were not new anymore. In one year of marching and playing, they had become veterans. Some of them had become as good, or better, than those who had been in before them. There were still a few left from the original 1958 Corps, and everybody else in between had degrees of experience ranging from one to four years. In Canada, this was not a common situation and was to have uncommon results.

There were no vast music programs in school to draw people from nor any widespread interest in, or knowledge of, Drum Corps. Most Corps people came from other local Corps, which could be detrimental to the whole Corps scene. The enticing of players from one Corps to another had been going on for years and sometimes resulted in the building of one Corps at the expense of another. We had not had to do this but still had come up with that rarity in Canada, a fully experienced Corps. So, it would be thought that with everything seemingly going our way, everybody would be chomping at the bit and raring to go. In fact, as things developed, they moved in exactly the opposite direction.

## A completely new show

The Corps management, realizing the extent of its miscalculations of the previous year, threw out the entire show. This had never, ever, been done before and was like wiping the slate clean and starting over. It was a good move, and, as the new music came in and was revealed, everybody appeared enthusiastic about it. The new show was in the process of being learned but, at the same time, the effects of constantly striving for the top began to subtly creep in. It took the form of a lethargy that settled over the Corps. Spirit and unity sagged to an all-time low. People came to practices but were less inclined to do anything. Fewer people came to practices and gradually, what was left of the Corps began to wonder if it was worth keeping it going. With the prospects for the coming year initially being as good, or better, than ever before, there had to be a reason for this.

It was a classic case of burnout. Possibly, it was a combination of things. The same people, same



1961: Participants at Optimists Rally Night

old faces, doing the same things year after year had to have something to do with it. Even armies in wars get regularly relieved, but not Drum Corps, year after year, pounding out the drills and music. There has to be a reaction somewhere, and, in this case, this was it.

Also, the tension endured during most of the previous season probably caused a backlash. This might have dissipated if, say, a one or two month respite had been taken. With Corps, of course, you finish one year and immediately begin the next, so any reaction intrudes upon the Corps itself.

## Lorne kicks us in the butt

So here we were, a Corps in a situation that it had never been in before. It was bursting with talent and experience, yet seeing its ambition and potential dribble away in a debilitating torpor. This could not last and had to go one way or the other.

It came down to one miserable practice, and everybody, instructors and members alike, were at their wits end to produce a solution. A meeting was called of all those who were present. It was held at the back of Jarvis Vocational School, in the school yard. Barry Bell conducted the session, and the unspoken thought in everybody's mind was "Is this it? Is this the end of the Corps?" Nobody really wanted that! Barry asked what it was that the Corps wanted, almost despairingly. People replied with their various suggestions until the whole resembled a cacophony of whiners. It was probably the lowest point, morale-wise, that the Optimist Drum Corps had ever seen.

Then, like a bolt from the blue, came a voice, edged with steel and tinged with scorn. The speech, lasting only a short while, touched everyone in attendance, as its derisive words found a target in every heart. When it was over, everybody was shamefully silent, digesting the scornful message, knowing it to be true. That speech was the turning point, and anyone who was at that meeting could say that it was indirectly responsible for ensuing events aside, the whole episode proved that the Optimists were, after all, only human.

Whatever, the Corps was kicked out of its junky mood and, from that moment, we never looked back. Lorne Ferrazzutti, by the way, delivered the speech, ad lib.

## The New Repertoire

With that nonsense out of the way, things began to move in leaps and bounds. What helped was that the new music, all of it, found hardly any disfavour in the Corps itself. It was a good mixture of Broadway, classical, jazz, ballad, folk, Latin, and popular music, in other words, a well-rounded show with contrast and variety.

Because this repertoire was so apt and partially responsible for the outcome of this season, we shall list it in its entirety.

- ▶ *Let Me Entertain You* – from the musical “Gypsy”.
- ▶ *Asia Minor* – a classical excerpt from a larger movement.
- ▶ *St. Louis Blues* – a jazz contribution.
- ▶ *In The Mood For Love / Down By The Riverside* – two contemporary concert pieces, one slow, one fast.
- ▶ *Tabu* – a Latin inspired offering.
- ▶ *I Believe* – a cheer inducer, as it was presented. Later to be described as having religious overtones.
- ▶ *The Party’s Over* – a self-explanatory closing number.

These selections appealed, in one way or another to almost everyone in the Corps. This was, and is, an important factor; and, just as vital, would prove to appeal equally to judges and fans alike.

It was apparent, early on, that this year’s version of the Optimists would be like no other.



1961: Andy Henderson with the guard

The musical arrangements, both horn and drum, were the most difficult that we had been expected to play until now. This would be a major factor in the year to come, combined with the fact that this year we could play them. Because of the depth of talent in all departments, the new material was digested in double-quick fashion. This left more time for the perfecting of the music, both in section and ensemble practice.



A good horn line can be recognized by almost anyone, whether possessed of Drum Corps knowledge or not. To a layman's ear the recognition of the music, played with no obvious blunders, would qualify a line as good. To someone with a bit of specialized know-how, other things play a part: power, range, dynamics.

## The Drum Line and Rifles

A good drum line is a bit more difficult to assess without some knowledge. This line, even apparent to those not in the know, was shaping up to be outstanding. The snares, Victor Krukliis, Ronn Prokop, and Ron Kaiser were showing signs of being the best we had ever had. Prokop had now been with us for two years, going into his third. Krukliis, who had come to us the previous year, from the Knights of Columbus Corps, had gained the reputation of being able to "play anything". The newest member, Ron Kaiser, had practised so much that it was a simple matter of minor adjustment for him to fit in.

Among these three superb drummers, Ronn Prokop more or less gravitated to a leadership position, if only by personality, technical ability, and seniority. Not surprisingly, his talent and drive would take him a long way in the music business, long after the Corps. He was part founder and drummer for the Paupers, and the more renowned "Lighthouse" rock bands.

Although he was a leading figure, the line was still under the control of Lorne Ferrazzutti, who guided its various talents and moulded it into a top competitive unit. Prokop, this year, wrote much of the drum music for the show, the first time that Lorne had allowed anyone to do this. Talent cannot be suppressed. This was to be proven again, years later, in another department.



1962: Toronto Optimists on retreat (Rome, NY)

Three excellent, veteran riflemen, Al Miller, Bill McNabb, and Andy Henderson highlighted the colour guard, fully versed in showy, but military, routines. Their twirling and tossing routines, done with rifles equipped with bayonets, were to catch the eye of many a crowd and judge. In a nutshell, this corps had potential in all departments, and all could see that the future looked bright.

## To the outside world

To the outside world, of course, we were still the Corps that had barely scraped through the previous year, retaining our title by the merest of margins. So it was to be expected others would think that the coming year would be a repeat of the past.

We shall see.

Because the Corps was progressing so well and so rapidly, it was a favourable situation for early learning of the drill. The only obstacle to this ambition was the lack of an indoor place to rehearse. Due to politics, a somewhat indistinct affair, the details of which are long lost, the local armouries were not available to us. This delayed early learning of the drill but proved to be only a minor setback.

One major step forward, technically, was the acquisition of a complete set of bass horns, twelve in all. They replaced the ordinary baritones that we had been using until now, and we were the first Canadian Junior Corps to use them. These horns, an improvement on the baritone, were the precursor of the modern contra-bass. Incidentally, all of our instruments, drums and bugles, were still of pre-1958 vintage, hand-overs from the old Optimist Trumpet Band and varied sources. The new bass horns that we acquired this year were the first new instruments this Corps had seen since its inception.

There was to be a change in the uniform this year. New blouses and cummerbunds were on order. They turned out to be a definite improvement, with trimmings that would enhance the overall appearance on the field, but without altering the basic design. When they arrived, it was decided to save them for a certain, important event. The results of this event were to justify this measure, making it that much more a “special occasion”. So, for the first part of the season, the original uniforms, in their entirety, would still be used, going into their fifth year. This situation is not uncommon in Drum Corps. Uniforms and instruments are expensive items to replace, so you try to make them last as long as possible.

Another Corps that had green blouses, St. Vincent's Cadets of Bayonne, New Jersey, folded this year. One of the best and most famous of the US Corps, they had been one of those that we had first competed against in 1958 at Batavia, New York. The other two at that contest, Audubon Girls and Garfield Cadets, we had since defeated, but not St. Vincent's. “Vinnies” as they had popularly been known, were another Corps sometimes called “The Green Machine” or “The Big Green Band”. Their disappearance left a big gap on the American scene, especially New Jersey.



1961: relaxing in a dressing room

In Canada, De La Salle were reported to be red hot and raring to go. This was hardly surprising considering their performance the previous year. They were still the major contender for top spot and were not to be taken lightly.

This year, the situation differed in that we were not down and were looking and sounding, even in January, like nothing that had ever come out of Canada before.

On another plane, “Green Capsule Comments”, our Corps paper, could not keep up with the demand for it. The mailing list grew too big for the supply available and had to be curtailed. This was in line with a statement in “Illinois Info”, a column in the February 1962 issue of Drum Corps World. “The Toronto Optimists easily have the best publicity set up of any Corps in the country”. This included Canada and the United States and was a tribute to the imagination and dynamism of Don Daber. He was incomparable. And he was Ours!



The 1961 rifles, Ivor & Len, with two of the 1962 Rifles, Al and Andy

## The arrival of Jim McConkey

Something happened during the off season that nobody would have ever thought could, or would, happen.

One night, in the hallway of Jarvis Vocational, a young man was seen sitting on a bench. He was dressed in a raincoat, self-consciously reading, while often glancing up nervously at the people passing by. To some of us he was vaguely familiar, and we all eventually learned who he was. This was Jim McConkey.

We had only ever seen him before, flamboyantly marching in front of some of the best drum Corps in the business; namely, Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights and the Archer-Epler Musketeers. These two Corps were both among the top in their leagues, and both had been majored by Jim McConkey. He was among the best in the business. What, then, was he doing here? Well, it turned out he had come to join up with us.



1962: Barry Bell and Jim McConkey

Some of us were a little bit in awe at first, if only because of his reputation. Although being perennial Canadian Champions and having a decent name in the United States, we had never yet equalled the calibre of Corps that he was used to leading. What had brought him here?

His presence caused debate that went on for some time, and no



stone was left unturned. All this controversy had its effect, which showed when Jim finally majored the Corps for the first time at a Sunday rehearsal.

Visibly nervous, he directed his first number in front of the corps. From the first note, his superb showmanship took command, all tension disappearing as Corps and Drum Major performed as one. At the end, most of us were aware that if we did not use his offered talents, we would be crazy. We were not crazy and James McConkey became our Drum Major for the year of 1962. It was a decision we would not regret. To cement this relationship and make him quickly feel at home, it was decided to throw a party for him. This was a "Get McConkey in the Corps" party and was held at a downtown tavern. It was a place of dubious reputation but where one could put tables together and let one's hair down. We preferred places like that. The party was a success, and McConkey was "in", not only officially but as one of the boys. We were almost ready for our 1962 debut.



1961: Optimists Rally Night

Regardless of the uproar at the 1961 Canadian Championships, Al Baggs was still Chief Judge of the C.D.C.A. and still our Corps Director. This situation, with its potential for conflict, could not last forever and eventually something would have to give.

## **NY State assigns 45 points for G.E.**

One development that would have consequence for us concerned New York State. The New York State Chapter of All-American Judges had decided to use score sheets opposite in value to Official Legion National Sheets. What this meant was that score sheets in New York State would allow forty-five points out of a hundred for general effect.

The execution captions would now allow fifteen points for bugles, fifteen points for drums, and twenty-five points for marching and maneuvering. The general effect captions would allow fifteen points for bugles, drums and M & M. Although this arrangement would only apply in New York State, it was to have an affect on our fortunes, and later in the story we shall see how.

During the winter months, someone had suggested the formation of a mini-corps. It was brought into existence and consisted of representatives from each section of the regular Corps. They learned music that was played by other, well-known Corps and played it with great panache. First displayed at the Drum Corps Convention at the Sheraton Brock Hotel in Niagara Falls, Ontario, they caused a minor sensation. The quality of their performance gave a clue to perceptive people of what to expect from the main Optimist Corps this year.

Jim McConkey, who was staying with Mrs. Nonie McKolskey-Beer, was the first one to suggest the idea of a Corps yearbook. The idea, though it had merit, was rejected. It was thought that Green Capsule Comments was already fulfilling any purpose that a yearbook might serve. The idea, though, was not forgotten.

Green Capsule Comments, started from scratch, had snowballed and was now accompanied by a host of other items. These were all for sale to the members and displayed at shows to the public, by our tireless Ladies Auxiliary. Some of these items were:

- ▶ Corps Pennant. . . . . 50¢
- ▶ Corps Calendar.. . . . 50¢, 10 photos of the Corps
- ▶ Jacket Crest. . . . . 75¢
- ▶ Corps Button. . . . . 25¢
- ▶ Booster Decal.. . . . 25¢
- ▶ Toronto Optimist “Junior International Drum Corps Competition Button” 25¢

The last item is significant because it was representative of our first contest this year. It goes without saying that all of these items were creations of, who else, Don Daber.

Proving to be a creature of varied talents, Jim McConkey started a column in G.C.C. called “Personality Profiles”. In each issue, a few people and their characters were outlined in some depth, until the entire outfit had been covered. This frill was interesting, learning about one’s fellow Corpsmen. This fellow was proving to be a valuable addition to the Corps in more ways than one.

Finally, a winter indoor drill rehearsal area was acquired. Someone had cracked the wall of bureaucracy and got us an armoury. This enabled us to put the drill together earlier than usual, but not quite as soon as we would have liked. However, as with the music, the all-new marching formations were learned and executed faster than usual, all due to the experience of the Corps.

## **The coming year**

We were ready for the field, and capable, much sooner than in previous years. Yet, paradoxically, we would not this year be going to the Preview of Champions in Jersey City – the year when we would have been more ready for it than ever before was to see us staying in Toronto. However, we were not upset because there was a top-notch contest in Toronto on the same weekend. This was the previously mentioned “Junior International Drum Corps Contest”. It had a better than average line-up of Corps for a Canadian show, and we were committed to appearing in that one.

Sadly enough, when the Corps was undeniably looking and sounding the best it had ever been, the schedule that lay ahead was not ideal. Out of twenty-two appearances that the Corps would make this year, twelve would be exhibitions rather than contests. In fact, our first eight dates were exhibitions. For a competitive unit, this is not good; but one can only accept what one is invited to, and last year’s performance could have had an effect on this, Champions or not. Doing exhibitions is better than doing nothing, or possibly rehearsing. So we did them. One reason for the high standards of the New Jersey Corps was their constant, high calibre competition. In Canada, and other regions, the few contests available made it harder to ever achieve the same standards. It did, though, happen. An occasional Corps would come from a

region of lesser activity and beat everybody. Chicago Cavaliers were a good example of this. In the future, St. Kevin's, Boston Crusaders, and most amazingly, the Casper Troopers, would bear out this observation. It only changed when the centre of gravity moved from Jersey to other regions.

The first of the exhibitions that led off our appearances was none other than the good old Ice Follies. This show was actually the product of an agreement between the Optimist Club, Ice Follies Management, and Maple Leaf Gardens. All the proceeds of that evening went to the Optimist Club, in support of their good works, part of which was, of course, us!

We often did special appearances for the club, knowing that without them there would never have been a Corps. Their support was, considering the relatively few people involved, quite expensive and would become more so as time passed. What they got in return was fairly extensive publicity and a sure crowd-pleaser when needed, for special occasions. Whether the Corps now embodied their original ideal of helping young people is debatable. It had certainly been eroded somewhat. The true purpose of a Drum Corps is to win contests, not be a charitable organization. This Corps had fulfilled that condition and would continue to do so. If in the process it steered wayward individuals onto the straight and narrow, so much the better.



1962: Toronto Optimists (Quebec City)

The Ice Follies debut was at the end of January, and from February through May seven more exhibitions were performed. Most were in Toronto, but others were in Kitchener, Peterborough, and Quebec City. In March, we played at the show put on by our Bantam Corps, which was still a going concern.

For now, the trip to Quebec City saw us use, for the first time, two buses. Compare this with today's top units, most of which use three, usually four, busses and a large vehicle for equipment. So, before our first contest we had fairly wide exposure until, at last, the first competitive activity approached.

In past years, we had been in Jersey City; now, Varsity Stadium in Toronto beckoned us to the "Junior International Drum Corps Contest". The Optimist Club, acting independently of the Corps sponsored it, so we could compete in it. The line-up of Corps was above average for a Canadian show and we waited, more curious than anything else, to see what would happen.

Nobody could guess what was in store.



## Chapter 12: 1962 – The Steamroller

### The Junior International

It was early evening, June 2, 1962, and on Bloor Street, in the heart of Toronto, people were filing into Varsity Stadium. They were not pouring in because this was not football or hockey, national pastimes, but Drum Corps. The eventual total crowd would amount to between six and seven thousand, and what they lacked in numbers they would make up for with enthusiasm. Almost every individual in that crowd was a Drum Corps fan, and, as a breed, they rival those of any other activity in their interest.

What they were coming to see was the first “Junior International Parade of Champions”. This was the first show in Canada to feature three American and three Canadian Junior Drum Corps. Such a format had previously been confined to the senior division.



1962: Toronto Optimists wear “old” uniforms for last time (Junior International)

The US Corps were of good calibre, the top one being the Garfield Cadets. They were, by now, completely back in top-notch condition. Along with St. Joseph’s of Batavia and the St. Catherine’s Queensmen of St. Albans, New York, they would represent the United States. The Canadian entries were Preston Scout House, De La Salle, and the Optimists.

The original line-up had included the St. Kevin’s Emerald Knights from Dorchester, Massachusetts, a fine Corps that had come a long way during the late part of the fifties, becoming a match for anyone in the United States. They had succeeded in the toughest venue, New Jersey. Due to prior C.Y.O. commitments, they had to withdraw from this contest. It was unfortunate because they had never been in Canada and would have been a definite hit. Their replacement was the St. Catherine’s Queensmen from New York. We had met them before, several times, but only defeated them once. Always good, they would be an entertaining substitute for St. Kevin’s.

Predictions had been made earlier by those aware of the situation that the Optimists would give the top US Corps a run for their money this year. Along with this, it was said that De La Salle were neck and neck with us in the sweepstakes. Scout House and St. Joseph’s were unknown quantities to the local scene at the time, so this show would really serve to sort out a raft of rumours and conjecture. In order that this contest be truly international, in fact as well as in name, the judging panel was mixed. Of nine judges being used, four were Canadian and five American.

When the Optimist corps came out on the starting line, it was to a subdued applause, probably due to the previous year’s near debacle at the Nationals. Some of it, though, was genuine appreciation and interest. We still had some fans.

Jim McConkey addressed the Corps and put it in readiness to step off. Then, turning, he marched out to face the crowd. Just watching this guy strut was an experience, and his display alone roused audience interest. A few yells of encouragement preceded his signal for the first note, and we were off. That first note from the horn line hit the stands like a clap of thunder, as the most powerful ensemble the Optimist had ever fielded let rip. The fanfare ended and the Corps stepped off the starting line and into their best season yet. Even before the first number was over, it was apparent to those in the Corps itself that everything was working as it should. You can tell these things. By the time that the first number was completed, it was also apparent to the crowd. It started to come alive, realizing that this was the “old” Optimists but with a new face. Gone was the striving, but barely surviving outfit of last year, replaced by a robust, confident, powerful unit bent on regaining its stature. It was also, considering the early date, fairly accurate. Proof of this was the sight of judges walking around holding their clipboards and pencils, but not using them that often.

When the first half of the show ended, we had the crowd with us, on their feet, and their applause only served to fuel the fires of ambition. If we could do it, the second half would be better. Barry Bell had been observed doing a little jig on the sidelines as he saw all his planning, and that of the other instructors, unfold before his eyes. At the end of the standstill concert, the audience was in an uproar. The melodious rendition of “I’m In The Mood For Love”, followed by a rocking version of “Down By The Riverside” turned the place upside down. This, no doubt, was partially due to the change from “The Serenade From The Student Prince” and “In The Mood”. These two numbers had been very successful for us, but their time had passed. The now “fired-up” Corps literally “chewed-up” the field during the second portion of the show, and outdid themselves. Before the final note echoed through the stadium, the crowd was on its feet, remaining that way until the last man passed in review and disappeared under the stands. Never had there been such an ovation for this Corps. We were back!



1962: Toronto Optimists (Grey Cup Parade)

However, there still remained the small matter of the score sheets to contend with. Often, no matter how good that a Corps feels it has performed, or how high the optimism bred by positive crowd reaction, judges’ opinions can draw a different conclusion. We were up against other good units and were ourselves still rough around the edges. The rest of the show featured good performances by all the units competing, and the final scores would reveal some surprises.

The Garfield Cadets were, as expected, the most smoothly professional Corps of the evening, not only in their execution but also in their arrangements, both music and drill. The complexity of their material, combined with the depth of talent that enabled them to execute well, was to prove a potent mixture. They easily upheld their status of a top US Corps, and it was not necessary to be an expert on the subject to detect this.

The other Corps involved, though, did not appear amateurish in comparison, and the crowd was treated to a good selection of various styles and degrees of competence. In giving the end result of this contest, let's run through the Corps and scores as they ended up, giving a short report on each one.



1962: Toronto Optimists

In sixth position was Preston Scout House. Still a definite crowd favourite, they were hindered by an inability, or unwillingness, to accept change. Not only in style, but material, some of which was still of 1958 and before vintage. Although still a fine exhibition band, they lacked something for modern competition, scoring 69.76.

Placing fifth was St. Joseph's of Batavia. They were new to Canada and still a young Corps.

This was a Corps that was much improved over the previous year and would improve in leaps and bounds. Their performance on this night showed their potential. A good show, and the future would see them up with the best, scoring 73.95.

Now was De La Salle, who were held back by the problem all Corps face sooner or later, a lot of new people who needed to pick up experience. They had many fans that hoped to see them carry on where they had left off the year before. Eventually that would come about but not tonight. Although their show was effective with some good new material they garnered fourth place, with a score of 79.5.

Everybody loved St. Catherine's Queensmen's, music. Stan Kenton's "Eager Beaver" was a crowd favourite, as well as an Optimist favourite. Music, content, and execution were the strong point, but a lacklustre drill presentation was to be a negative force. Always good, tonight's show was for third place, barely edging out De La Salle with a score of 79.9.

By now we were really wondering what was going to happen. We had topped Del, and even the Queensmen, for a second time. We soon found out at the announcer droned, in second place, the Optimists, score 85.33. The Corps was jubilant. Almost six points over our closest Canadian rivals and a good US Corps. How well we had really done was revealed when Garfield, in first place, was announced with a score of 85.69. Less than half a point from a top American Corps was, for us, a definite success and more than we dared hope for. To some, who were involved in the business, but not at this show, this result was regarded as a fluke. No Canadian Corps had ever been this close to a top American Corps. However, all the Canadian Corps were getting better, and this was just the first time it had happened. It would happen again, more than once, in the future, and involving other Corps than the Optimists. As for us, this year, there was a whole season ahead that included chances to disprove the theory that this result had been a fluke.



## The Port Credit Pear Pickers

Things were now quiet for a while, contest-wise, until July 2nd. That was a whole month, but rehearsals were kept up at the same pace, not only to maintain but to improve our performance. During this slow period there were a couple of exhibitions and a parade that had an unusual aspect. We had already done one unusual parade at Christmas. It was unusual because of the fact that instead of uniforms we wore ordinary clothes but allowed the style to be any manner



1961: Toronto Optimists as the Port Credit Pear Pickers



1961: Toronto Optimists as the Port Credit Pear Pickers

that each individual could devise. The result was a garish collection of costumes that caused great curiosity among spectators. Even that early, the quality of the Corps was evident and people were wondering who we were, as there were no emblems or distinguishing characteristics. We spread it around that we were the “Port Credit Pear Pickers”, and it was a great job and fun for all.

## The “Hatari” Parade

Now, the parade this month, on June 25th, was unusual for different reasons. One, we were the only Drum Corps in it, albeit this time in uniform. Two, this parade was for a rare occasion, especially in Toronto, as we paraded for the premiere of the new John Wayne film “Hatari”. The great man himself was there, along with other Hollywood celebrities, and followed us along Yonge Street to the location of the theatre. Mr. Wayne, larger than life, took the trouble to come over and see us, being made an honorary member of the Corps. With the true grace of the great, he accepted this, to add to his numerous lifetime achievements. He truly was big.



1962: Optimists DM, Jim McConkey makes John Wayne an honorary corps member

## On the Road

We were back on the road with more exhibitions, June 30th at the Tournament of Drums in Rochester, and July 1st in St. Catharines. These affairs were good for exposure, but what was needed to keep and hone the fine edge was competition, and the last day of this weekend saw just that. The two exhibitions served as rehearsals for July 2nd, in Port Hope, Ontario. De La Salle were about the only Canadian Corps that had any chance of surpassing us. They were still a good Corps and a whole month had elapsed since our last meeting. Not having been idle ourselves, at the end of the night, we were still six points ahead of anyone else. This was a great year to be in the Optimists and everyone who was knew it.

What was shaping up to be a banner year received a dent in its armour on July 7th. In Brantford, Ontario, De La Salle, who were never to be discounted, pulled themselves to within three points of us. Whether they outdid themselves, or we, overconfident, let things slide, is a matter of conjecture. It was, however, the first time that we got hauled over the coals for winning a contest.

All this activity was leading to something else. That “special occasion” mentioned earlier in relation to the new uniforms. On July 14th, off we went, again, to Rome, New York. This was the show for which we had saved the uniforms. It was more psychological than anything else, designed to give a boost in morale. Rehearsals were held every night for two weeks prior to this show, and every ounce of energy and know-how we had was poured into this effort. Being in New York State, the score sheets allowed forty-five points for general effect, more than anywhere else, or than had ever been allowed in the past.

What was the reason for all this preparation and calculation? There could only be one reason, Blessed Sacrament would be there. With the potential that existed in the Corps this year, we were



1962: Blessed Sacrament at The Dream

really anxious to see what we could do against the best. Such sentiments would not have existed on their side, regardless of our good showing earlier in the year. They had never had to worry about us before, especially the previous year. We were as primed as could possibly be, at this time, and were out for blood. The “fluke” theory against Garfield earlier in the year, we hoped, would be laid to rest. So, aware of all the nuances involved and the fact that another such opportunity might never arise, off we went.

There were a total of six Corps in the show, four of which were American. We will limit discussion to two, only because not all of the others are known at this time.

When we rolled into the stadium, on the bus, Blessed Sacrament, or “Sac” as they were known, were on the field partway through their show. It was never a good idea to watch “Sac” when you had to go against them. You just felt like packing your stuff and going home. However, it could not be avoided, as we had to get ready for our turn.

At last, as the final, smooth strains of “In The Still Of The Night” floated over the stands to prolonged applause, we knew our time had come. Our new uniforms drew some comments from “Sac” people, who now stood around singly or in groups. Other than that they were unconcerned with us.

Standing on the line, we knew that tonight was now or never. As Jim McConkey marched out to face the crowd, some patriotic soul yelled “do it for your county, boys”. Well, if we could, we would.

This event was an emotional one for Jimmy McConkey because he had spent many years with Blessed Sacrament. Now, here he was trying to beat them. It did not deter him from giving his best, and, when he signalled for the first note, the Corps responded likewise. For what was probably the first time ever, “Sac” people looked up and then came over to watch. Everybody in the corps noticed this, and it was a real morale raiser. Although we had played Rome before, the locals had never seen this version of the Optimist Corps, and they ate it up.

“Let Me Entertain You”, the opening number went off well, but, in the second number “Asia Minor”, a disaster struck. There was a general breakdown on drums and horns when coming out of a standstill French horn solo. The Drum Major and the Corps got their signals crossed and half the Corps was out of time with the other. Here, training and experience took over, as the playing stopped, the drum line picked up the show, and the horns came back in on cue. The whole thing only lasted seconds and the show continued as if nothing had happened.

That was fortunate, because the performance was knocking the crowd and the judges over. The lapse that occurred, and after, even prompted one judge to comment “nice recovery” on the score sheet, though of course it still cost us points.

Well, after that nothing else catastrophic occurred and the show picked up steam.

After the standstill concert, part of the show, Jim McConkey said audibly, “you better bleed on that finish line!”<sup>4</sup> It was picked up by tape recorders and subsequently reproduced on records. It has since become a piece of Drum Corps folklore.

Continuing, the horns played powerfully and well and the drums out executed themselves.

Accuracy was one key to success and appeal was another. Would we have enough of both to make any inroads against the masters. If the crowd reaction was any indication, there was no doubt. The Corps marched off the field to a rousing standing ovation, but it remained to be seen what the verdict of the judges would be.



1962: Toronto Optimists Drum Line (Rome, NY)

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<sup>4</sup>. Editor's note: the comment was actually recorded at the 1962 Nationals



On the retreat ceremony, tension was evident in our ranks, aggravated by 98° F heat and the ever-present mosquitoes. All the Corps were lined up on the field, but at the judges table tabulations were still being done. This sort of thing is nerve-wracking. Finally the announcing of results began, and as they were reeled off excitement grew. Third place was given and we had still not yet been named. Nobody really dared hope for the unlikely, and at the official spoke into the microphone:

“In second place, with a score of 84.45, the Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights”.

Nobody moved a muscle.

It had happened, and it was a shock to everyone.

“In first place, with a score of 86.20, the Toronto Optimists”. The crowd roared its approval and, relaxing, the Corps members indulged in some well-earned self-congratulations. “Sac”, many times US National and New Jersey State Champions, had gone down to an outsider. Actually, it was the first time that a Canadian Junior Corps had ever defeated a past or present US National Champion. Now we had to find out how it had happened.



1962: Retreat in Rome , announcing second place

Being the winning Corps, we were last off the field and stood patiently as the other units marched off in front of us, even “Sac” who were at the far end of the field. Everyone was now still and silent, but inwardly elated at being part of what was, up to now, the high point of the career of the Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. Finally, our turn came and we trooped off the field behind the stands, where we boarded our bus. Pandemonium reigned, while Barry Bell

pulled out the score sheets and began to analyse the whole affair. Eventually chaos changed, slowly, to relative serenity and he was able to give us a breakdown of the sheets. Not surprisingly, the general effect captions had done the trick for us. Wins by 3/10 on bugles, 2/10 on drums, and a whopping 2.3 on marching and maneuvering. This last was a tribute to the creative genius of Doug McPhail. Self-taught and brilliant, he was mostly responsible for the devising and teaching of a drill that had out-marched the best in the business. Of course, without good execution, general effect suffers, and we had held our end up there, although not topping any captions. "Sac" took execution drums by 2/10, bugles by 7/10, and M&M by 0.15. These scores were the closest, in every category, that we had ever come to "Sac" execution-wise, and the margin of 2.8 in overall G.E. tipped the scales in our favour, to the tune of 1.75.



1962: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation (Varsity Stadium)

Well, there it was, and it was savoured all the way home. Would we have beaten them the next day, or in New Jersey? Only the gods knew that. Of course, back at work, in school, or even at home, when relating what we had done, often the reaction was "who?", accompanied by blank expressions of incomprehension. We were happy, and in the Drum Corps world, it was an upset of major proportion that would reverberate for a long time to come.

Although the outcome of this affair had exceeded our expectations, everything afterwards was now anti-climatic.

There was still much activity to contend with before the season ended. Most of this involved local competition, where our competitors could never be ignored no matter how successful we had been this far. This outlook on things was always to the fore in our calculations. If not always totally shared by the general membership, it was officially promoted from the top in order to forestall the onset of overconfidence or arrogance.

## Post-Rome

Closer to home now, it was to Falconer, New York again for an exhibition at a senior contest. Then, on July 25th, at East York Stadium in Toronto, it was time for the first defence of our Ontario Championship title. We maintained our six point advantage over all other entrants, reinforcing the almost total dominance achieved this year.

In reporting this contest, it is noteworthy to recall remarks made, in a Drum Corps World column by the prolific writer, Bob Mannhardt. He penned more than one monthly column and was recognized by all as a knowledgeable source of news. Although he was an Optimist fan and an honorary member of the Corps, his articles were unbiased and critical of anyone, if such was deserved.

Regarding this show, he observed that De La Salle were as good as they were last year, which was decidedly good. Therein lay the problem. It was not good enough anymore to be “as good as last year”. Del’s horn line was as fine as ever and on par with ours; however, as Mr. Mannhardt pointed out, the Optimists had acquired a whole new show, moving ahead in material and competence. By regaining the initiative, the situation of last year had been reversed, forcing our rivals to contemplate inconvenient and difficult mid-season changes if they wished to remain competitive.



1962: Toronto Optimists on retreat (Varsity Stadium, October)

Early August saw us in Rochester, N.Y., again for the New York / Canadian Championship. Rochester was a good place to compete because interest in Drum Corps was widespread, and the stadium was always filled. This one went down well as we topped a field containing St. Joseph’s of Batavia and De La Salle by six and seven points, respectively. An exhibition in Sarnia led, two weeks later, to a mixed junior/senior contest in Titusville, Pennsylvania. This town was noted for being the site of the first oil well drilled in the United States. Well, we drilled hard for this one, coming up against the Pittsburg Rockets Senior Drum and Bugle Corps. They were a good Senior Corps, but we managed to cap the field by a margin of 1.65. We had been in Titusville in 1961, but, as elsewhere this year, it was not the same Corps. To win this one was a definite feather in our caps.

It was no getting late in the season and increasingly unlikely that anyone in Canada would defeat us this year. Since July, we had maintained a minimum six point lead over all others and had not lost a contest anywhere since June 2nd.

### **Pittsburgh: The rematch that never happened**

But there was one more contest in the US before the Canadian Championships were held, and it was a big one. We focussed on it intently, and the list of Corps involved shows why.

There were six:

- ▶ Chicago Cavaliers
- ▶ Garfield Cadets
- ▶ Madison Scouts
- ▶ St. Catherines’ Queensmen
- ▶ Blessed Sacrament
- ▶ Toronto Optimists

What a line-up! The location was Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the show was an adjunct to the Allegheny County fair, on September 2nd. Prior to this, on August 25th, we won back the CNE title we had lost to De La Salle the year before. This time it was by a huge eight points.



One reason was that we had been rehearsing overtime in order to prepare for the Pittsburgh contest. It had been on our minds since it was announced eight months earlier. The added practice time made us more than ready for the CNE.

At the time that the schedule was aired, we had not known how the Corps would turn out this year. Now, we knew. This contest was seen as an opportunity to go at the best, while realizing it would be far from easy to accomplish anything. There would be no huge general margin in the score sheets, nor any advantages of surprise. This was Pennsylvania, not New York, and everybody now knew that we were capable of an upset and would act accordingly. We, of course, were itching to get on with it. It was to be a three day trip, allowing much time for rehearsal.



1962: Ivor & Jim with the Drum Major of Audubon and others (Quebec City))

Away we went, full of beans, determined to again make our mark. Nothing could dampen our spirits, not even being accommodated in dark cabins reminiscent of Davy Crockett days. The rain that began to fall, also, could not suppress the spirit of the Corps. The trouble was that the rain began and did not stop. It rained, and rained, and rained. We still rehearsed hoping for a break in the weather, which did finally happen. What else had happened, of course, was that the contest field had turned into a sticky quagmire of wet, gooey mud. It was impossible to march on it, let alone compete. The contest was cancelled, and all the Corps were reduced to playing their shows in semi-circle, on a wooden platform. There was no other word for it but disappointment.



1962: Toronto Optimists (Grey Cup Parade)

Drum Corps were nearly always subject to the whims of Mother Nature. Resignedly, we played our show to a small gathering of spectators, who probably had no idea of the lost drama confronting them. It was just a band show, a side show of the country fair.

Packing up our equipment, we boarded the bus for the long trip back to Toronto. There was always next year, but would we ever again have a Corps like this one.

## The Nationals

Never long subdued, the spirit was back by the time we got home and began to prepare for our own backyard contest, the 1962 Canadian Championship. It was less than a week later, and in the junior division it was not really much of a contest at all. Based on our record this year, we would have had to make several major blunders to lose this one. Still, it was the Canadian Championship, and, taking it seriously, as ever, rehearsals were not allowed to lapse. As a result, the six point margin established earlier was maintained. We became Canadian Champions for the fifth consecutive year. De La Salle, of course, were second, not having managed to close the gap since the beginning of the season; however, where other corps had disappeared, they were still there and would be for a long time to come.



1962: Toronto Optimists (Varsity Stadium, October)

Al Baggs, still our Corps Director, was also still the Chief Judge and presided at this show. This time there were no protests or political uproar. The scores were too far apart for that. Other interesting things happened at this affair. The Optimist Bantams, our feeder Corps, placed second in the junior standstill division, a good omen for us, as they were one of our major sources of new talent.

Ivor Bramley's proteges, the Oakville Trafalgar Patrolmen, won the title in their division for the first time ever. His influence on this Corps had been considerable, and his participation in their affairs had a lot to do with this result.

Back in the Junior "A" Division, Grantham, who had always been a dark horse and a viable contender, had suffered misfortune. Many of their members had, early in the year, left to form a Senior Corps. Consequently, they had not fielded a competitive Corps all year until the championships. Then they reverted to the Junior "B" Division, and, even then, only just made it to the finals. They seemed finished as a challenge to anyone.



The biggest surprise at this year's Nationals was the first local appearance of a Senior Corps from Quebec. Les Diplomates de Quebec, unheard of and unheralded in these parts, came on and astounded all that saw them. A horn line of unequalled power, a crisp drum line, and a show crammed with general effect put Quebec Corps on the map. They were tremendous, throwing a real scare into the local establishment.



1962: Blessed Sacrament and Optimists on Retreat (Rome, NY)

Before the season ended, there was one more function to attend, the Annual St. Catharines Grape Festival. Again, nature intervened and this was also rained out. So much for that!

The year was now officially over. What had started out seeing the Corps almost fold had become the most successful year in its brief history. A "Five Year Championship" dinner was held for all at the King Edward Hotel in downtown Toronto, the first of its kind.

The savouring of the year just finished overshadowed speculation about the future. Plans and changes were announced, and it was revealed that from May to October about 1,800 Corps buttons had been sold. A lot of people had jumped on the bandwagon, so to speak.

There could be a lot more said about this year, but it would serve little purpose, let's just say that the Corps, rather than being merely good, had teetered on the brink of greatness. It was a heady experience, and one not easily discarded. Some Corps take much longer to reach such a plateau. Some never do. However, there were changes coming up, the foremost being the loss of at least twelve members. This, due to age, was unavoidable but not catastrophic. One of these was the spirited Ivor Bramley, who this year had been the guard commander and drill instructor. Staying around as an instructor, he would eventually become good enough to be sought after and used by top Senior Corps.



1962: Toronto Optimists (Grey Cup Parade)



Oh yes, this was also the end for the author of this story. The time had come to go out into the real world and find out what was there. Six years in Corps, sometimes feted, applauded, always in good company. Now, I was to leave all this – for who knew what.

As far as this tale is concerned, it shall no longer be “we” or “us” when speaking of the Corps. Nor will there be any eyewitness reports for a long period, all information being culled from magazines, letters, and interviews. If the narrative suffers because of this, I offer no apologies. It cannot be helped.



1962: Colin Hedworth, right end of drum line, at his last contest (Varsity Stadium)

# Version

## Chapter 13: Inside The Corps

What was the Corps like behind the uniforms and public image as seen on the field? Probably not much different from any other Drum Corps, as most of them were after the same things. In order to pursue these ends, they did the same things, different only in degree and method. Let's see if we can discover what, if anything, made the Optimists distinctive, and tick for so long, so successfully. In attempting to do this, it is probably a good idea to begin at the top, if only for want of a starting point.

### Downtown Optimists Club

To begin with, there was the Downtown Optimist Club itself. Without them, there would have been no Corps, at least, not one of the magnitude of this one. The club, one of many in their field, was a remote organization to the general membership of the Corps. We knew them in name only. Nobody knew when or where they convened, or how large a part the Corps played in their overall programs. Their representative closest to us was, of course, Al Baggs, whose concern was us. From him we heard of club decisions or activities, but only if they involved the Corps and its affairs. Most, if not all of us, were only interested in things that applied to the Corps.



Optimist International Crest

From time to time, a club member would come around to see what was going on, and often we would be unaware of his presence. Even if he was noticed, no one would know who he was, as they were seldom introduced. The most common reaction, if a stranger appeared was, "Who's that guy?". Usually he would be taken for an interested father or uncle, perhaps even an outsider who would not know anything about Drum Corps. Thus he was not to be bothered with. All of us would have been surprised to find out just how much these "strangers" did know, as well as what an influence they and their colleagues had on the make-up and operation of that which we all loved, The Corps.

### The Executive

Next to the club, on a level more accessible to the membership was the executive and those associated with it. As the Corps itself changed with time, so did the executive, though for different reasons. Age was the one factor affecting all in the Corps itself, along with other things affecting individuals.

In the executive, no constant factor existed, and some of these people would stay for years. Change at their level could have many reasons. The increase of responsibility in other field i.e. family, business, etc., ill health, advancing years or even just being superseded by others more fit or capable of taking up the reins of control. This last sounds a little too efficient, or even ruthless, but it was not that way at all. Anybody was welcome, at any time, for any reason, if they wanted to help out. Provided that the interests of the Corps were not interfered

with, nobody was subject to dismissal or arbitrary rulings. There were, as anywhere, power struggles, with winners and losers, and sometimes losers stayed or sometimes they left. Those were personal, and usually hidden, not general policy.

Over the years, many people helped out at the executive level, some of whom remained almost unknown, while others became visible and accepted by the Corps. After, though, being subjected to intense scrutiny and hauled through the shark-toothed field of Corps discussion. Once accepted, they were in for good, becoming part of the whole and wearing the green jacket.

At the beginning, Al Baggs was the only executive member that we knew of, or saw, though he was soon joined by others. Bernie Beer came in, then Don Daber, and many others as the years passed. In this fashion, somewhat haphazard though it was, an effective management was maintained throughout the entire existence of the Corps. During all those years, there were many people involved, some of whom will be mentioned later, others who will not, if only because of a lack of records to draw from.

All who did become involved brought their own particular specialties, there being hardly a skill or trade that we could not take advantage of, if necessary. Such depth was often to prove useful. It goes without saying that all of this was done in a volunteer spirit, for if profit was the incentive for any, they would have to go elsewhere.

The members of the Corps itself were always interested in the people who became involved. Often this would lead to the coining of humorous nicknames that would be used frequently, and in public. The only one who was never addressed familiarly was Mr. Baggs. Long ago, he had been stuck with the name of “Daddy” Baggs, but this term was seldom, if ever, used to his face. “Daddy” Baggs did have a sense of humour, but it never occurred to people to use this nickname openly. It truly was a term of endearment, of respect for the man who had “fathered” a championship corps. This attitude was good in that it maintained a certain formality that helped in the running of the Corps. Even in a Drum corps, there has to be some discipline and hierarchy.

Other members of the executive, or even instructors, would be treated in a more informal fashion, and this never led to problems. In fact it was all part of the fun of being in the Corps.

During the very early years, an attempt to introduce a sterner formality between members and instructors fizzled out. It was asked that instructors be addressed as “Mr.” when members spoke to them. This did not last very long, possibly because at that time there was not much age difference between the two factions. This, plus the fact that after rehearsals everybody, executive, instructors, and members would often hang out together. This did not foster formality.



1963: Don Daber



## The Instructors

Now that we are onto the topic of instructors, it must be said that they were as “Drum Corps” as any of the members, in some cases, more so. Everybody was very young and exceedingly enthusiastic. Before the Corps became champions, many times over, all was new and exciting. Nobody was ever blasé or world-weary. Everybody was learning and loving every minute of it. It is hard to capture on paper the feeling that existed and successfully impart it to the reader. Possibly, it was what most of us experience during our youth, when spirit and enthusiasm are at a peak. Whatever field or endeavour one is in, it is a period in life unmatched. For us, it was the Corps.



Lorne Ferrazzutti and Barry Bell

The instructors of this Corps were more than somebody that you only saw at practice. They were often friends. Anyone of them was only too glad to pass on knowledge to those who desired it. They were true mentors and would bend over backwards to assist anybody in the Corps. In contrast to today, although there was an equipment department, of sorts, there was no Corps equipment truck, unless someone brought their own vehicle to be used. This occasionally happened. In these primitive days, everybody was responsible for their own equipment and was expected to be. People like Lorne Ferrazzutti hardly ever went home without a carload of drums, obligingly relieving people of having to carry them, a facet of his generous nature. It really was a chore if one had to board a crowded streetcar or subway train while carrying a bass or side drum, however, it was done all the time.

Barry Bell was, without a doubt, a true Corps person. He was always available for anything involving the Corps, or even other Corps. He was one of those who could sit for hours

discussing Drum Corps and often did, until the wee hours. Then, almost everyone was possessed of this zeal to some degree. If they had not been, this book probably would not have been written, or it would tell a different story.

All of these people in the instructional staff were possessed of much talent and intelligence. People like Barry, Lorne and Doug McPhail, were assisted by capable individuals from within the Corps itself. They could be anybody, designated or volunteer.

The time that they put into the Corps, with little or no remuneration, could have been used in more lucrative pursuits. This assessment also applies to the executive. Collectively, it demonstrates that they, like the members of the Corps, truly liked what they were doing. This was a major factor in the success of the entire operation.

## The Corps Members

What was the appeal of the Corps, almost magnetic in its attraction to those who were interested?

Many times we would spend long hours debating and discussing what it was about, this activity that held its devotees so strongly. The probable answer lies in a combination of factors that were not always related.

A definite liking for music would bring those who wanted to play rather than just listen, but who could not pursue it professionally or would not. Whether this would be due to lack of time, money, or talent is beside the point. The Corps, any Corps, would provide an outlet for such inclinations.



1963: Skit with Ronn Prokop, Jim McConkey & Dave Johns

It did not cost a lot of money to belong. There were no dues in those days, and all that was needed was enough to be able to live on the road for a day or two, everything else was provided free; uniforms, instruments, instruction, and travel expenses, only meals being paid for individually.

Talent! It was not really necessary, or asked for, that one be talented to be in the Corps. Most of us were decidedly not talented, but as a group managed to give the impression of a reasonable facsimile. Talent was usually a matter of individual ambition. A clever horn player could, and did, fake his way through part of the show without being detected. Many Corps, us included, in order to fill a blank, would use a person who could not play a note but go through the motions with his instrument. If this went unnoticed, one's Corps would not suffer, point-wise, on the score sheets. Of course, if too many did this, it would be noticed. Only the drums and guard could not fake their routines.

If the Corps had more than a few above average performers, so much the better, the unit would be better for it. Often, the show would be designed around such people, using their talents to the best advantage, without putting the rest, most of us, in a lesser light. Al Morrison, Joe Gianna, Doug MacKenzie, and Ronn Prokop were people who fitted the category of above average and were showcased to the benefit of all. Also, though there would usually be backups for any of these people, now, and years in the future. Different names held sway then.

About the only thing required of all was the time involved. That all should participate to the same degree was almost necessary for the maintenance of uniformity and cohesion. With the Optimists, and likely most other Corps, peer pressure usually ensured that this requirement was fulfilled.

During the early years, the time element was not too demanding, but as the Corps got better it began to increase. In order to keep up with or even surpass better Corps, the time involved gradually grew until eventually it reached extreme levels. This could work to the near exclusion of all else in one's life. It was a matter of personal opinion if it was worth it or not.

One of the decidedly strong appeals of the Corps was the outdoor, fresh air aspect of the whole activity. Although most music was learned and rehearsed indoors, once the summer arrived, or even before, most activity was conducted in the wide-open spaces. To get a break from stuffy classrooms, well lit but confining offices, or factories, and participate in a healthy physical activity, possessed a broad appeal for many. This, culminating in those weekend bus trips, provided an irresistible lure that was almost addictive in its attraction.

## Bus Trips

The bus trips were, without a doubt, a major part of the fun of being in the Corps, at least this one.

They would go something like this. In the wee hours of Saturday morning, all over the city, certain people would arise while others were still sound asleep. Quietly getting themselves ready, they would finally pick up horn or drum and sneak out the door, off for the day with their favourite Drum Corps. Depending on the length of the trip, the bus would be ready to leave at 7:30, 8:00, or 8:30, when finally everybody had shown up. In the Optimists, we seldom had to wait for anyone, or had people missing. It did happen but only occasionally, which was an indication of how the corps was liked by those in it. Some people, who were really dedicated, would arise even earlier than the others, to meet at someone's house for an hour or two of section practice before meeting the bus. Such enthusiasm!

Once the Corps was assembled, all would board the bus after roll call and away we went. Usually it was a fine, sunny Saturday morning and all was well as the bus pulled out onto the rolling road, full of young, happy people.

The locations from which we departed were not always the same. Sometimes it would be Jarvis Vocational School, sometimes the Canadian National Exhibition grounds. One good spot was at Church and Adelaide streets. It was convenient because it had an early opening restaurant nearby where one could load up with goodies before leaving.

In the early days, it was usually Barry Bell or Al Baggs, or both, in token charge of the bus. Token because they seldom did much. That would have spoiled the fun. Once on the bus, safely in one's favourite seat, it was sit back, feet up, and leave it all to the bus driver. For some reason, the rowdiest element always seemed to congregate at the back of the bus. Reflecting this, a song was composed, called "The Back Seat Boys", that paid tribute to these worthies. The group was fluid and transient, with people joining and leaving as desired, but it was constant.



1961: Bernie Beer & Mr Baggs on the bus



People occupied themselves in various and sundry ways; reading, card playing, discussion and debate, usually about the Corps. These pastimes would be accompanied with sleeping, singing, and, sometimes, unbridled riotousness.

This lasted until everybody was exhausted, which often took a long time, young and healthy as we were. The bus driver took it all in stride, probably having seen worse if in the habit of driving weekend groups. It was all great fun and most times ended with us taking up a collection for the driver on the way home. In a Corps hat - remember those!



1963 or 1964: Travelling to Midwest

If the trip was to the United States, as increasingly they were, experience taught us a few things. When US immigration boarded the bus at the border, they would ask, "Where were you born?", to each individual. It was the best just to say "Toronto", which came out "Tronna". When one honest fellow said "Sicily", we were held up for hours while border guards conscientiously checked that all was okay. This entailed phone calls to Toronto to verify documentation. After that, everybody was born in Toronto, or at least in Ontario.

This little incident served to highlight the homogeneous nature of the Corps. We had all kinds and were a multi-cultural society, in miniature, long before such arrangements were official government policy. Were it still in existence today, its make-up would likely be even more cosmopolitan, reflecting modern society. Everybody got along very well, different natures and temperaments serving to add to the overall fun of a bus trip.

This Corps, and no doubt most of them, always had a clown or two to liven things up. We had many, but the most obvious in the early days was Don Chisholm. His irreverent wit could keep a whole bus in a turmoil of laughter until he had to be begged to stop. You just could not take it anymore.

Being in a Junior Corps, these trips were pretty clean cut, which was a plus factor. The debilitating effects of alcohol were minimal as it was not encouraged, and the ugly and illegal presence of drugs had not yet made its presence felt. These things would, and did crop up and were handled in a manner designed to reduce, if not eliminate them altogether. Not, it must be said, always successfully. The effects of alcohol abuse became evident once when some wine was acquired in the course of an out-of-town trip. The results were odious and repugnant, serving the discomfort of all on the bus. Such things are, of course, a matter of personal choice, and in a Corps will be found all different types of people. If you wanted to be in the Corps, you did not have to use such things, but sometimes you had to endure them.

Eating on the trips was an experience, not only for the Corps but also for those who worked in the restaurants. When fifty or sixty young people descend on a place all at once, on top of the people already there, things get pretty hectic. Mostly for the people who worked in these

establishments. At night, although fewer local people would be in the place, there were also fewer staff on hand to serve; however, believe it or not, this Corps was a fairly well-behaved lot, and we were never refused entrance. It can happen. Everybody always got fed and back on the bus in a reasonably short time. This was a credit to the restaurant staff as well and the Corps. Even years later, with a much larger Corps, there were seldom problems, certainly none caused by the attitude of the Corps itself.

Often people, who were not officially connected, went on trips with the Corps just to see the shows or to act as a cheering section. These could be friends, relatives, or, in many cases, ex-members following their old Corps around. This was quite a common practice and could result in a whole convoy instead of just a single bus.

Girlfriends were a bit of a different story. If one had a girlfriend who liked the Corps, it made things a lot easier. Many of these would come to all the practices as well as the shows if they were really keen. Some were, almost all Corps had some groupies and we were no exception. It was not all that much fun for the girls, though, as all they could do was watch whatever the Corps did. Nowadays, with the gender mixed Corps, it is possible for the girls to participate. They were capable of that at the time but things were just not done that way. Either you were in a boys Corps or a girls Corps. When, at last, the girls did become truly involved, they proved to be an asset in more ways than one.



1961: Pat and Barry Bell

It would be interesting to speculate how many budding romances were destroyed by membership in a Drum Corps. The Optimists certainly experienced their share of these. There were people who got married while still in the Corps, and the wise ones left. Then there were those who married but did not leave, and this could have been the cause of broken marriages. It did happen. Corps life, with its constant demands on one's time for rehearsals, and all the travelling involved, was not truly compatible with domestic bliss. Possibly, another category common in years to come, marriage between two people in the Corps was the answer. Whatever, marriage and Drum corps, two fine institutions. It is of course, a personal choice, but not an easy one.

During the trips many things occurred, usually in a fashion to punctuate the tedium that could set in. On a memorable occasion, one of our better horn players, Ed Nanni, was encouraged to challenge Barry Bell to a horn playing contest. Barry agreed, picked up a horn and began triple-tonguing as a warm up for the bout. The contest was cancelled in the face of such expertise.

There were, of course, mishaps that occurred. Those that involved the bus, or an accompanying car, caused the most inconvenience to all. Often assistance had to be sought from many miles away. We always got home in one piece, never experiencing any disastrous accidents as plagued some other Corps. Considering the amount of travelling involved, this was lucky and fortunate. It was also a tribute to good management.

## The Corps “Identity”

There was always a good “Corps identity” for want of a better name. When we met to go on a bus trip, we were not a bunch of individuals. We were “The Optimists”, and this helped to make the trips more enjoyable. During the early years, things were not so demanding and there was more free time available. Later on, almost every minute was scheduled and the Corps, though better, demanded more of its members. The people in it at the time thought nothing of this because, to them, it had always been this way. What had been one or two day trips became week long tours that were a whole different ball game from early times.



1962: Ivor chatting with a cop while Prokop, Kaiser, Burak & Hedworth look on

On the bus itself, the mixture of people sometimes created an unruly atmosphere. This was a group of teenagers, most of whom were in the process of being educated. As a result of this partially civilized stage of development, it did not take long for the descent into near savagery. If this involved only certain elements of the Corps, many found it hilarious, some, only to be tolerated.

The inside of the bus could become a haven for the vilest noises and exclamations known to man. These would be accompanied by the appropriate offensive odours, and the whole served to create a scenario that was not for those of delicate sensibilities. Any inclined this way would soon learn this. But nobody was ever physically injured, even though many fights took place. They were all in good fun. To the best of my knowledge, nobody ever quit the Corps because of the atmosphere on the bus. The later addition of girls to the Corps, it was noticed,

did have a beneficial civilizing effect on the whole operation. If things did get too out of hand, as sometimes occurred, there was always an adult or two on board to keep things under control. This was a good thing because occasionally things got just too bizarre.



1962: Toronto Optimists at Varsity Stadium

Probably the best all round bus leader during his tenure was Barry Bell. He could maintain a semblance of



order with a potent mixture of wit and discipline. This would serve to preserve order, suppressing extremists, who were a minority, thus allowing the majority to enjoy the trip. It was the majority who usually gained the upper hand and trips were conducted in a pleasant and tolerable atmosphere. As a whole, the Corps was rather a culture unto itself, tough, harmless, and, if you did not like it, you could always leave. This seldom happened.

The overall attraction, even addiction, that the Corps exerted on its members is best illustrated by events of today. Whenever reunions occur, formal or otherwise, after the first few minutes, all talk is of the Corps. Most of these people are successful, in the accepted fashion, in their latter day lives. Some are high ranking business executives, others business owners. Nearly all are solidly capable in some field or endeavour. Some have families, and some are now retired. No matter. Seldom meeting other than at arranged occasions, when they



1962: Toronto Optimists in the Grey Cup Parade

do, the Corps and its activities dominates the conversation. In some instances, this phenomenon applies to people from forty years ago, and to many from thirty years ago.

Reasons for the initial interest have been mentioned, but why such a lingering attraction, even a possible longing for past experiences. One can only guess, and then it would vary for each individual. One thing, though, that is doubtlessly near universal, is the remembered feeling of “All for one, and one for all” that generally prevailed. No matter one’s status or ability, in the Corps all were the same and when that unit marched out on the field it was the “Optimists”, not 50-100 individuals.

It is a fact that people in Drum Corps are a breed apart and never forget those days, no matter how distant they may be.

## Tradition

The Corps first became champions almost by chance, and in doing so established a tradition that was ever harder to maintain. Championship status was increasingly promoted as a goal to strive towards. In spite of this, membership requirements remained pretty much the same. Anyone could join, and did, but, as stated before, as the Corps got better, it would be harder to get a spot. Once in, you were expected to conform to the regimen. Manuals covering almost every aspect were written and expected to be followed. These could include dress, uniform care and maintenance, personal practice time, behaviour, instrument care, and so on and so forth. In the later stages, these things would grow ever more complex.

Such organization was non-existent when the Corps began but developed piecemeal as the Corps got older and grew in stature. Except for the name, a guy who joined in 1958 and a guy who joined in 1968 would think they were in two different Corps. It was all part of the attempt to maintain its record in the face of increasingly rigorous competition in the form of more, and better, Corps on the field and in the efforts to move up in places where success had yet to be achieved.



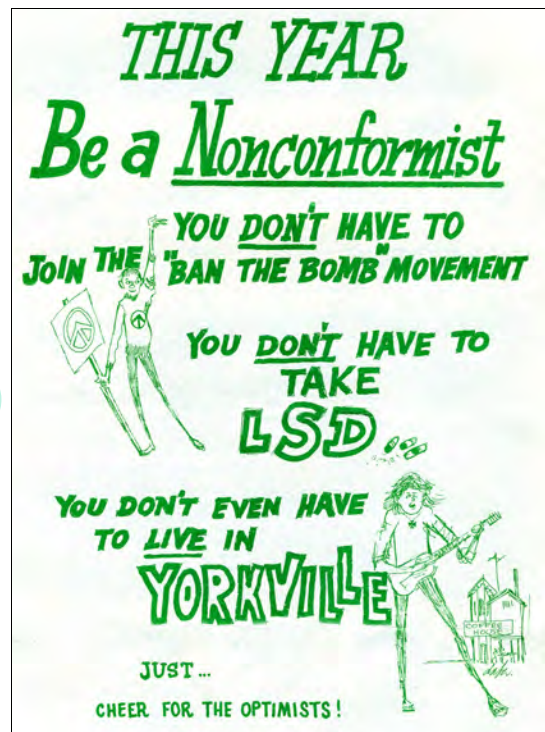
1963: Rick Robida, Ronn Prokop, Fred Lombard & Joe Palanica

All this striving and the development that it spawned were to ensure the success of the Corps for a long time. Everybody knew that its winning streak, especially locally, had to end one day. The establishment of traditions, and the attempt to maintain them, ensured that it was a long time before this happened and was the one thing that made the “Optimists” distinctive.

Was the Corps hated for its success?

Possibly! During the early years, we were cheered as the underdog. Later, anybody who could beat us was cheered as the underdog. Often the Corps was booed, even when winning, if the affair was a close run thing. Many were. Just as often, the Corps was cheered when a performance left no doubt in anyone’s mind as to who had won. No matter what the reactions in those far off days, a look at the records reveals a streak that can never be erased, because that is what actually happened.

As this chapter winds down, and we get back to the real story of the Corps, on the field, we can anticipate a whole range of drama yet to come. There are seventeen years of story telling yet to cover, where anything and everything could, and did, happen. So let’s have a coffee and a smoke and relax for a while, and then carry on with this absorbing, real life, soap opera.



“Cheer for the Optimists!” flyer from the 1960s

## Chapter 14: Movin' On

At the end of 1962, it had been ten full years since the formation of the tiny Boy Scout band, way back in 1952. What Bud Parker had started was now probably light years removed from what had been originally planned. It was also five years from the inception of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps, the unit that had evolved from those humble beginnings. What had begun with a diverse group of people, who had a common, binding interest, had ended up, through the efforts of all, as a going concern. There were very few left of that original group, most having been replaced by new generations. This, of course, was due to age restrictions. They had helped to mould a Corps that had a brief but glorious history in its field, establishing milestones on its way and creating traditions as it grew.



Other than Al Baggs original idea of winning the Canadian Championship in two years, there had been no detailed long range planning, certainly not any that anticipated five years on top. Rather, it had been handled year by year, facing challenges that arose and most often surmounting them.

### The Challenge

To reverse an old saying, there was no place to go but down and the challenge now was to try to maintain what had thus far been achieved. Two factors existed to make this goal difficult.

The first was the fact that there were more contests in Canada than ever before, due to growing interest and participation in the Drum Corps movement. This gave more units a chance to gain experience, thus improving their quality. The other obvious factor stemming from the first was that there were more Corps in the C.D.C.A.

Things could, and would, get tougher. A new, very promising Corps from Ottawa had made an appearance on the scene lately. They were the La Salle Cadets, or Cadets La Salle, and they had all the makings of a strong contender. You could never relax in this business. One of the bad things about being on top was that you hated to think about not being there, thus every move, every contest becomes vital. Because of this, it is a matter of personal opinion whether the Corps was as much fun to be in, at this stage. However, the drive for victory was the idea fostered, and I suppose that, at the time, no one would have had it any other way. The Optimists had been on the top of the heap locally for almost all of their first five years, so let's have a look and see how they managed for the next five.

Reflecting the success of 1962's show, not too many changes were contemplated for 1963's. It is always prudent to make some changes, as no presentation is beyond improvement, and fans tire of repetition. Some Corps kept certain numbers in their field repertoire for so long that they became familiar trademarks. Hawthorne Caballeros, with "España Cañi", and Blessed Sacrament, with "National Emblem" were two examples of this tactic. However, units that did this usually changed some, or all, of the rest of their show, over a period of time.



## Changes for 1963

For the Optimist Corps of 1963, planned changes included using the themes from the movies “Lawrence of Arabia” and “El Cid” to open the show. “Ain’t Necessarily So” and “Chattanooga Choo Choo”<sup>5</sup> for the standstill contest. A first choice for the opening number, “Barabbas” did not work out. This is where judgment plays a large part in planning. It is often not known if any changes made are for the better until the season opens and they are judged.

There were other changes in the offing for this year, not all of them concerned with the content and presentation of this years offering.

One thing that never changed was the annual proliferation of rumours that always swirled around the Corps. The most outlandish circulated this year, indeed, likely any year, was that the Optimists were going to appear on the Ed Sullivan Show. This was humorous as well as misleading. A mainstay of Sunday evening prime time CBS Television, this show often featured unusual acts. Drum Corps, however, was not usually, if ever, included. Besides, Drum Corps does not come across well under studio conditions. Even outside, where they belong, the visual effect lends itself well to television coverage, but the audio leaves something to be desired. It is the nature of the instruments. Finally, in a humorous vein, if Ed Sullivan had wanted Drum Corps on his show, he would have wanted the whole contest, not one Corps.

## Mr Baggs steps down

Definitely, the most drastic change came as a surprise to some, but it was inevitable. Al Baggs stepped down as Corps Director of the Optimists Drum Corps.

This sober, somewhat aloof, but always friendly man had made a profound impression on this Corps, and much of the class it displayed was of his stamp. He had visualized and overseen the original merger that led to the existence of the Corps in its present form. His vision of a future championship Corps had given this outfit a goal, without which it might not have progressed as it did. Selecting the right people, who became infused with his ideas, and his organizational ability, provided them the vehicle with which to proceed. He was the ideal manager, seldom sticking his nose into the mechanics of the Corps, rightfully leaving that to the instructors. The success of the enterprise, due to their competence, was a direct result of his selection of the right people in the first place.

Once it was on the road to success, his guidance with a firm hand kept things under control. He stood up in meetings of a political nature for his Corps and was respected, if not always liked, by many outside of the Optimist circle. One measure of that respect, within the Corps, was always evident during meetings. If an instructor or a member was addressing the Corps, there was often a low hum of conversation and much fidgeting going on. It could distract and embarrass the speaker. When that sombre, conservatively dressed figure walked in, complete

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<sup>5</sup>. Editor’s note: “I’m in the Mood For Love” and “It Ain’t Necessarily So” formed the original concert. At the Preview we got an overtime penalty and the Corps discovered that the show was too long. The easiest option was to replace concert. The Preview was at the end of May and we had less than a month to find a new concert, get it arranged and learn it before our next contest. Karl Bossert’s father arranged “Chattanooga Choo Choo”. The 1963 recording at Mundelein, IL was only our second public performance of “Chattanooga Choo Choo”.

silence immediately descended and all disturbances ceased. He stated his business quietly and effectively, nobody daring to disturb the scene. This phenomenon was always evident.

Yet, Al Baggs would sit in the restaurant with everybody and be part of the whole. It was just that you never doubted who was the boss. Even those of his colleagues who did not adhere to his ideas, often had to, as the modern phrase states, “shape up or ship out”.

Mr. Baggs had been a member of the Optimist Club since he helped engineer the takeover of the band, by the club, back in 1955. Now, with his resignation as Corps Director, he was made a lifelong member of Optimist International. Both he and his wife, Gladys, had devoted much time to the Corps, and, with other responsibilities, no doubt felt it was time to step aside. Whether this was due to an overload of work or to give somebody else a chance to run the Corps is not known. There was somebody in the wings.



1965: Mr Baggs (centre) with Chief Judges of A.L. & V.F.W.

The official reason given was that he wished to devote his time to the affairs of the Canadian Drum Corps Association, working for Corps in general. Along with this, he still remained as Chief Judge of the Canadian Association, where his administrative abilities were an asset as, indeed, they had been with the Corps. Hardly anything ever went wrong when Al Baggs was in charge of the Optimists. When another capable fellow by the name of Clare Reid stepped down as Contest Co-ordinator for the C.D.C.A., Al Baggs was given that position.

The prolonged discussion of this man does not even scratch the surface of his activities within the Optimist Corps, and Drum Corps in general. That alone could fill another book. Not without his faults, and who is, he to this day, 1998, is still vividly remembered by all who crossed his path within the Corps and otherwise. To say that the success of the Corps had much to do with him would be an understatement.

On January 28, 1963, at the Ice Follies, the Corps played for the last time with Al Baggs as Corps Director. It was a poignant moment, as all had come to respect and like this man. Not given to public displays of emotion, he went as he came, quietly, soberly and with dignity. His like would not be seen again.

Now, the problem arose, who was to replace this outstanding person.

## Our Staff

As often, the solution to this was somewhat surprising, if not entirely unexpected. Waiting in the wings, young, enthusiastic, intelligent, and by now knowledgeable enough, was none other than that paragon of diligence, Don Daber.

Yes, Don Daber now became the Corps Director of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. This Corps had been winning championships before he even knew what a Drum Corps was. When he did become aware of the activity, it was still quite a while before he ever heard of the Optimists. Now, he was the director. In the approximately three years that he had been connected, his accumulated knowledge and enthusiasm had made him a very good candidate for the position. It was also possible that nobody else wanted the job. It is easy to move into a successful enterprise, but not so easy to keep it that way.

However, the future cannot be foretold, and he willingly picked up the reins laid down by Al Baggs. It was a good job somebody did. His assumption of this task only added to a host of others for which he was responsible. As of now, Don Daber was:

- ▶ Corps Director of the Optimists
- ▶ Publicity Director of the Corps and the O.D.C.A. (Ontario Drum Corps Association)
- ▶ Director of the Booster Club
- ▶ Editor of Green Capsule Comments

The remainder of the staff stayed pretty much the same. Barry Bell and Lorne Ferrazzutti were still on horns and drums, respectively. Often, they both had capable assistance from talented, ambitious members. One of their assets was that they generally knew when and how to use it.

Ivor Bramley now became a full-time drill and guard instructor. The creator of much of that drill was still the undeniably creative Doug McPhail.

The Optimist Club, who formally confirmed these appointments, oversaw all of this. They would not neglect their investment.

As far as the actual marching unit was concerned, there were also alterations. Jim McConkey stayed on as Drum Major for another year, but now to be accompanied by one Glen Durish as an assistant D.M. Andy Henderson, a former rifleman, became the Guard Captain. The previous year, our riflemen had used genuine bayonets attached to their rifles, to give added flash to their performance. These were looked upon with some misgivings, as they were a real weapon and capable of inflicting injury. There had been incidents in which a flag was torn, and one bayonet had flown off a rifle and stuck in the ground at a contest. It could have stuck in a person. These bayonet/rifle combinations would be spun at high speed and flipped in the air to a height of six to eight feet. The people handling them were long-time veterans and good at what they did. In 1963, new people came in and a rash of near accidents that occurred when training led to the bayonets being removed. It was probably for the best.

Phil Hennings, who had been the first Drum Major the Corps ever had was now the Equipment Manager, a post he had held before.

One of the eight bass horn players the Corps had lost due to age, yes, eight out of twelve, was Richard Boehnke. He now became Treasurer/Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, and assistant to the executive. Staying around to help out when one's playing days were over, was a common thing in Drum Corps. Often it was an attempt to prolong one's days in the Corps, staving off the inevitable. It was also an indication of the attachments that developed.



Besides being Assistant Drum Major, Glen Durish was also Social Director of the Corps, which was becoming increasingly a world unto itself. A modern offshoot of this development is the tendency of Corps to play for themselves rather than for the crowd. By this I mean the choice of music. The average Drum Corps crowd is usually possessed of ordinary tastes, neither lowbrow nor highbrow, nor prone to one particular type of music. A policy of choosing a music program that only follows a theme pleasing to those playing it can result in negative reactions. An often heard comment is, "They are very good, but what are they playing?". It is not always a good idea to lose the common touch.

## Other News

The Toronto Senior Corps, the Jesters, mentioned before in connection with rumoured Optimist affiliation, were still largely instructed by Optimist people. Their Assistant Director was one Bill Jay, who went back through the Optimists to the Danforth Crusaders. He was also, along with Fred Johnson, very much responsible for the creation and operation of the Optimist Bantams. Jesters' bugles were taught by Barry Bell and Lorne Ferrazzutti taught their drums. Numerous members of this Corps were ex-Optimists. Their director,



1962: Jesters at Nationals

at this time, was one Vince Macciocchi, also a bugle judge, later to become Chief Judge of the Canadian Association. The situation that had existed between these two Corps, and led to some rancour due to the number of current of past Optimist people involved, was not entirely unavoidable. Nearly all Senior Corps in Canada actively solicited Junior Corps personnel, sometimes even before their junior playing days were over. This could take the form of verbal inducement, often accompanied by lavish treatment at parties or rehearsals. If one was accorded this treatment by one Corps and then went to another, the backlash was strong and sometime long-lasting; however, it should not have been, as no one was really obligated to anyone else.

Don Daber again outdid himself in this, his busiest year yet. He produced a Drum Corps Association Directory, the first publication of its kind yet issued. It listed all the Corps in Ontario, their location, directors, instructors, etc., and was very well received all around.

In line with uniform changes of the previous year, new black and white shakos were acquired, to add new lustre to the uniforms. Along with these were to be added, later, new white pearl drums to replace the gold sparkle ones that were currently in use. The white pearl of the drums was designed to match the pearl on the new shakos, creating a more uniform appearance throughout. Many people must have wondered at the use of gold drums in the past. They were the original drums of the Optimist Trumpet Band, gold being an Optimist Club colour. Although the gold did not really fit in with the green, black, and white of the uniform, they were used because that was all there was. The more appropriate colour of the new instruments

was somewhat offset by the fact that the old “distinctive” sound of the Optimist drum line was never duplicated. Often drum lines have their own distinctive sound, and that of the Optimist was altered forever when the original drums were discarded.

Green Capsule Comments, the Corps paper created by Don Daber, was now in the hands of others, who often changed. Its size varied, but it was now always more than double its original size. The content reflected its variety. There were columns at one time or another from Chicago Cavaliers, Garfield Cadets, Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights, and Scout House. Others also contributed, sometimes on a regular basis, sometimes once. Mostly, it was about the Optimists and their capers and was widely read inside the Corps and out. People love reading about themselves. One reason for its almost professional appearance was the fact that Don Daber was a commercial artist and indirectly connected by trade to such projects. His artwork and photography produced much in the way of publicity, not only for us but all Corps, through his connection with the C.D.C.A. It reached the point of familiarity where his work could be recognized without any signature or identification.

Other winter activities that served to keep members occupied were numerous and varied. Some of them entered an individual contest in Geneva, N.Y., and two people won first place; one in the French horns class and one in the soprano class. These were Ross Cation and Joe Gianna, respectively. Mr. Gianna was an original member, not only of the Optimists but also of the Danforth Crusaders.

On a more sombre plane, Drum Corps, Garfield Cadets especially, mourned the passing of Mr. Charlie Nabors. He had been the Chief Judge of the Eastern Judges Association, mentioned in Chapter 8 in regard to his forty-eight years in Drum Corps. Garfield had reason to remember him as he had played a big part in their victory at the 1957 Nationals.

We had run into him when he presided over the 1959 Preview of Champions contest in New Jersey. His comments had always been constructive and complimentary.

The Corps had managed to fill the gaps in the line and planned to use thirty horns this year. It might be thought that people would flock to join a top Corps, but such was not always the case. Often it was touch and go whether the required number of people would be available. There were still the Bantams to draw from, which was a good source, and sometimes people from other Corps would show up to join. Right now, this was sufficient since thirty horns, a slight increase from the usual twenty-seven, did not stretch resources too much. This year, though, one Corps, St. Josephs of Batavia, would field forty-two bugles, reflecting a trend that would lead to the very large horn lines of today. Modern bugle sections are now much bigger than our entire Corps, back in the “good old days”.

Chicago Cavaliers had, this year, come out with a Corps paper of their own, appropriately called “The Green Machine”. The Optimists had been tagged with the same label, but by others, not themselves. Because of this there was no rancour between the two Corps over this issue.

Among Senior Corps in Canada, the number of Corps that had severed their links with the armed forces reflected a growing trend. To-date, they included the Kitchener-Waterloo Flying Dutchmen, the Hamilton Viscounts, the Marching Ambassadors, the Jesters, and the Guelph Royallaires. Oddly enough, the one with the most military title, “The Niagara Militaires”, had never been a military unit.

As far as instructing other Corps outside of Optimists, Optimist Bantams, and the Jesters, some of our people travelled extensively to do this. Joe Gianna and Jim McConkey instructed two Corps that required this. One was the Hamilton Optimists, more colourfully known as “The Conqueror”, and the other was the Sarnia “Lionettes”, a girls Corps. The Girls Corps, a separate division in Canada, had elected to keep things that way rather than throw in with the overall Junior “A” class of Corps. This was not necessarily good, as some of them were very capable and would have made their presence felt. The days of totally mixed male and female Drum Corps was still a long way off.

There is a question that should be asked, and its answer leads to an interesting observation about the Optimists Drum Corps. What was done with all the trophies that had been won?

Most of them had ended up in someone’s closet, usually a member of the executive, but occasionally that of an

ordinary member. Sometimes, some were put on display when there was a party or dinner but they always disappeared afterward, usually back to where they had come from. Many years later, some were stored in a building where a fire broke out. Whether they were rescued or not, they vanished forever. This situation points to the fact that the Optimist Corps never had a permanent base of operation, a Corps “home”, where such things could have been stored. They were not unique in this respect by any means, such luxuries being beyond the means of many Corps to finance. The spirit never dropped because of this and might have even been enhanced. It certainly adds a sheen to their accomplishments. All practice facilities were obtained through the goodwill of interested parties, or the machinations of people connected with the Corps. If one facility became unavailable, it was never long before another was acquired. It would have been nice to have had a place to store all those trophies, there were a lot, and to have a sort of headquarters. Although some places, i.e. Jarvis Vocational School, were used for years, these locations were always tentative; therefore, the Corps led a transient existence, the members going where it went. The Corps spirit that existed was the glue that held it together.

Out at Oak Park School in East York, the Bantam Optimists, the feeder Corps, was still a flourishing enterprise. Still instructed by members of the Junior Corps itself, it was good enough to perform parades, shows, and concerts of its own. The younger lads in this band were kept busy with these affairs, often travelling out of town to perform their routines. Although several people were involved in its operation, and these often subject to change, the unit remained under the overall direction of Mr. Fred Johnson. Under his careful management, the original purpose of the band was maintained, and that was to produce talent for the Optimist Corps itself. He never attempted to promote its independence, which, had it come about, would have altered its original concept.



1962: Hamilton Optimists, The Conqueror, first performance in new uniforms



Springtime rolled around, and with its advent came the first shows, concerts, and other affairs. For those in Drum Corps, the milder days, budding trees, and chirping, cheerful birds, served only to waken the tingling sensation caused by the proximity of a new season. It was what had kept one going during the long, cold winter, when everything was worked out. Springtime heralded the completion of preparations for another turn at the merry-go-round that was the wonderful world of Drum Corps. It was a fact that people in Drum Corps were different in outlook from most others. Those who were in the Corps, never envied those whose pleasure lay in work or school, cottage or car, house or hotel. In fact, the Corps was, for many, an escape from these things, and the sometime mundane existence that they represented. Often, even during summer holidays, from work or school, people would not travel very far away, in order not to miss Corps practice.

It is appropriate here that we jump ahead a little in time, in order to deal with an issue that arose. It was Sept.–Oct., 1963, to be exact, and the subject was the 1962 Optimists. The vehicle of discussion was a periodical similar to our Green Capsule Comments, but with a different format. It was put out by De La Salle and called “The Corpsman”.



1962: Toronto Optimists Baritones (Rome, NY)

An article by a noted member of that Corps dealt with the fact that Canada had yet to produce a “great Corps”. It went on to say that small thinking led to mediocrity, but that our Corps, the 1962 version of the Toronto Optimists, had risen above this. Considering the source, this was high praise indeed. The article, well thought out and written, praised the 1962 Corps and its accomplishments, and then criticized the Optimists in general for subsequently not maintaining the same standards. In Canada, the Drum Corps infrastructure that existed then was not really conducive to the production and continuity of “great” Corps. As previously explained, it was the combination of a rare set of circumstances that made the 1962 Corps what it was. These conditions were not always readily apparent, and it was ever necessary to adapt to altered circumstances and bend with the breeze.

The Optimists of 1963, a willing, enthusiastic and Optimistic bunch, were ready to take the field, hoping to emulate the successes of 1962.

So let’s pack our bags, park the car, wish the others goodbye, and hit the road with the Optimists and see how they made out in 1963.

And away we go!

## Chapter 15: 1963 – A Good Corps, Again

The shows began early this year. On December 19th, the 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.



1957: Jolly Jesters at Roosevelt Stadium



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.

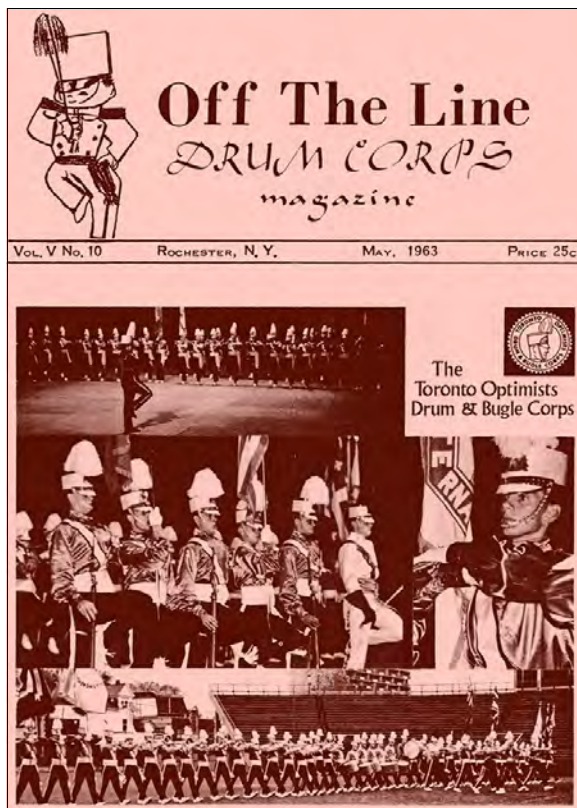
## Optimists Mini-Corps

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.



1963: Toronto Optimists mini-corps (Hull, PQ)

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.



1963: May Cover of “Off The Line”

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, N.Y., “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



1963: Toronto Optimists at the Ice Capades

York Skyliners. To appear in any show with them 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 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.



1963: Toronto Optimists (Preview of Champions)

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.



1963: Toronto Optimists Guard

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 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



1963: On the bus



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



1963: Toronto Optimists On The Line

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.

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 29<sup>th</sup>. On June 30<sup>th</sup> 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 this year, featuring these two Corps.



1963: Chicago Cavaliers and Optimists on retreat together (Mundelein, IL)



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.



1963: Toronto Optimists

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.

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.

Again, the following weekend, St. Josephs of Batavia, at Leroy, N.Y., 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, N.Y., 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



1963: Ronn “Skip” Prokop leads sing-along on bus

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, N.Y., 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.

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.



1963: Toronto Optimists Off The Line (Nationals Prelims, Waterloo)

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, N.Y., 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.

Mother Nature co-operated this time and the contest was held as planned. Blessed Sacrament 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.



1963: Toronto Optimists playing El Cid (Nationals prelims, Waterloo)

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 forgone 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.

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.

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.



1963: Toronto Optimists Full Corps Photo (Waterloo)



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.

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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.



1963: Toronto Optimists (Optimist International Convention, Toronto)



## Chapter 16: The Middle Years, Part 1 – 1964 to 1965

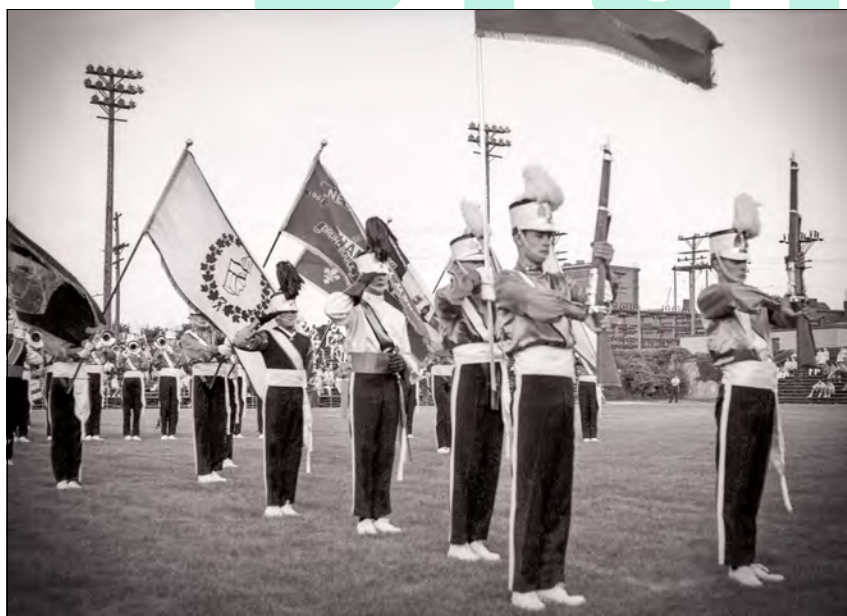
This period represented a cycle of change, not only for the Optimists but for the Drum Corps movement as a whole. A greater change than had possibly occurred during any previous equal length of time. New Corps, hitherto non-existent, were formed and made their presence felt, some drastically.

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.



1964: Toronto Optimists Colour Pres (Racine, WI)

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

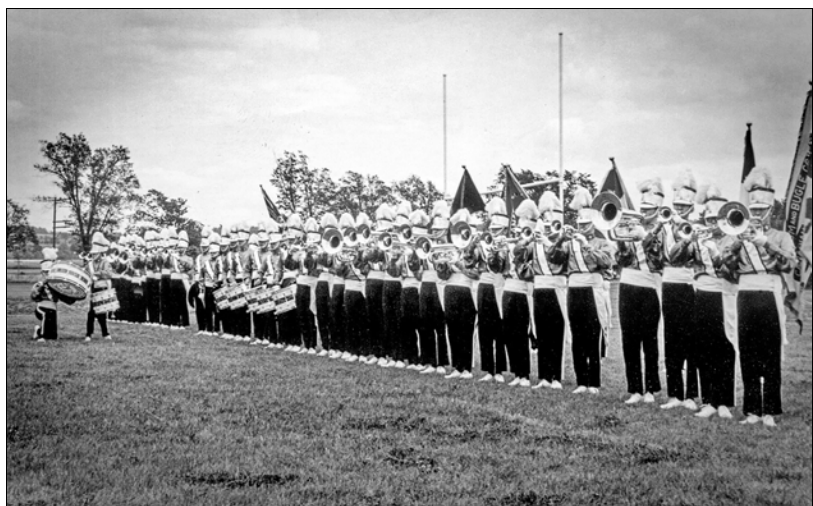
As of the month of November 1963, Al Baggs was still the Chief Judge of the Canadian Judges Association. After the ruckus at the 1961 Nationals, his durability in this position had to say something about his competence. On the other hand, the fact that he was no longer the Director of the Optimists may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



1964: Toronto Optimists on the Finish Line

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.

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”<sup>6</sup> 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.

## 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



1964: Toronto Optimists choir on the streets of Menominee, MI

of these, all covered by numerous rules, were: Behaviour, Rehearsals, Corps Jackets, Trips, Corps Policies, Drill, Music, Organization, Dues, Uniforms, etc., etc., etc.

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

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<sup>6</sup> Editor’s note: “As Long As He Needs Me” and “Jamaican Rumba” were played in Winter concerts but not used in the field show. “More” and “Let Me Entertain You” were added and “It’s Legitimate” became our concert exit.

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.



1964: Toronto Optimists in summer parade uniform (Sarnia)

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

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.

1964: Vern Johansson, Andy Henderson, Gene Chepswick & Don Mountford

## 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<sup>7</sup>. 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.



1964: Vern Johansson, Andy Henderson, Gene Chepswick & Don Mountford

<sup>7</sup>. *Editor's note: While this trip had been planned, the corps never went to the Quebec Winter Carnival in 1964.*

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.



1964: Toronto Optimists in Toronto Santa Claus parade

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<sup>8</sup>.

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.



1964: Larry Greenwood playing Mellophone

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<sup>8</sup>. Truman Crawford later joined the U.S. Marine Drum & Bugle Corps with whom he stayed until 1996.



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.



1964: Commanders in Hamilton

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<sup>9</sup>, 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.



1964: Toronto Optimists rehearsing (Racine, WI)

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.

<sup>9</sup>. The truth is the corps was not ready. Many members had aged out at the end of 1963. The Bantam Optimists joined the main corps so that there would be enough members to field the 1964 Toronto Optimists.



## 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!



1964: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation, Racine, WI

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.

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.

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.



1964: De La Salle (Yonge St, Toronto)

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 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”.



1964: Toronto Optimists concert formation (Menominee, MI)

### Back to the Midwest

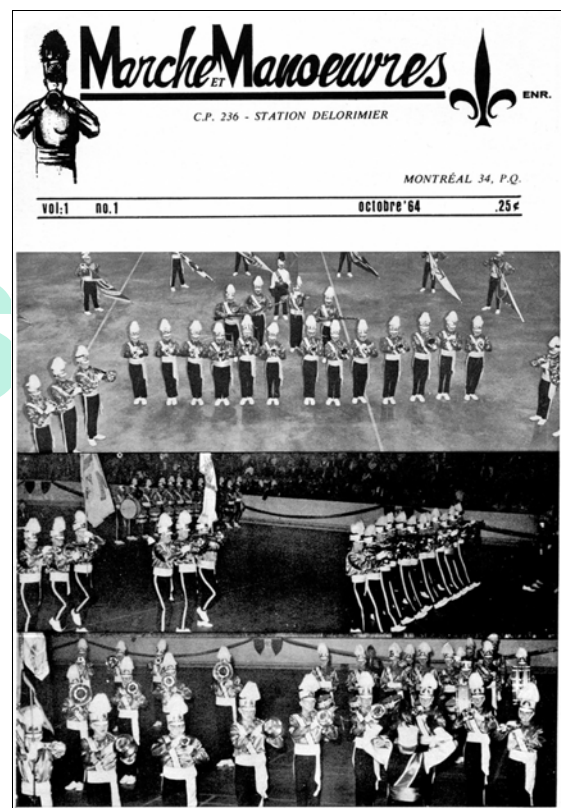
Now, it was back again to the field of broken dreams, Highland Park, Illinois deep in the Midwest.

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.



1964: Optimists on cover of Quebec Corps magazine



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.

## 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



1964: Toronto Optimists on retreat (Nationals)

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.



1964: Andy and the corps (Montreal)

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

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.



1965: Toronto Optimists Indoor Concert

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.

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 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.



1965: Truman Crawford, Bill Shepherd & Dave Watt

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, brilliant 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.



1965: Toronto Optimists Off The Line

### **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. 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.



1965: Toronto Optimists concert formation

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.

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 contra-bass, it made a good impression on this youthful group.



1965: De la Salle's Drum Quartet



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.

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.

## 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.



1965: Toronto Optimists (Mandy or Big Bad Bill)

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



1965: De La Salle's drumline

Cadets were showing up here and there, although far back. Even a reconstituted Grantham was back in the fray, and Scout House was seen 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”.



1965: GCC Article on Optimists' movie

## Other Contests

### Attica, NY

Although there was no Midwest tour scheduled this year<sup>10</sup>, 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



1965: Toronto Optimists at the Pow Wow

<sup>10</sup>. Editor's note: There had been a Midwest trip planned. Unfortunately it was cancelled too late for Optimists to book other contests. We had a contest on Aug 7<sup>th</sup> and the next one was the 28th. This layoff plus a layoff in July meant that the corps never reached its full potential.



points back, albeit in fourth place. Best Drum Major was won by Andy Henderson, accompanied by the young Vern Johansson<sup>11</sup>. 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.

### *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, they now attempted to repeat, coming within 1.7 of the Optimists.



1965: Toronto Optimists in parade (Shawinigan, PQ)

### **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.



1965: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Varsity Stadium)

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<sup>11</sup>. *This is not correct. Vern was not with Optimists in 1965. He spent the year with a rock band.*

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.



1965: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation (CNE)

## 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



1965: Toronto Optimists (Hamilton)

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 Mendocino.

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.



1965: Toronto Optimists march past Whaley-Royce who made their horns

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.

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.



1965: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation

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



## Chapter 17: The Middle Years, Part 2 – 1966 to 1967

The almost total success enjoyed by the Toronto Optimists up till now was, from their viewpoint, a wonderful situation. They would have been content to see it continue forever, which seemed not only possible but also probable at this stage of the game. All the effort, planning, and work necessary to maintain this ever growing string of success was enjoyed, even relished, by those involved. In a nutshell, the people in the Corps would rather be where they were than anywhere else.

To other Corps in Canada, the Optimists must have seemed like an invincible machine that just kept on going. This was how others had once seen Scout House. This is not always a healthy situation, in this or any field, because, if the Optimists were at a show, the only question was who would place second.

This was all about to change and, in the process, produce years of far more intense and exciting competition in Canada than had ever been seen before.

In saying all this, it must be said that Canadian drum corps, any of them, were still nowhere near the equal of the best US Corps. However, the excitement and tension created in Canada, as the various Corps began to close the gap, would rival that of any American Legion or V.F.W. contest, including their Nationals.

The changes previously mentioned came not in or two great leaps forward, but in small, significant changes and improvements. Over time, these would add up to create the scene that we now approach.

### 1966

Let's start at the beginning of the 1966 Toronto Optimists.

It began, as so often, with change. Grantham, who had called it quits, rose yet again. Merging with Dennis Morris "Majestics" they became the "Chessmen" of St. Catharines, Ontario. They were now the only Corps in the Niagara Peninsula, which had once been a hotbed of activity. More in line with current trends, De La Salle acquired new uniforms. They really hit the right note this time, with very smart cadet-style uniforms in their school colours of green, red, and white. These would improve their image considerably. That they were the correct choice is proven by the fact that it was never found necessary to change them again.



1966: Chessmen from St Catharines

Opposition from the musicians union was overcome when it was announced that the Optimists would, this year, appear at professional football games. Also, De La Salle, Royallaires, Commanders, and Scout House would do the same.

Bigger news than this for the Optimists was the fact that the Corps got its own headquarters building. Situated at 385 Keele St., in west-end Toronto, this was the first place, ever, that the Optimists could call home. It was not large enough to accommodate rehearsals, but its uses were to be very practical. One of them was to store trophies and equipment. It had been acquired by, who else, Don Daber.



1966: Dave Johns & Ron Cooper outside the Clubhouse at 385 Keele

A spring concert in April was followed by a “Social Night”. The 1965 movie, a buffet and dancing was enjoyed by all. This was, of course, a very good money making enterprise.

Commanders, now an established Senior Corps, still had people in their organization that had been, or still were, part of the Optimists. Some of these were: Fred Lombard, Andy Henderson, Lorne Ferrazzutti, Vic Krukliis, Al Morrison, and Terry McKolskey.

Al Baggs was, yet again, re-elected as Chief Judge of the judges’ chapter of the C.D.C.A. This, among other things, was a vote of confidence. Also, it was now possible that many people in this year’s Corps would not know who Al Baggs was, outside of this position.



1966: Toronto Optimists Full Corps photo (by the Shrine Temple)



In a glimpse of things to come, it was reported that Blessed Sacrament would field a five and five drum line this year. This was still a novelty, in 1966, but would lead to the large lines of today.

In an unusual move for this Corps, the Drum Major changed again. Vern Johansson, who had been the assistant in that position under Andy Henderson, replaced Dave Johns.



1966: Toronto Optimists (Shriners International)

There had been reports that the Corps was not up to par this year, based on winter concerts. This was confirmed on May 14th, in St. Catharines, when the Corps was seen to need much work, mostly on marching and maneuvering. It was a late date to be like this, but not too late to clean it up. Ivor Bramley was being missed. Future scores, however, would confirm the new instructors as good choices.

### **Optimists Beat Reigning U.S. National Champions at Shriners International**

The US debut this year occurred against a field drawn from New York, Delaware, and New Jersey. No results are available<sup>12</sup>. The following week, on June 15th, was the 2nd Annual Shriners' Contest. This year it was both a senior and junior contest. In the senior division Hawthorne Caballeros finished first. Less than three points from the top, and less than three years old, were the Commanders.

If that was a shock, the junior division was even more so. The Optimist Drum Corps won it! They defeated the Chicago Royal Airs who were the reigning US champions, having won the 1965 American Legion, CYO and VFWs. Only one month previous, Optimists had been noted as rough. Now, in the process of winning this show, they had set a comfortable margin over local rivals. De La Salle, with their new uniforms, had made a good showing.

Another standout at this show was the size of the crowd, over 22,000, eclipsing the previous record.



1965: Chicago Royal Airs

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<sup>12</sup>. Editor's note: The show was June 4th in Batavia and we came 4th, behind Magnificent Yankees, Blue Rock and Garfield.



Commanders were winning a lot this year, as were the Casper Troopers, on their climb to super-corpsdom. Oh, yes, the Optimists were winning too, including a six point spread over the now familiar La Salle Cadets. July was an exciting month, leading into an even more exciting August.

### **Contests in the U.S.**

July 22nd, New Haven Connecticut, a big show, with a small crowd, and the Corps placed fifth. They were five points down from first, which was a respectable showing. St. Lucy's won the show, in a field that contained Blessed Sacrament and Garfield.

The next test for the Optimists was at Middleport, N.Y., against a mixed field from Canada and the United States. Second to St. Josephs of Batavia by a point, the Optimists again kept a solid five-point lead over any Canadian Corps in attendance. So, as far as Canada was concerned, it seemed that they were in a comfortable position. Nationals were only about six weeks away and they had yet to lose or even come close to losing to a Canadian Corps,

August, though, marked the beginning of events that would lead to the shattering of any illusions. Kingston, N.Y., was an invitational with an evening and an afternoon show. The evening show was set, the victor in the afternoon show would be allowed to enter it. An amazing thing happened when the afternoon victor, the P.A.L. Bridgeport Cadets, almost won the night show. The afternoon Corps were not supposed to be that good! The Optimists came fourth in the evening. They were much improved but still five points behind St. Lucy's, although managing to edge Garfield by tenths. The rest of the season was to be played out in Canada.

As far as Canada and the Optimists were concerned the season had been a repeat of previous years.

### **Back to Canada**

Now, in the short time left for competition, there were to be some surprises. Things would again never be quite the same.

La Salle Cadets, still not yet great in Canada, had gone to the World Open Contest in the United States. They had won eighth place in the preliminaries and seventh in the finals. This result was a sign of things to come.



1966: Toronto Optimists (Kingston, NY)

On August 27th, at Seagram Stadium, it was to happen. The show was the Ontario Championship, held by the Optimists for as long as anyone could remember. They managed to retain it yet again, by the skin of their teeth.

Continuing their surge, La Salle Cadets placed second by a mere 0.55. By doing this, they rearranged a pattern that had been in place for years, Optimists first, De La Salle second. Now De La Salle was in third place by three points. All this was a major change in the junior scene. Both the Optimists and De La Salle had had a major shock, but neither would take it lying down. It was only three weeks until the Nationals and, for the first time in a while, there was speculation about the outcome.

### The 1966 Nationals

The championships were to be held on September 17th, in Montreal, Quebec. What happened that afternoon had not happened for over five years. The Optimists lost a contest in Canada, to a Canadian Corps. It had not happened since 1961 and before that in 1958. It was a shock!

It had happened at the preliminaries of the championship contest. Continuing their surge, La Salle Cadets took first with a score of 81.80 to the Optimists 81.50. De La Salle posted a 78.95 for third. Still in contention were York Lions and Sertomanaires, just tenths behind. There had never before been such a crush at the top of the junior division and it laid the basis for top-notch finals. Four Corps would be in it.



1966: Toronto Optimists on Retreat (Nationals, Montreal)



1966: Vern receives trophy from Chief Judge, Al Baggs

As for the Optimists, they had not faced this situation since 1961, and now, as then, there was not really time for any major changes. What, then, to do?

Although from year to year the people in the Corps changed, its character, spirit, and traditions had not. Had the Corps done the best possible show? Probably, as the Nationals were never taken lightly. It was not that the Optimists were getting worse but that other Corps were getting better.

Now was the time to draw on the much-touted spirit of this Corps, to reach down and do a bit more, a bit better. And so it was. The



Corps knew what had to be done and went out and did it. Observers described the show as beautiful, super and outstanding, as the Optimists captured their ninth consecutive Canadian title. A convincing 86.0 to La Salle's 83.65 dashed the hopes of the Ottawa based Corps.

In the senior division, the Diplomates nipped Commanders for the title by one tenth of a point. Ten points back, in fourth place, was a Corps from Montreal named Les Metropolitains.

The Optimists were still and, once again, the Canadian champions. They had been challenged and had overcome their challenges. The major difference between now and the past was that, from now on, the challenges would increase, not fade. This result also set the agenda for the coming year – to win number ten and make it ten in a row. This, if it could be done, would surpass any record held by an American Corps.



1966: Toronto Optimists at pre-season camp

### C.D.C.A.

Around this time, something involving two solid ex-Optimists occurred. A dispute arose between the Ontario Chapter of the C.D.C.A. and the Judges Chapter. This had led to the suspension of

Al Baggs and the members of the Judges Advisory Board from the Judges Association. The dispute concerned by-laws passed by the C.D.C.A. not being implemented by the judges in the time allotted. It had no reflection on the abilities or qualifications of the judges.

Bernie Beer was the Chairman of the Ontario Chapter of the C.D.C.A., the body responsible for the suspensions. Al Baggs and Bernie Beer had both, at one time, been with the Optimists. There had been friction. Al Baggs was at that time the Corps Director and, therefore, the boss. Now, in a different fashion, Bernie Beer was the boss. It would be easy to read personal



1966: Toronto Optimists Drum Major, Vern Johansson



animosity into this, but that is unlikely. These were sensible men who no doubt had seen such situations before and resolved them. Mr. Beer himself stated publicly that the suspensions were only due to non-compliance with the by-laws passed by the C.D.C.A. It was, after all, the ruling body.

Mr. Ian Beacock was appointed acting Chief Judge of the Ontario Chapter, to maintain continuity. Mr. Baggs was named to a committee to advise on rules and by-laws that would attempt to prevent similar situations in the future. This was the idea of Mr. Beacock. So, something constructive did come from the affair, all of which was endorsed by the National Board of Directors of the C.D.C.A. Al Baggs, though, would never again be Chief Judge.

At the C.D.C.A. convention in Ottawa this year, the guest speaker was the Hon. Paul Martin, Canadian Minister of External Affairs, and the father of Canada's current Minister of Finance. Drum Corps kept good company.

### **Optimists Corps Banquet**

For the Optimists, the fifth annual banquet was held, again at the Royal York Hotel. They had all, so far, been victory banquets – a time to lighten up, sit back, savour the year just past, and hand out all awards and decorations.

Mr. Gord Robinson, from the Shriners, acted as emcee for this affair. He was to become a permanent part of the Optimist folklore. He introduced the guest speaker, Lord Athol Layton, himself, Imperial Potentate of the Shrine, The Boss.

Five-year rings were given to two members, Mike Thys and Joe Palanica, and then the Corps Director spoke. He reminded the Corps of its mistakes of 1966 and how to correct them for the coming Year. Barry Bell, the Music Director, then took the stand. This remarkable, self-effacing man presented each member of the bugle line with a membership certificate. A similar ritual took place for the drums, by Lorne Ferrazzutti and Ron Kaiser, and for the guard by Jack Roberts. This sort of thing had been customary for some years now and was one more of the growing number of traditions to be observed. Rookies got pins for completing their first year, and the “Rookie of the Year” was introduced. This year it was John “Scotty” McDonald. He was a snare drummer, originally from the York Lions Drum Corps. The “Rookie” business was to expand in the future, becoming almost akin to colleges on military academies.



Ron Kaiser and Lorne Ferrazzutti (1965)

Yet another tradition was created with the first “Corpsman of the Year” award. It was given to George Wright, section sergeant of the baritone horns. In later years he was to play a much

larger note in Corps affairs, but in less happier circumstances. This award was unique because it was decided by a vote of the Corps members themselves. Vern Johansson got a Drum Major award. He had been most successful, even earning praise from outside Optimist circles.

Not over yet, the “21” year mugs were presented to Joe Palanica, Orest Burak, Bill MacMillan, Ron Kaiser, Bob Christie, and Bill Fallows. These poor unfortunates were now overage and most would have to leave the Corps.

Finally, things came to a close with the Corps song, colour slides, and an 8mm film of the Nationals preliminaries, the one they had lost. As the Corps got older, these affairs became more complex, a reflection of its success.

### Other news

Elsewhere, Les Metropolitains, of Montreal, a Senior Corps, announced that they would become a Junior Corps in 1967.

Actually, the banquet signalled more than the end of a year. It also marked the beginning of the next, as activity was virtually ceaseless in this business. Santa Claus parades were done and it was learned that the 1967 Nationals would be held in Ottawa, Canada’s capital and the home of the La Salle Cadets. During the coming year, things were to become even more complex as the Optimists strove to maintain their position. The field of Canadian Junior Corps was becoming more crowded and, more importantly, much more competitive. Nothing could be taken for granted any more, and old patterns had been disrupted forever.

Filling another gap in their armament, De La Salle decided to allow people into the Drum Corps who did not attend the school. This had to have been a hindrance to their development, even if minor. The Optimists had never had such a restriction, anybody being allowed to join if they had proper releases. By doing this, De La Salle had opened a door that was to contribute to the exciting events that lay in the future.



1966: De La Salle

A less fortunate event, but one from which the Optimists were to benefit, was the disbanding of the York Lions Drum Corps. They had been one of the finalists at last year’s Nationals. From the rubble of this fine Corps, the Optimists acquired the services of one Cliff Billington, who was to prove an asset.

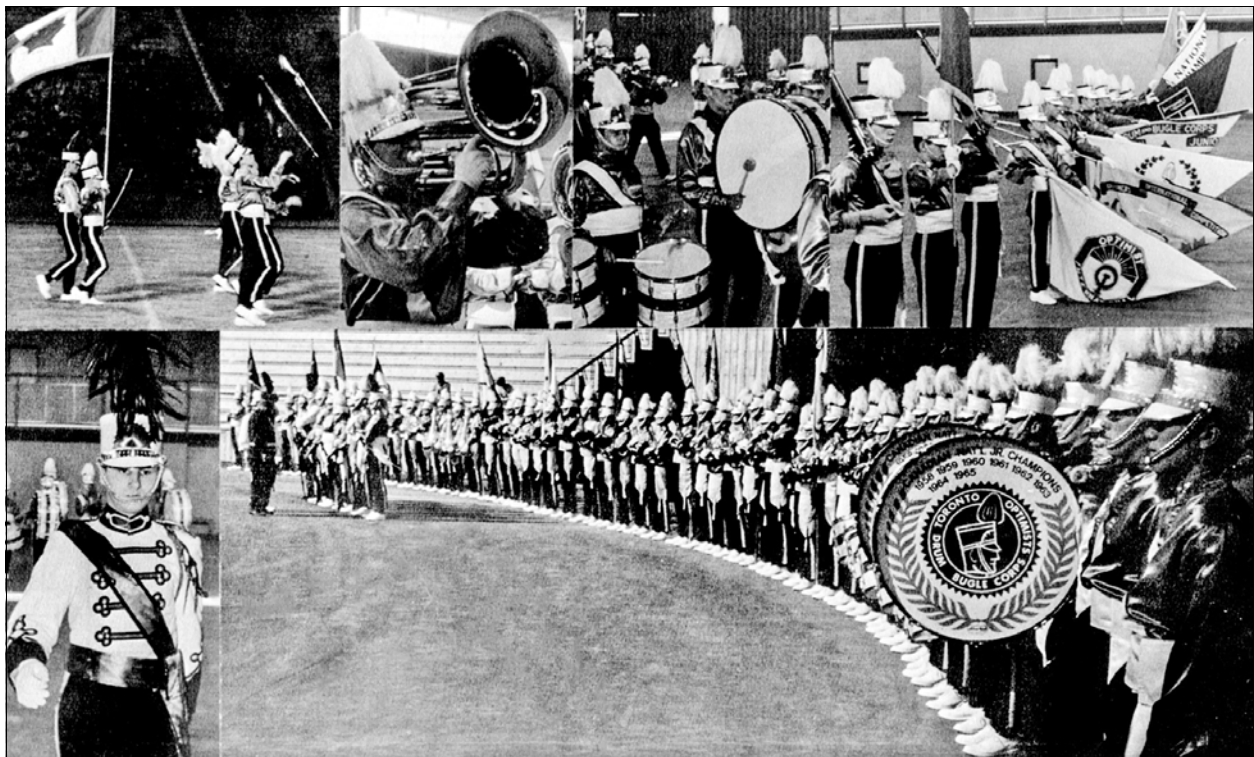
Lord Athol Layton announced the line-up for this year’s Shrine Contest, and it was to be a top-notch affair. Featuring the Chicago Cavaliers, Boston Crusaders, Garfield Cadets, and Racine Kitties from the USA, it was now to become an all-junior show. From Canada, the top three would be the Optimists, La Salle Cadets, and De La Salle. This would provide a good

international competition, as well as a preview of the Canadian scene. Here, it should be noted, a lot of Corps had come and gone since 1958, but two that were still around were the Optimists and De La Salle. La Salle Cadets were a relative newcomer, though now firmly part of the act, and had done well during their short existence as a Drum Corps. Similar to the Danforth Crusaders, one of the founding Corps of the Optimists, they had been part of the Army Cadet Corps affiliated with a school. Like Danforth, they broke with the cadets to become a Drum Corps.

Mr. Maurice Legault, who would become a legendary figure in Canadian Drum Corps, led their staff. During their third year, they blossomed, almost winning the Ontario and Canadian Championships. From now on they would remain a major factor for a long time.

Mr. Baggs, suspended earlier as a judge, now saw fit to resign, as a result of the dispute that occurred in 1966. Others went with him, so it was not really a personal thing. Most of the current members of the Optimists were likely not aware of all this, unless they were well up on all aspects of Canadian Drum Corps. What is most important, of course, is that there are contests with judges to judge them. All were wished well and afforded recognition for all that they had done.

Now, Mr. Ian Beacock became real Chief Judge, rather than acting in that position, and any lingering suspensions were lifted. Thus vanished the remains of a messy affair, the likes of which are sometimes inevitable.



1966: Montage



## 1967

The first Ontario Individuals were held on February 4, 1967, and the Optimists did quite well with six firsts, four on bugles and the others on drums. Possibly, a good showing was to be expected from the top local Corps, although not sweeping the field showed they held supremacy only on the field, as a unit.

The field show was shaping up nicely, at an early date. This was a good thing because there were more contests lined up this year than ever before in the history of the Corps. This was one factor that made it seem less of a hobby, leaning more toward a way of life. These schedules bore little resemblance to those of the early days, and it was either go along with it or fade away. In keeping with current trends, the Corps, as planned, was to be the largest one fielded yet with forty-two horns<sup>13</sup>, five tenors and four snare drums, with bass, rudimental bass drums, and two cymbals. The guard would field sixteen members. As noted before, the new numbers and instrumentation, all over, were changing the face of Drum Corps.



1967: Toronto Optimists Promo photo

There were other changes taking place this year. As in other fields, so in Drum Corps, where, it seems, change itself is the only constant.

### Over the Winter

The Optimists revealed their new off the line number, “Born Free”, from the movie of the same name, at a concert in Stoney Creek, Ontario. On the basis of this show, they were again predicted to be the top Corps in 1967, despite the fact that the competition was expected to be the toughest in years. The Colour Guard was featured on the cover of Drum Corps International Magazine, no relation to the present D.C.I. organization.

On March 18, the Optimist Club hosted the first annual Colour Guard Championship won by the Aquinas guard of New York State, the Optimist guard placed sixth. Al Baggs was a judge at this affair, as he was still a member of the New York All-American Judges Chapter. In a move toward uniformity, the Canadian Judges Association adopted American Legion score sheets.

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<sup>13</sup>. In the end we only fielded 37 horns with 3 snare and 4 tenor. While smaller than most of our competitors (often 42-50 horns) it was the largest horn line that Optimists had ever fielded.

At another guard contest in Rochester, N.Y., the Optimists guard was again in sixth place, but only 3.7 points from first. These were the first Colour Guard shows that the Optimists had ever entered, and they were not experienced. Not a bad showing for beginners.

In a beneficial move, De La Salle had acquired the services of Al Morrison as a horn instructor and Vince Bruni on drill. Al Morrison had been a soloist, arranger and instructor for the Optimists and had a similar function in Commanders. Vince Bruni, of course, was one of the top drill men anywhere.

For all the good reports about this year's Optimists, one of those amazing things that can happen from time to time happened on February 25th. At the Rochester, N.Y. "Sound Off" contest, the Optimists placed second. What made this unusual was that it was to a Canadian Corps. This was big news, and Les Metropolitains, of Montreal, Quebec, did it by six tenths of a point. As mentioned before, they were a Senior Corps.



1967: Toronto Optimists at practise

In an effort to build a better Senior Corps for 1968, they became a Junior corps for this year. No matter, they were junior now and had beaten the Optimists, only the third Canadian Corps to do this in eight years. They were, of course, immediately expected to become this year's new Canadian Champions, but that contest was still over six months away.

Vern Johansson won the trophy as best Drum Major, being now a smooth old pro. He was, in fact, to get raves all year.

Regardless of the success of Les Metropolitains, the La Salle Cadets were nominated as the fastest rising star on the Canadian scene. They had come a long way and were not finished yet. Canada now had four Corps capable of contending for first place, with others not too far behind. This made for a far more exciting, and tense atmosphere.

The march of events continued. In February. One of the categories won by the Optimists at the individuals had been that of bugle quartet. That was the Provincial Contest, and in March, at the National Contest, they won it again. They were now the best in the country.



1967: Corps members on the bus

During March, a new association was formed called "A Junior C"

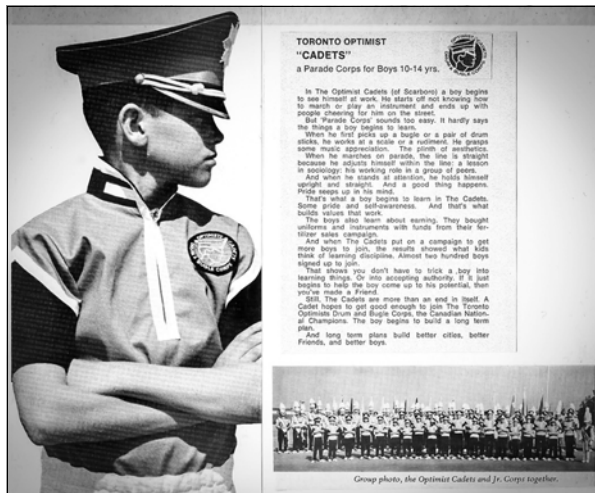
which stood for Associated Junior Corps. It consisted of three Canadian and three New York State Junior Corps. These were the Optimists, La Salle Cadets and Chessmen, from Canada, plus the Geneva Appleknockers, Magnificent Yankees of Utica and St. Josephs of Batavia from New York State. Cliff Billington, who had come from the York Lions to the Optimists, was now the Corps Business Manager. He was also appointed National Publicity Chairman of the C.D.C.A., by the directors of that organization.

All this, plus the number of Senior and Junior Corps now in Canada, points up the fact that we were now in what was likely the most concentrated period of Drum Corps activity ever in Canada. Add to this the current and future contests that were lined up and it becomes apparent that Canada was a major player in the Drum Corps world, certainly more so than in the past. The Drum Corps movement in Canada could, and would, claim many first, and bests.

Firsts for the Optimists in particular were: first look for an equipment truck in 1967, first added contras to the horn line in 1965, first to ever carry euphoniums on an M&M field in North America. Another, Green Capsule Comments, first published in 1960, and was now bigger and stronger than ever. It had been the first real, regular Corps publication of a specific Corps. It was also widely regarded as the best of its kind around. It was started by Don Daber and maintained by him and his ever-changing staff. He was still Director of the Optimists and his influence was paramount.

### Optimist Cadets, the Tierneys and the Knights of Columbus

Entering the scene this year, were two men who were to exert much influence on this Corps.



Optimists Cadets promo

These were Al and Greg Tierney, brothers. The Optimists, this season, realized that unless people could be recruited and trained, the Corps could run into difficulty in the future. The original "Peanut Squad" had, either through negligence or lack of interest or necessity, been allowed to lapse<sup>14</sup>. Now, it was decided that a feeder Corps was, again, needed and things were 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.

Scarborough Knights of Columbus were looking for another youth activity, with baseball and hockey already well covered in the community. Like everyone, they were short of money but did possess a practice facility.

Optimists Drum Corps + Property Owner – \$ = Cadet Corps

<sup>14</sup>. Optimists lost a great many horns at the end of 1963. In order to field the 1964 corps the Bantams Optimists were shut down and the members joined the Toronto Optimists.



A Grand Knight attended an Optimists practice and was impressed by the discipline. There was a meeting of the executive of the Optimists and the Knights of Columbus then, later, with the general membership of the Knights of Columbus. Slides of the Optimists and the 1965 movie were shown and all of the K of C men were in favour of this promotion. They could not contribute financially, but provided their clubhouse for practices and agreed to assist with the recruiting drive. On September 1st, a final decision was taken to accept this offer, and a program was developed to culminate in a recruiting day on Sept. 17th.

Handbills were distributed, much of the work being done, by the Knights as the Optimists, at this time of year, were busy with the Nationals. On the 17th, the Corps paraded from the K. of C. to a church and, there, on the steps, played to a crowd of a thousand. Slides were again shown and short speeches 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. First rehearsal was set for September 23.

During that week a small article in the Toronto Star brought a sudden increase in phone calls, to all concerned. Suddenly, the recruiting drive became not only a success but in danger of being swamped. At the first rehearsal, the original forty-seven 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" with Mr. Al Tierney as Director and Mr. Greg Tierney as Manager. It would be 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.

### More on the Optimists

Back to the early months of 1967, a reflection of the continuing cold war between the Optimists and De La Salle was a report that the word "Optimist" was not to be used at De La Salle College. Whether true or not, this was, at the time, humorous, as relations between the two Corps had been good for some time. In the future, however, things would reach new lows. Right now, it was a normal rivalry caused by a ten-year side-by-side existence of two competing units. Also, This pattern had been interrupted by the rise of La Salle Cadets, who had usurped the position of De La Salle and threatened the Optimists.

What fun and games! And we must not forget the new junior, Les Metropolitains.

Let's get back to the Optimist Corps itself, which is what this



1967: Rehearsing at the "Shell" Tower (probably Bulova Tower then)

book is supposed to be about. The Chief Bugle Instructor was still Barry Bell. Lorne Ferrazzutti was still the Drum Instructor, and his chief assistant was Ron Kaiser, who had done this job for the previous two years while still drumming in the line. A superb drummer, he would have marched in the Corps until he was ninety if he could have. He had also done some of the music writing, the first to do this since Ronn Prokop in 1962. The 1962 drum line of Ronn Prokop, Ron Kaiser, and Vic Krukliis, along with the Corps, was still talked about and would be, for a long time. They had put in many hours of extra rehearsal and had been noted among the best in North America. They were now being challenged by other Corps in Canada, hungry for success, realizing that what one Corps can do so can another. The pressure to stay on top never let up.



1967: Siblings in the corps

Before we get into the season proper, it is interesting to take note of a report that appeared around this time. It stated that the Optimists had lost only four contests in Canada in nine years. This was very complimentary but not accurate. This dates back to the end of 1958.

The four were listed as:

- 1961 CNE. . . . . To De La Salle
- 1961 Nationals Prelims . . . . . To De La Salle
- 1961 St. Catharines . . . . . To De La Salle
- 1962 Varsity Stadium, Toronto . . . . . To Garfield

These were all true, what was missing was:

- 1964 East York Stadium. . . . . To St. Joseph's
- 1965 Sarnia. . . . . To Norwood Park Imperials
- 1966 Montreal, National Prelims. . . . . To La Salle Cadets

This shows that the Optimists had, in fact, lost seven, not four, contests in Canada in nine years. This, most likely, was due to someone's faulty memory, but it does not obscure the fact this was still a phenomenal achievement.

Now, after the subsidiary activities of winter and spring, the Corps arrived at the beginning of yet another season of competition. The days of preparation, change, and whatever else are now past. All depends on that thirteen minutes on the field. For the Optimists, this year had more significance in that it could bring a tenth National Championship. This, if achieved, would surpass any record, anywhere, in Drum Corps. This, of course, was to be more difficult due to other Corps, now much improved, who were just as eager to win titles. Mostly, this meant De La Salle and the La Salle Cadets, both genuine contenders. Others were not far behind and anything could happen this year. If the Optimists, in any one year, had not improved they would have gone down fast.

### Summer of '67

So, with this in mind, let's take a trip back to June 1967 and see just what did happen over the succeeding months.

They got off on the right foot at the first "A Junior C" Contest in Batavia, New York. Winning with a score of 78.95, good for an early show, they topped the Magnificent Yankees, if only by seven tenths. High general effect, colour guard trophies, and a standing ovation were theirs. An additional plus was the fact that this was the first time in three years that the Optimists had won in New York State. This was a good morale builder for their next outing, only one week later. It was none other than the 3rd Annual Shrine Contest, one of the biggest of the season. This year it was an all junior event and would remain so.

The contest, to a small degree, did contain some surprises. A predictable outcome was the victory of the Boston Crusaders, who were now in the realm of "super" corpsdom. There was some disagreement though, with their four-point spread over the Chicago Cavaliers. Chicago was always good, seldom losing by such a margin.



1967: Toronto Optimists (Sarnia)

Surprise number one was the third place finish of the Optimists. Not so much the third place, this was a good Corps, but a score that put them only 2.5 behind the Cavaliers. This also meant that they were only 6.5 behind Boston, but, more importantly, seven points up on their closest Canadian rival, La Salle Cadets, with De La Salle close behind. All of the Canadian entries were well received. La Salle was classed as outstanding, and De La Salle as having fielded the finest Corps in their history. The Optimists, it was said, were exactly what the fans wanted. More!



With this result, the Optimists again appeared to be in a comfortable position in Canada for another successful year. However, the other Corps would not have received such compliments had they not deserved them. Nothing could be taken for granted.

At first, though, it seemed otherwise. A week later, the Corps again topped their two main local rivals by seven points. These two were less than two points apart, but seven behind the Optimists. That is, until Port Hope, only one week later.

Although the Optimists still took first with 83.91, second was La Salle with 82.31, then De La Salle with 79.15. They had gone from a seven point deficit to just over a point and a half in two weeks. What an unpredictable business this was.



1967: Garfield Cadets (Shriners International)

Al Tierney, becoming more involved, was now writing an Optimist column in Drum Corps International magazine. In a note from the past, it was learned that St. Patrick's, the host Corps of the Optimists first visit to the New Jersey "Preview of Champions", had disbanded. This was mainly due to the fact that their moderator, Father Gaffney, was being transferred to San Francisco. Father Gaffney was well remembered in the Optimist Corps and still is among the alumnae. Never forgotten was his unfailing help and generosity when it was needed.

When Don Mountford, a well-known figure in Canada, resigned as Canadian Editor of Drum Corps News, a good magazine, Al Tierney picked up the reins. Al's name was appearing more and more in Drum Corps circles. The already familiar, Bernie Beer, was announced as the new Corps Coordinator for De La Salle. Although he had begun, and learned, the Corps business with the Optimists, Bern would help out anybody if he could. He would prove to be a valuable acquisition. Along with him, Del also got Dave Parker to help out Vince Bruni on drill. This



1967: Toronto Optimists in summer parade uniforms

Corps was really looking for success, no doubt having been stung by losses to the newcomer, La Salle Cadets. Indeed, they were humiliated even further in Rochester on July 15, being edged by the "Chessmen" of St. Catharines. This was at the prelims of the New York – Canadian Championships. It did not happen again, but must have been a low point for them. They would not stay there.

One of the major factors helping to keep the Optimists sharp was entry into top-notch contests in the United States. One of these was the 20th Annual Garfield Invitational Championship. On their second trip to Garfield this year, the Optimists ran into some of the best. Among them, St. Lucy's, Blessed Sacrament, St. Kevin's, Muchachos, Buccaneers, Kingsmen.

The Optimists gained a fifth place, just four points out of first. This was a far cry from earlier years in New Jersey, when the spread between first and the Optimists was seldom less than eight or nine points.

Back in Canada, things were also on the move. Les Metropolitains, of Montreal, who had beaten the Optimists in Rochester, began to appear at field shows in Ontario. Here, they were an unknown quantity and had to be regarded as a dark horse contender. A difference was that the Rochester contest was a standstill affair. On the field, things were not going as well for them, but well enough that they were still in contention.

Lindsay, Ontario, on July 22, saw the La Salle Cadets with 82.06, De La Salle with 80.50, and Les Metropolitains with 79.36.

A week later, De La Salle upset La Salle Cadets and then took off for the Dream Contest. Other Canadian Corps were now getting American exposure. This, in turn, helped them in their pursuit of the Optimists. Things were getting interesting.

Next, in the U.S., for the Optimists, was the first "A Junior C" Championships. The Corps really wanted this one and came off in high gear, but it was not to be. The New York State powerhouse, St. Joseph's of Batavia won it, Magnificent Yankees were second with the Optimists, four points back, in third place. Only weeks earlier they had been closer than that to the Chicago Cavaliers.



1967: Toronto Optimists (Sarnia)



1967: Marty, Gord and Vince

East York Stadium saw them back in Canada, against the Chessmen of St. Catharines, and the Michael Power Knights, who were debuting in the Junior "A" Division. They scored well as did the Chessmen who were greatly improved. The Optimists, though technically good, were criticized because they seemed to lack their customary snap and enthusiasm.



After that interlude, it was off to New York City and Columbia University, for a first class contest. The Optimists put up a good show but still placed fifth in a field of five, seven points behind the winners Blessed Sacrament. At this time of year, August 18, this was a little unusual for this Corps; but as they always had, and always would, the Corps took its lumps, coming home a little wiser for the experience. Indeed, the very next day, in Kingston, New York, they again placed fifth, but this time 5.5 behind “Sac” and 1.5 behind St. Joseph’s. Still, at this time, the Canadian Champions were comparing well with their local rivals.

At the New Jersey Dream Contest, De La Salle and La Salle Cadets finished fourth and fifth, respectively, ten and twelve points out of first place. This is exactly what the Optimists had encountered seven or eight years before.

## THE LA SALLE CADETS, OTTAWA



**CADETS LASALLE** — The LaSalle Cadets are more than happy to participate, for the first time, at The Shriners' International . . . one of the truly great Canadian Drum Corps Contests.

Founded in 1963, The Cadets are affiliated with The LaSalle Academy, a Catholic High School in Canada's National Capital under the direction of The Christian Brothers.

In three short years The LaSalle Cadets have produced one of Canada's top bugle lines, a Champion Colour Guard and an award-winning Drum Major. All the members of the Corps are French-Canadian and bilingual, a true representative of Canada's culture and talent.

The Cadets' repertoire is: A City of Brass; Johnny One Note; How The West Was Won; Brazil; Funiculi, Funicula and Softly As I Leave You..



1967: La Salle Cadets advertise the Nationals in the Shriners program



These events were leading, of course, to the one show that, this year, was to be like no other Nationals Canada had ever seen. The Optimists had not yet lost a field show to a Canadian Corps, this year. Two rivals, however, were breathing down their neck. Pressure was building to what promised to be an explosive climax. One event paving the way toward this climax was the Ontario Provincial Championship, August 26, at Seagram Stadium, Waterloo. It was considered by all to be a preview of the Canadian Championships, which were only two weeks away.

Before we look and see what happened at this contest, some explanation of events beforehand is in order. La Salle Cadets had slowly closed the gap on the Optimists during the season, leaving De La Salle in third place. Optimists had scored a convincing victory over both Corps at the Shrine Contest, neither one coming within seven points. It was stated at the time that the Optimists should have no trouble winning the Nationals for the tenth year. That was then! This is now!

There had been a contest in Sarnia and the Optimists had won this one, as they had for the previous three years. A wide-open drill that made full use of the field, and an enthusiastic crowd, gave them a score of 83.10. In second, still under the direction of their resident genius, Maurice Legault, were the La Salle Cadets. Their score was 82.58, barely half a point difference. Adding spice to this situation was that, for the last two years, La Salle had defeated De La Salle frequently. This year, before and at the Dream Contest, De La Salle had picked up and defeated La Salle twice. Del had also beaten Les Metropolitains, as had La Salle, but the Metropolitains had defeated the Optimists. So now, at this late date, anything could happen. These four units were all on a collision course that would end at the 1967 Nationals. The race for the Junior Championship had tightened up and all eyes were now on the Provincial Championship. Of course, this was for Ontario so Les Metropolitains, being from Quebec, would not be at this one.

The Optimists, aware of all the factors, knew that just an ordinary show would not be good enough this time out. How much interest had been stirred by now was indicated by the size of the crowd. Ten thousand came out. Many of them possibly hoping to see the Optimists dethroned.

Rising to the occasion, the Toronto Optimists put on their best show of the year. Described as “sparkling” it earned them another Provincial title, winning with almost two and a half points over the Cadets, and more than four over De La Salle, who were now back in third place. For now, at least, the future looked a little more secure for the Optimists.

The Nationals were two weeks away and there was some heavy activity between now and then.

On August 29 was the 4th Annual C.Y.O. Invitational Championship. The Optimists had been at this one a few times before, because they were the



1967: Toronto Optimists Guard in summer uniforms with rifles in regular uniform

Canadian Champions, a title that opened a lot of doors. Because no results are readily available for this one, we shall have to pass on comment<sup>15</sup>. It is enough to say that the line-up included fourteen top Junior Corps. This was just fine as a warm-up for the coming Nationals. Now, only four days later, the next major event took place. The North American Invitational Championship was held at home in Toronto. This was a top-notch junior contest featuring both American and Canadian Corps. The results were to complicate, even further, an already complicated situation.

Let's have a look at placings and scores.

Boston Crusaders.....	87.200
Chicago Cavaliers.....	85.333
St. Joseph's.....	83.216
Optimists.....	83.000
La Salle Cadets.....	77.083
De La Salle.....	75.100
Muchachos.....	73.933



1967: Boston Crusaders

This scorecard shows some amazing things, in light of recent events. First, it was no surprise that Boston won. They had been the talk of the Drum Corps World and had reached "Super Corpsdom". Nor was it any surprise that Chicago was in second place, though they were not often in that position. St. Joseph's, backing up rumours of greatness, were only two points out of second.

Two tenths behind St. Joseph's were our Optimists, two points from Chicago and just over four points from Boston. The Canadian Champions received a standing ovation from the crowd. It had been one of their aims, at this show, to close the gap between them and Boston, and they had certainly done that. By doing this, they had generated the biggest surprise of the day and opened up, again, a six-point spread from their closest Canadian rivals, La Salle Cadets.

Not only had they maintained the winning streak over the Canadian Corps, but had opened it up to almost what it had been at the start of the season. Yet, only a week before, this gap had only been two and a half points, and earlier, at Sarnia, only half a point. To say that this business is unpredictable is an understatement.



1967: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation (CNE)

<sup>15</sup>. Editor's note: 1967 was the first year Optimists competed in the CYO Nationals. We finished in 11th place with 74.80, 13.18 behind Boston. The top corps were: Boston Crusaders, 88.080; Cavaliers, 84.830; Blessed Sacrament, 84.760; Garfield Cadets, 81.630. The week after CYOs we were only 4.2 behind Boston and 2.3 behind Cavaliers.

Now it was time for the Nationals. Unusually, this was the final event of any importance this year. Anything after this would be insignificant compared to the drama about to unfurl.

### **The 1967 Canadian National Junior Championship**

For the Optimists this was even more important than usual. If they could win this one, it would be the tenth consecutive National title. It was also the tenth anniversary of the winning of their first National title, in 1958. About the only Corps remaining from those days was De La Salle. Scout House was still around but were not competing. Finally, of course, the number ten has certain significance in our culture, as does seven, twelve, or thirteen. Ten is a sort of milestone used to gauge many things. If this was a milestone, of sorts, another was that this would be the most hotly contested Junior Championship in Canadian Drum Corps history. There were four genuine contenders for first place.



1967: Toronto Optimists in a company front

It had been decided, long before, that this year's Nationals would be held in Ottawa, Ontario. This was the hometown of the La Salle Cadets, and potentially hostile territory.

The preliminaries, held earlier in the day, displayed the finest performances of seven Junior Drum Corps. There were some upsets, and these were to contribute to the excitement of the evening finals. Four of these units would reach the finals. Les Metropolitains, who had, all year, been considered a dark horse contender and had done quite well, was the first casualty.



Placing fifth, they were eliminated from further participation by the Sarnia Sertomanaires, who had always been a threat to everybody. They were in fourth place, with a score of 79.33, just over three points out of third, held by De La Salle. Del's score was a respectable 82.466, behind second place by a mere 1.317. Defying the results of the last few contests, in second place, were the Optimists, bowing to the victors, La Salle Cadets, by a margin of 0.433. This was a repeat of last year's events and, once more, the Optimists had their back to the wall. Extra pressure was on this Corps, due to what was at stake. For the others, it was a chance to win their first National title and be the first to knock-off the Optimists, at National finals, in the process.

For the Optimists, the pressures were the greatest, and how they responded would reveal the spirit of this Corps. They had been there before and, now, as then, were fully aware of what had to be done.

As the time slipped away, towards the night show, tension rose. It was too late to make any effective changes, though in the past this had been done.



1967: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation (Nationals, Ottawa)

There is really only one way to beat the odds in a situation like this. Everybody has to reach down and give a little more, do a bit better. The leeway is always there, but sometimes it takes an occasion like this to find it. At times like this, the Corps is, usually, more of a unit, united and determined, than at less dramatic times.

The feeling in the Corps that night could not be described. You had to be there, in it, to feel the tension. For thirteen minutes, the rest of the world ceased to exist for those in the Corps, as all attention was focussed on the business at hand. It was a good thing the Corps could concentrate, as it must have, in order to perform well. When they stepped off the line in this do or die effort, they were booed by the partisan crowd. They were booed all through their show, and booed when they finished. This confirmed that this was hostile territory. Ottawa was the hometown of the La Salle Cadets who, it was hoped by the crowd, would be the new champions. More than just the usual reaction of a crowd rooting for the underdog, this was also because the Optimists had won for so long. Also, some envy had to be in there, with a natural desire to see the top dog bite the dust. It happens all over. Such a display, rather than distracting its object, often has the opposite effect. It can serve to encourage the unit on the field to try harder.

### ***The Retreat***

The retreat ceremony is, of course, final, and nothing can be changed. In what was the toughest, but not the closest, National Championship yet, the Optimists overcame all the obstacles that day, capturing their tenth consecutive Canadian Championship.

This was a feat unprecedented in Drum Corps history and, as in 1958, it was followed by a display of uncontrolled emotion. For two years now, they had come from behind to win; this time leaving the local crowd very disappointed. It had ended up, really, as a two Corps contest.

The Optimists... . 86.316

La Salle Cadets... . 86.100

De La Salle... . 81.000

Sertomanaires... . 77.416

The ultimate victory was by a mere 0.216, and it wrapped up what had been the busiest contest season ever for the Toronto Optimist Drum and Bugle Corps. They had entered nineteen contests, won nine and lost nine. What happened to the other one is unknown. Maybe it was rained out.

Most importantly, they were still the number one Junior Corps in Canada, no matter how narrow the margin.



1967: Toronto Optimists with hand-written 10 (Nationals retreat, Ottawa)

Winding down the year took the now familiar route of the banquet and awarding of honours. Rookie of the year was John Christie, Corpsman of the year, Ron Cooper, and a new one went to Robert Ledyards, Guardsman of the year. These fellows were outstanding, in an outstanding Drum Corps that had pulled off an outstanding feat. It had required the utmost effort by all and all were to be congratulated.

End of the year notes and rumours contained the stuff that helped lay the basis for future events. De La Salle, the Corps that everyone expected to upset the applecart had, seemingly, been relegated to third place. They, of course, were not satisfied with this and hired Harry Clark to help out in this direction. Harry we have met before, as an original from the Optimist trumpet band. A snare drummer, he had played for three years in the Toronto Optimists and, after that, with the Jesters Senior Corps. A better person to instruct a drum line would be hard to find, bringing with him much knowledge and experience. Teamed with Eddy Jacko, a De La Salle graduate from their early days, this was to be a formidable combination.



1967: Toronto Optimists guard member (Sarnia)

A final comment was the report that De La Salle were to lose very few members this year and were expected to be strong next year. Two hundred and sixty-five miles away, La Salle Cadets were said to have over sixty horns. They had merged with the Troubadours from Hull, the city across the river.

For the Optimists, of course, all these developments meant that next year could be even tougher than this one. Though they were still supreme in their own backyard, the days when that supremacy was easily maintained were long gone. Forever!



1967: Toronto Optimists (East York)

Draft  
Version



## Chapter 18: 1968 – Down But Not Out

Well, if last year was somewhat confusing, this year would be even more so. All of the four top Canadian Juniors would be in a race for the title, a race that began at the end of last season. This group consisted of the Optimists, De La Salle, La Salle Cadets and Les Metropolitains. Mets, as they were often known were, once again, part of the quartet, remaining in the junior division. Last year's fourth place finalist at the Nationals, the Sertomanaires, were no more. They were not folding, but reorganizing, and would not be seen on the field this year.

South of the border, Drum Corps were rapidly growing in California. Corps from that region would shortly begin to have an impact on the National scene.

### News

#### De La Salle

Locally, what was to help change things, in an already changing Canada, was the acquisition by De La Salle of Terry McKolskey as their Horn Instructor. Al Morrison had been Music Director for the year 1967, and he had done a very good job. So good, in fact, that they had wanted to retain his services. Al was also a player and instructor for the Senior Corps, Commanders. There lay the problem. Del wanted him exclusively, but he was not willing to sever his connection with the Senior Corps. Terry had been helping Al with De La Salle so, when Del and Al parted company, Terry took over. He had wanted the job, so all were happy.



1968: De La Salle

Terry wanted the job because he wanted his own horn line to instruct. Terry had started in Drum Corps with the Optimists and he had always been a worthy member; however, not being able to play as big a role as he wished, he looked elsewhere, ending up with De La Salle. They had always had a good horn line, which had improved under Al Morrison. Under Terry McKolskey, it would improve even more, with results that we shall soon see.

#### New C.D.C.A. Publication

A new publication made its appearance in Canada this year. It was to be the official voice of the C.D.C.A., called "Canadian Drum and Bugle Comment". Its staff consisted of:

Vern Johansson. . . . . Editor  
Cliff Billington. . . . . Advertising  
Don Daber. . . . . Art  
Dick Brown, Bob Walker. . . . . Production  
Frans Rood. . . . . Photos

The writers were: Don Daber, Vern Johansson, Dick Brown, Clare Reid, Al Tierney and Jack Roberts. What is unusual about this list is that nearly all of these people had been, were now, or would be, associated with the Optimists. Either the Optimists had a disproportionate share of influence in the C.D.C.A. or, more likely, no one else was interested in doing the necessary work. Other Corps had just as many capable people as the Optimists, so you have to draw your own conclusions.

### Green Capsule Comments

“Green Capsule Comments” the voice of the Optimists was now in its eighth year of publication. This year there was a “special” special edition, for “inside” the Corps only. It was about the Corps manual, a virtual book of wisdom. It was a recap of all the experience and knowledge gained over the years which, hopefully, would be absorbed by the present members of the Corps.

Among other things, it outlined a code of conduct that included such things as, “be superior, but friendly”, and “always behave like gentlemen”. These were tall orders, but there was far more to this book, which is what it was, than just rules of conduct. It covered almost every aspect of the Corps and its activities that could be thought of. Whether anybody ever learned, or even read, the whole thing is debatable. Certainly, if everybody had read and followed all of its dictates, this would have been the best Corps in the world.



1968: Cover from GCC

### Optimist Cadets

The Optimist Cadets, now a going concern, had one hundred and forty-three boys on the roll. At the beginning of March, they were working on their third musical number. Bugle instructors were Richard Boehnke and Paul Thompson. Drums were taught by Gord O'Halloran, Rick Plonick and Vern Johansson. Actually, they had no drums yet, but would have by March 16th.



1968: Al Tierney with members of the Optimists Cadets

## The Optimists

As far as the Junior Corps itself, the Optimists, they had taken a two week break after the Nationals, with rehearsals resuming on October 1st. There were many new members in the line this year, a factor that, when combined with the reputed strength of the opposition, pointed to tough times ahead. Regardless, the Corps went ahead with an entire new show for 1968: The Joker, Medley on Girls Names, Ontario, Temptation, Going Out of My Head and You Only Live Twice.

These numbers would form the 1968 repertoire of the Toronto Optimists. Bugle arrangements were by Barry Bell, with percussion arranged by Ron Kaiser.

Fund raising this year was helped out by the Optimist Club, who ran a weekly bingo on Monday nights. No matter how successful the Corps was on the field, prize money alone could not cover costs, not even combined with outright grants from the Optimist Club. Fund raising activities were as much an annual necessity as putting the Corps on the field.



1968: Some guys at Grey Cup Parade

This year was the forty-fourth birthday of the Optimist Club, the one that backed the Corps. On February 23rd, trophies and flags won were put on display. Two Corps members, in full uniform, were posted alongside for effect. Anyone who saw this colourful exhibition would have found it hard to believe that the Corps was really a very minor part of the club activities. This was true, proven later this year with the issuing of an Optimist Club magazine. The Corps was only given one page.

## Colour Guard Contest

Colour Guard contests were becoming a popular winter activity in Canada, as they had been for a long time in the United States, where the competition was ferocious. During the last couple of years, the Optimists had entered some of these and, though beginners, had not fared too badly. Guard instructors for the Optimists were Ron Cooper, who was also the Captain, and Jack Roberts. Jack was also the Corps Drill Instructor, having taken over in 1965. They entered the guard in at least four contests this year. One first ensued, but this was “unofficial”, not having a full panel of judges. Another “unofficial” saw them 3rd. With a full panel of judges, the Optimist Guard came in fifth. Then came the 1st Annual Canadian National Guard Championship. Eleven guards were entered in this event, which played out before a full house. Many of the entrants showed their inexperience, and huge penalties were handed out all around. Partly because of this, and partly because they were no longer inexperienced, the Optimist Colour Guard won this event. Their score was 91.55, adding another star to a record already full of honours. It was the first victory for the



Optimists this year; however, from here on, everything would be a tooth and nail fight to the finish.

## The 1968 Season

### The Shriners International

An indoor show for the Optimists preceded the first big one this year, the Shriners International Pageant. The Optimist Cadet Corps, now fully uniformed and with a repertoire of three numbers, took part in the parade that preceded the show. The Shriners show proved to be a good one for the Optimists, but only as regards the Canadian side of it. None of the Canadian Corps, the Optimists included, were anywhere near the winning American units. Before a crowd of over twenty thousand, the show was won by the still powerful Boston Crusaders. With a score of 80.76, they just topped an also powerful Blessed Sacrament, who scored 80.20.



1968: De La Salle

After that, it was another contest. Racine Kilties were third, six points back, and the three Canadian entries were behind them, all within three points of each other. On top of this trio sat the Optimists with 72.98, followed by De La Salle, at 71.93, and La Salle Cadets with 69.96. For the Canadian Corps, none of these scores were decisive.

Anyway, the season was now underway. One week later the Optimists were unceremoniously dumped by Les Metropolitains. Again! This time by over two points, with De La Salle in third place by two points. At another show in June, the Optimists came back to defeat Les Metropolitains by over three points. As much as anything else, this shows what a ding dong year this was going to be.

### Brantford

Early in July, a contest in Brantford upset all the careful predictions. One week before this, La Salle Cadets had clobbered Metropolitains, and thus were now considered number one Corps on the scene. They were not scheduled to be in Brantford, but somehow got themselves included. No doubt, to have another crack at their rivals. Well, they got it and more.

For the first time in seven years, De La Salle beat the Optimists at a full field show, in Canada. La Salle Cadets were stuck in third place, three points behind the Optimists who were, themselves, one point behind Del.



1968: Members of Optimists & Cadets in front of "new" equipment truck

Del was now number one. It was that kind of year and the year was not even halfway over. What would happen next?

## Sarnia

A week later, in Sarnia, the scene of many an Optimist victory, three of the top four met again. De La Salle did it again, with the Optimists and La Salle second and third, respectively. Increasing their lead to almost two points, Del now had the bit between their teeth. All this was a novelty because, since the end of 1958, the Optimists had never been beaten this many times in one year.

Al Tierney, who was now the director of the Cadet Corps and who would have an important role in what it became, now turned his hand to writing. He published a long article in "Canadian Drum and Bugle Corps Comment" magazine, entitled "The Care and Feeding of a Bantam Corps". He was, by now, qualified to write such a piece. It detailed the necessity for a feeder Corps as a reliable source of new members. It also described how to go about building one. He had assistants for this project but Al was the one who was mostly responsible. As well as holding the job of Cadet Director, he was also Assistant Director of the Toronto Optimists, themselves. For a man who had only been in Drum corps for a couple of years, he had come a long way.



1968: Toronto Optimists (Battle Cry)

The hectic scene that was the 1968 Canadian Drum Corps season continued. It was observed during these up again down again results that De La Salle played it very cool when they began to win. On the other hand their fans, after so many years of disappointment, went wild, finally having something to cheer about.

## Ogdensburg

All four contenders next met in neutral territory, Ogdensburg, N.Y. Reflecting the intensity of competition, all put on their finest shows yet, each striving to outdo the other. This sort of thing was paying untold dividends for the fans, who now were really getting their money's worth.

Here are the scores:

- 1st De La Salle. . . . . 77.450
- 2nd Toronto Optimists. . . 74.750
- 3rd Les Metropolitains. . . 71.850
- 4th Cadets La Salle. . . . . 71.130



1968: La Salle Cadets



The specialty awards were:

Drum Line. . . . . The Optimists  
Horn Line . . . . . De La Salle  
Colour Guard. . . . La Salle Cadets  
Drum Major. . . . . Les Metropolitains

Strictly point-wise, horns and drums were the most important captions here and do provide a picture of things as they were unfolding.

In what must have seemed a pleasant respite, the Optimists had a contest in the United States, away from the Canadian circuit. Taking second by five to St. Josephs, they were ten ahead of the third place Corps, a somewhat lopsided affair.

Back in the battleground of Canada, Del triumphed for the third time this year, yet again increasing the margin of victory. Three points down from them were the unpredictable Metropolitains, with La Salle in fourth place. What a state of events now existed, and with time passing, things did not look at all good for the Optimists. Or La Salle, who usually started slowly but finished strongly. This year they has started off well but now seemed to be slipping.



1968: Toronto Optimists Off The Line

### North American Invitational

Next, loomed a major classic event. This year's North American Invitational, on August 17th, mere weeks away from the Nationals. This contest was one of the three most important in Canada, the others being the Shrine and the Nationals. It was run by Terry McKolskey and his committee. Terry was a little guy but proving to be very big on talent and ability. Organizing an event like this is no mean feat. Terry was also Music Director for De La Salle and, with their string of successes thus far this year, that alone must have been a full-time job.

Fortunately, scores and placings are at hand, so we can see the latest results in what was the most exciting season in Canadian Junior Drum Corps in years. Here are the American scores

1st Casper Troopers. . . . . 85.300  
2nd De Plaines Vanguard. . . . 82.583  
3rd St. Josephs. . . . . 81.983

Not far back, but enough that it was almost another contest, stood our three Canadian entries.

4th De La Salle. . . . . 77.550  
5th The Optimists. . . . . 76.383  
6th La Salle Cadets. . . . . 71.266



Important to us, here, is the fact that the Optimists were beginning a slow climb back towards De La Salle. The La Salle Cadets are seen to be slipping still further behind. All were still behind the Americans, though not by as great a margin as before.

After this contest and as a result of their record, De La Salle was listed as the undisputed number one Junior Corps in Canada. Not since 1958 and Scout House had that label been on anyone but the Toronto Optimists.



1968: De La Salle

Because this book is about Canada, only brief comment will be made regarding the U.S. Corps. Casper was becoming one of the best, possibly the best ever, Corps to exist. Santa Clara was part of the rise to prominence of the California Corps. St. Josephs was not only the powerhouse of New York State, they were well on their way to national prominence.

Canada now was the scene of three more major contests before the season was over: the Ontario Championship, the CNE Championship, and the Nationals. The Optimists currently held all of these titles.

Both La Salle and Les Metropolitains had seemed to fade towards the end of the season. This left only two Corps in the running, De La Salle and the Optimists.

### Ontario Championships

This was the scene as, on August 24th, the Ontario Championship rolled around.

This show was held, again, at Seagram Stadium. For the first time in seven years De La Salle won a major Canadian title! This made four in a row that the Optimists had now dropped to Del, confirming in most peoples minds that there would be a new Canadian Champion this year. Besides winning this title for the first time, De La Salle was the first to beat the Optimists this many times in Canada. Ever!

### Sarnia

What the Optimists thought of all this is unknown but not hard to imagine. They likely assumed that if they gave up and relaxed, their time was certainly up. Not being this way inclined, they were off to Sarnia on the following weekend. Significantly, De La Salle took the whole weekend off. While



1968: Toronto Optimists

the Optimists were very busy, the opposition was resting. Two days after Sarnia the CNE contest took place. This was the final contest before the Nationals, and if Del could win here, they would probably win the Nationals.

## CNE

A Corps like the Optimists does not go down easily. If they did, they would not have been on top as long as they were. You had to beat them, and stay beating them, because they would always come back for more.

What happened at the CNE was:

1st The Optimists. . . . 82.36

2nd De La Salle. . . . . 81.06

3rd La Salle Cadets. . . 76.95

The Optimists had rebounded from a string of losses to retain this title and open the door to, once again, winning the Nationals.

## On to the Nationals

The spread of 1.30 was, perhaps, not as significant as the psychology involved. If you could do it once, you could do it again. All that mattered now was the contest just one week away, the Canadian Championships. This year's Nationals were held in Kingston, Ontario. It would be a small contest, in a small stadium with a small crowd. What it was not small in was excitement, tension, suspense, and importance.

For the Optimists, a ten-year Nationals winning streak was on the line. For De La Salle, it was the chance to be the first to break it. With La Salle five points back at the last contest, this would be a two Corps competition. It was a duel every bit as exciting as it could be, for fans and participants alike. All gave of their best. It was one of those shows that nobody in the crowd, or on the sidelines, could decide. Only the judges had that power.

Reinforcing their confidence, the Optimists had won the prelims, with Del second and La Salle third. Unexpectedly, their victory was by two points, increasing the margin of the previous week.



1968: Toronto Optimists



Of course, these were just the preliminaries, a run up to the finals, where anything can happen. The boys in green had lost the prelims for the past two years at this contest, then came back to take the finals. Now, the same thing could happen to them in reverse.

As each Corps took its position on the starting line, you could hear a pin drop, and tension hung over the field like a thick fog. Even those watching could feel it. All performed flawlessly, each leaving their fans thinking that their favourite had won. Still this was, above all, a judges' contest.

Here are what they came up with:

1st	The Optimists. . . . .	79.133
2nd	De La Salle. . . . .	78.300
3rd	La Salle Cadets. . . . .	73.666



1968: Toronto Optimists (Kingston)

This was not a popular decision with the crowd and much booing was heard. Never pleasant to endure, the Corps took it, most of them having heard it before.

For an unprecedented eleven years in a row, they had won the Canadian National Drum and Bugle Corps Junior Championship.

Disappointment was plainly evident in the second place Corps but, being the outfit that they were, they would be back. Many others had disappeared over the years, but De La Salle had substance that seemed without limit. Crowd opinion aside, the contest was won, or lost, on drums. The Optimists were almost two points up on drums, while De La Salle took all other captions. It was not the first time that the Optimist's drum line had swung the balance in favour of the whole Corps. However, with Del winning all other captions, these must have been very close for an Optimist victory of 0.833. It was, then, a Corps victory.

So ended the 1968 Canadian Junior Drum Corps season.

## After the Nationals

That there was an aftermath shows the nature of the interest in this contest. Surprisingly, it did not arise from either of the losing Corps, but from a neutral source. It was, also, really no more than a tempest in a teapot.

The snag was that it came from a highly placed member of the Ontario Chapter of the C.D.C.A. He was the host of a Saturday morning radio show that gave out results of Drum Corps contests.



1968: Toronto Optimists (Battle Cry, Nationals)



When reporting this one, he stated that the results were received with disbelief, resulting in controversy. Such a statement implies that the results were in question, and that steps were being taken to remedy this.

First of all, the Optimists were not aware of any controversy. Had there been one, surely they would have been the first to hear about it.

Secondly, none of the other Corps in the contest lodged a protest or made the Optimists aware of any.

Finally, there was no machinery in the rules to reverse a decision of the judges. To do so would put the judges' chapter under suspicion and undermine confidence in them.



1968: Toronto Optimists in the Grey Cup Parade

A letter pointing all this out was sent, by the Director and Assistant

Director of the Optimists, to Bernie Beer, Chairman of the Ontario Chapter of the C.D.C.A. It was taken under advisement and that is all anybody, today, remembers about the whole affair. Were it really important, or valid, there would be accounts of action taken and people who remembered. There are none. It was just allowed to fade away. More likely, this was a display of frustrated personal opinion. Case closed. The Optimists were, and would remain, the Canadian Champions for 1968.

## Corps Banquet

The banquet, of course, followed, with a reminder, along with awards and presentations, that next year meant that number twelve was in the works. Already the propaganda machine was beginning to work overtime during the coming year. We will get to take note of its effects.

On November 11th, 1968, the young "A Junior C" circuit elected an executive in Rochester, NY. Don Daber became Recording Secretary and Public Relations Director for this organization. In addition, Don was still the Corps Director of the Toronto, Optimists. Don Daber was a glutton for work, as he still is to this day.

From the Corps, official thanks were extended to certain people in appreciation for invaluable services rendered:

- ▶ Gord Robinson for assistance at the individuals earlier in the year. These were not discussed in this chapter due to a lack of information.
- ▶ Mr. Greg Tierney and Mr. L. Y. Poole, Grand Knight and executive of the Knights of Columbus, for making available facilities (K of C hall) for the cadets.
- ▶ Mr. Burrage, for expert craftsmanship in the making of drum harnesses.
- ▶ Mr. Joe Brunelle and Corps members for distribution of handbills.



1968: Toronto Optimists Colour Guard in Grey Cup parade (note the Argo scarf)

Earlier in this chapter, mention was made of an Optimist Club magazine published this year. It was the November issue that devoted an article to the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. This magazine covered the entire range of Optimist Club activity, continent wide. Reading this, one becomes aware of the total picture. The Optimist Club is a huge organization devoted to good works of every description. To relate the whole range of its endeavours would take not a book but a library. In this ocean of benevolence, the Corps was just a drop of water.

## Statistics from an article on the Optimists

It was, if worthy, an expensive drop of water. The magazine included a history of the Corps, along with some statistics. These were compiled from 1960, when complete statistics were first kept.

Here are some of them.

1. During this period, the Corps has travelled some 57,103 miles. That is, I believe, equivalent to twice around the planet.
2. They had played to approximately 1,074,300 people. This, counted before the days of computers, must have taken some effort.
3. There had been two hundred and thirty-seven appearances in the United States and Canada. Over eight years, this works out to about twenty-nine appearances per year, not a bad total for a Canadian Corps.
4. During these events, the Optimists had won sixty-eight firsts in seventy-five Canadian contests. This is just over a ninety-percent success rate. If you pause to consider this, try to think of any other field where such a record can be shown. While there are some, these are few and far between.
5. This record included winning the Ontario Championship ten years in a row, the Canadian National Exhibition seven times, and, of course, the Canadian Championship for eleven consecutive years. South of the border, they had won the New York Canadian title four times.



1968: Toronto Optimists 11 year button

The Optimist Drum Corps was now an institution in Canada, and it is not hard to see why. Whatever happened in the future, they would never be just another Drum Corps.

That future was fast approaching, so let's turn the page and see what was in store for this battered, but still proud Drum Corps.



1968: Toronto Optimists perform at the Grey Cup game

# Version



## Chapter 19: 1969

Before carrying on, it is time to report some events that took place at the close of the previous year.

### Lorne leaves the corps

To the disappointment of all, Lorne Ferrazzutti left the Optimists. He was one of two people, still with the Corps, who had been with it from the beginning; from before, if you count the Danforth Crusaders. The other one was Barry Bell. During all these years, Lorne had worked for the Loblaw's Supermarket chain. Last year, he had been promoted, not for the first time, within this organization. The difference this time was that his hours in his new job would conflict with those required by the Corps.

Since the early days, the Corps had greatly increased its rehearsal hours to maintain, or even improve, its standing. The Corps, though, had never been a livelihood, and something had to give. Any sensible person would have made the correct choice, which was to drop the Corps in favour of the job. Lorne was, above all, sensible. It did not mean that he would be entirely out of Corps, or a related activity, but just not with the Optimists.

Fortunately for the Corps, there was someone willing to take over. Ron Kaiser, a pupil of Lorne, was now experienced at writing and instructing for a drum line. For the purpose of this tale, however, Lorne cannot be dismissed quite so briefly.



1969: Lorne watching Del perform

Lorne began instructing with the Danforth Crusaders and had been the drum instructor of the Optimists since the original merger. He had also played with and instructed both the Jesters and Commanders. During the long winning streak enjoyed by the Optimists, his drum lines had often been a deciding factor. The rest of the Corps always pulled its weight, but if things were even, the drum scores would tip the balance. This had happened at the last Nationals. Along the way, there had been assistance from talented, ambitious individuals, plus many extra hours put in, voluntarily, by his drum lines. Everything, though, was under the guidance and control of Lorne. More than this, he was a friend to many. If you wanted to learn to read music, most could not, he would take the time to teach you. Never loud or outgoing, his name was well known all over, partly by the success of his drum lines. I could go on a lot longer, but I believe the appropriate picture has been drawn. His shoes would be filled, but not easily. As with other instructors in the past, his loss was a major blow.

Barry Bell had taken a leave of absence last year, but would return this year. He had been reportedly ready to leave in 1961-62 but Corps members had a special meeting, in a restaurant, to see what could be done to prevent this. It was a measure of the esteem in which he was held.

This was to be a year when many problems would arise, some of a novel nature. To handle these, there was an experienced executive at hand.

Director . . . . . Don Daber (his seventh year)  
Assistant Director. . . . . Al Tierney  
Assistant Director. . . . . Clare Reid  
Business Manager . . . . . Cliff Billington  
Secretary Treasurer . . . . . Dick Brown  
Director Cadet Corps. . . . Greg Tierney

These men were all experienced with Drum Corps.

The Business Manager announced that twenty contests had been lined up for this year, so the schedule looked good. Every second Wednesday, a bingo was being run by the executive for fund raising. Things looked okay, despite the loss of certain people. It was not until February that the first sign of problems appeared.

### Poor Turnouts

An open letter to the horn line appeared in G.C.C., requesting people come out to practice. Although things usually did slow down in the winter months, this had never before been necessary. Due to poor attendance, there was a corresponding lack of progress in many sections. A final reminder was that the Corps was expected to win the Nationals for the twelfth time.

This and all the new rules laid down since 1964 may have been part of the reason for this attitude. People can only take so much.

The propaganda machine was working full blast now, with most of its output directed at the all-important number 12. It was additional pressure to maintain an incredible record and was to be the focal point of the Optimists existence this year.

One step taken to promote the improvement of the Corps was the setting up of a "Junior Advisory Board". More bureaucracy. Its first session was held in March 1969. All in attendance were members of the executive, or Corps members who were acting as board members. Don Daber, of course, was chairman. The stated purpose was to make a better Corps and, of course, title #12.

Part of these objectives was to establish a closer working relationship between the Corps itself and the executive.



1969: Toronto Optimists

The duties of the board, in addition to holding regular meetings, were to oversee just about everything. This included initiations, sale of rookies, assisting of rookies, spirit on trips, camp, home, trip holdovers, bus, Corps dinner, social events, setting an example and publishing the “inside” paper. Phew! Never before had such a concerted effort been made to ensure a specific outcome. Never before had it been thought necessary. There were, as well, other things, and all this pointed to a degree of sophistication never before attempted with this Corps. Comparing this with the 1958 Corps reveals almost two different units. The original Corps just went out and did what it was designed for. Everything else was handled by one small executive. Most of the things just mentioned did not exist. If the Optimists had not grown in the complex fashion outlined, it is possible that they would not now be chasing title number twelve. It was now a different era that required different techniques to survive and prosper.

## The Competition

Uptown, the perennial rivals of the Optimists, De La Salle, were far from idle. They were planning to use an eighteen to twenty piece percussion section, and were getting anywhere from thirty-six to forty-five horns at rehearsal. Last year, they had come so close to winning the National title they could taste it and they would not rest until they had it.

Nothing was known yet of La Salle Cadets, who were never to be discounted. Being as far away as they were, information was harder to come by.

## Finances & Fund Raising

Prior to the February 9th issue of G.C.C. “inside” urging better horn line attendance at rehearsals, an edition had stressed fund raising. This year it was to be selling chemical fertilizer, a scheme to help grease the financial wheels. The Cadets had used this method the previous year, raising \$2,000 in two weeks.

Money raised in this fashion was used for items not covered in the Optimist Club budget. Among these were a truck subsidy for gas and upkeep. The Corps now had an equipment truck. They



1969: Optimists Cadets in Batavia

occasionally had use of one in the past but it was owned by a member. Now a truck belonged to the Corps, as did all the expenses involved. Midwest trips always took extra funds. Because the Corps had not fared very well in the Midwest, competition-wise, and prize money was not enough. The crowds, however, loved them.

The Nationals now entailed more than a Saturday morning to Saturday evening excursion and a hotel stay was required.



There was also money needed to buy things to sell. In other words, money to make money. These and other things were the reason that extra money was needed and raised. In the future, finance was to bring a great upheaval in the Corps operation.

Corps jackets this year cost a member thirteen dollars, with an eleven-year crest on it for an additional dollar fifty. Anybody who buys such things these days can only gasp at these prices. Such is progress.

Another sign of the times was that the Corps now preferred to hold closed rehearsals. This had never before been a regular habit of this Corps, but with the tightness of things now, it might have been a good idea.

An aid to this trend was the fact that the Optimists were now the only Corps in Toronto to have the use of an armoury. This was a definite advantage. This fact also made full turnouts a necessity for the dates on which they were available.

Saturday, March 15, was set aside as “Fertilizer Blitz Day” and was listed as a compulsory event for all. This was one way to ensure some sales and was similar to the method used to sell peanuts in 1961. That, though, was never compulsory, just voluntary and an indication of how things had changed.

A tradition begun a few years earlier was to be continued on April 13th at the Shrine. This was the now familiar “selling of rookies” ceremony. New guys, or rookies, would be bought by an old guy for one dollar. It was the duty of the old guy to teach the rookie the ropes, while the rookie would become the obedient servant of the old hand. This practice was as much fun as



1969: Toronto Optimists and Optimist Cadets at an Indoor Show

anything else, never reaching the heights or depths sometimes practised in certain military academies or private schools.

A practical side was that a new guy would have a mentor in the Corps who would assist him to adjust to its ways. He would, therefore, become a better “Optimist” quicker than if left alone. After a year, of course, he was no longer a rookie and became an old guy.

Another addition to Corps lore was the adoption of a Corps motto. It had taken a long time for this idea to take hold, the closest thing yet being the club motto, “Friend of the Boy”. Now, more fitting, the motto would be “Crede Quod Habes, Et Habes.” Properly motto-like stated in Latin, its English translation was “Believe you have it, and you have it”. It was an apt motto as, during recent years, if the Corps had not believed that they had it, then they would not have.

## Winning the Circuit Guard Championship

March 22nd, Ottawa saw the Optimists Guard win, for the second year in a row, the Canadian Championship Guard Contest. They narrowly edged out De La Salle in the process.

For fun and spirit, the Corps held a rally night and party. This was a good thing considering all the work projects now in hand. This year's Ontario Individuals saw the Optimists fare quite well, amid the largest number of entrants yet recorded. Five first places capped a decent collection of placings in various categories. Highest scores were achieved in rifle and horn categories, reflecting quality in both the guard and horn line.



1969: Toronto Optimists Circuit Guard with trophy

## Other Bits of News

Bernie Beer, the ageless, timeless, ex-Optimist Assistant Corps Director was now Chairman of the Board of the C.D.C.A. for 1969-70. He would guide it into the coming decade.

Recordings of the corps is a subject thus far neglected. For many years the Optimists had been recorded on top quality records. This year they were on them again, in very good company.

**SuperRecords:** The 4th Annual Shriners International: featuring Kilties, Boston, Optimists, La Salle Cadets

**North American Invitational:** featuring The Troopers, Vanguard, Optimists, De La Salle

**Canadian Nationals:** featuring Optimists, La Salle, Chatelaines, Commanders

These were just some of those on which they appeared. The presence of other Canadian Corps on these records shows how Drum Corps had grown and improved in Canada over the years.

Vern Johansson was leading the Corps on all these sessions. He had now been leading the Corps as either first or second Drum Major, longer than anyone else ever had. He was good at the job and had become a well-known figure in local circles.

The May 11th issue of Green Capsule Comments "Inside" detailed the events for this year's "long weekend" camp. This year, it was to be at the Ukrainian Youth Camp in Oakville, Ontario. These camps, for learning and polishing the show, were loads of fun and all sorts of things went on. De La Salle and Scarborough Firefighters Drum Corps were doing the same thing. The Scarborough Corps sponsored by the local fire department were not newcomers,

having originated in 1961. Although nobody could remotely foresee it now, they would one day play a very big part in the future of the Optimists.

Also in this issue of G.C.C. was a Corps quiz about the Optimists. Some of the answers are interesting and revealing.

Gord Robinson of the Shrine Connection was now an honorary member of the Toronto Optimists.

Since the original, 1952, beginning, there have been four changes of uniform: Boy Scout Uniform, Optimist Blue, Dark Green Blouse, Black Trousers; Present Blouse, Black Trousers.



1969: Toronto Optimists mello (Bob, Brian & Rick)

The Optimists introduced rudimental bass drum in 1964. Into Canada that is. Blessed Sacrament had been using them since 1962.

Eleven buttons had been issued one for each National Championship.

Booster material sold over the years included; buttons, crests, records, lighters, money (fake), pennants, pens, calendars, photos, decal, posters. You did not have to be a salesman in this Corps, but it helped.

The best years in the Corps history were said to be 1962 and 1968. Only one contest was lost in 1962, and 1968 saw the Corps lose five in a row, only to pull up to win the Nationals. A footnote to this is that the 1962 Corps is still talked about today, and not only by ex-Optimists.

Of the people in and instructing the Corps in those days, only three were now left. These were Barry Bell, Joe Gianna, and Ron Kaiser. All were now instructors.

Other instructors for this year were:

- ▶ Jack Roberts: Drill Director and Writer, with Don Cooper and Bob Davidson
- ▶ John MacDonald: Percussion, with Ron Kaiser

Most of these people were home grown types who had graduated from the playing ranks of the Corps itself. So far, except for the brief use of Vince Bruni on drill, it had always been this way.

The competition season was fast closing in. Everybody knew it was not going to be easy, and one of the first tests was to prove just that.



## The Competition Season

June 8th saw Canadian Junior Corps square off in Batavia, N.Y., an early contest that would help set the pace for the season.

The results:

- 1st De La Salle. . . . . 75.70
- 2nd Geneva Appleknockers. . . . 71.90
- 3rd The Optimists. . . . . 70.85
- 4th Les Metropolitains. . . . . 67.20

Competition in the United States was on neutral territory, giving good indication of where one stood. As it stood, now, De La Salle had surged ahead of where they had left off last year, leaving the others choking in their dust. Messrs. McKolskey, Clark and company had done a good job. It was going to be a tough year. Both Corps were well matched in size, with field numbers in the eighties. Equality also extended to colour and performance. Visual performance, that is. The judges' pads had told a different story.

Les Metropolitains were quite a way back but would close up later, as was now becoming a trademark of Quebec Corps.

Prior to this show, at the same location, there had been a standstill contest between the Optimist Cadets and the feeder Corps of St. Josephs. The Optimist unit was seen to be more advanced and could have competed at Junior "B" level if they had a drill.

Les Metropolitains sprung a surprise when they edged De La Salle in Rochester, N.Y. Del, on a roll this year, were to be called the new power in Canada. For Mets to beat them was quite an accomplishment.

Del was using over thirty people in their colour guard this year and reversed a long-standing trend. The Optimists might follow suit. This fact was an indication of how things were changing in regards to size. The fact that the Optimists were following, rather than leading, was a sign of how other things were changing as well.

Drum line changes were now evident, getting into varied instrumentation. Tympanis and double bass, four at a time, by Del and the Optimists, respectively, were in use. It was not that many years before when only three snare, three tenor, two bass, and one cymbal were used, if you could find them. Such an arrangement would never be seen again among the more competitive Corps.

There was, around this time, a reunion of Optimist Alumnae. Dennis DeCarli, one of the original members of the Corps, was in charge of this. If the ship appeared to be sinking, at least the rats were not leaving. Most Optimist Alumnae were pretty loyal and were often seen at shows and contests.



1969: Les Metropolitains

It is worth noting that at any Optimist reunion, big or small, the reigning topic of conversation is always the Corps. No matter that some of them are now presidents, vice-presidents, have their own businesses, or have not much at all. After five to ten minutes the Corps, once again, is the main interest for the next couple of hours, or until the beer runs out.

This was to be a pivotal year in Canadian Drum Corps, even historic. Sadly, the telling will suffer due to information being somewhat sparse. That is unfortunate. This situation will occur again, regarding future years. Then, as now, we shall do the best with what we have. Here goes!

### **The Shrine Show**

Before a crowd of 17,000 excited fans, this year's Shriners International took place. All but one of the Canadian entries did well, placing closer to their American counterparts than usual. The Optimists were among them and, although third in the top three Canadian entries, they had improved a great deal from Batavia.



1969: Toronto Optimists (Shriners show)

The four top placings, held by the Americans, ranged in score from Kilties with 80.95, in first, Boston 79.05, second, Blessed Sacrament 78.80, third, and St. Josephs 75.56. Fifth was De La Salle, with 74.30, leading the rest. Next, came La Salle Cadets, with 73.66, followed by the Optimists at 73.65, barely in seventh. These three Canadian units were all within less than one point of each other. Les Metropolitains were so far back as to be out of contention, yet not so long ago they were nudging De La Salle. A strange business this is.

De La Salle's horn line was said to be a match for any of the Americans at this show. Also noted was the great improvement of the Optimists. This observation was borne out by the scores of this competition.

Don Daber was still the director. He had taken over when the Corps was the undisputed number one in Canada. The last couple of years had been shaky, and this one looked as if it might be even shakier. A lesser person might have quit. Not him! If things became less rosy, he would still be there. Don was an unsung hero. Green Capsule Comments was still stressing the "on to #12" theme. Well, it was coming, that was unavoidable, but the outcome, right now, was beyond prediction. Recent scores showed the three main contenders to be candidates for top honours. Significantly, though, no other Canadian Corps had yet beaten De La Salle in Canada. Les Metropolitains had done it in Rochester, but they were now out of contention.

Still definitely in the race were De La Salle, La Salle Cadets, and the Optimists. Now a familiar scene, it was anybody's year. The face of Canadian Junior Drum Corps had changed forever.

Though the Optimists, who could rightly claim the sixties as their decade, might not like it, the change was for the better. No one could now be considered a sure-fire winner in all-Canadian contests. This situation made for very exciting and entertaining shows.

These statements do not belittle what the Optimists had accomplished in the past. That was a phenomenal achievement, not likely to be repeated. Thus far, it has not been. The big winners from this change were, without doubt, the fans. They got more for their money, with nail-biting results and better shows.



1969: Toronto Optimists (Batavia)

### Shows in the U.S.

Two major contests in the United States showed how close things were.

- ▶ De La Salle, at the World Open, 10.70 out of first place.
- ▶ The Optimists, at the U.S. Open, 9.84 out of first place. A difference of only 0.86

These shows were held on August 15th and 16th, not that far from “Number 12”.

At the World Open, two California Corps began their ascent. This leak would become a flood.

Due to lack of information about this year, it is impossible to do justice to all the events that took place. All that can be said with any accuracy is that towards the end of the season things got even closer. Also, as the Canadian Nationals approached, no Canadian Corps had defeated De La Salle in Canada. Del had even won the CNE Contest for the first time since 1961. All other years it had been an Optimist preserve.

Thankfully, we do have an account of the all-important Canadian Nationals. This promised to be the most hair-raising one yet, mainly because the reigning champions had not yet been able to defeat their greatest rivals. Yet, there was a good chance it could be done. It would call for a supreme effort.

### The 1969 Nationals

For the Optimists, the whole year had been geared towards this contest. The #12 campaign was constantly promoted through the pages of Green Capsule Comments “Inside” editions. Along with this, almost every day of the two weeks, up to and including this contest, was laid out in detail. Rehearsals times, meeting times, arrival times, leaving times, eating times. Nothing was missed. It would have done any army proud. As mentioned before, with sparse information being available, no information regarding the preliminaries is currently available. Diminishing this omission is the fact that prelims are often indecisive, results often being overturned. It is



the all-important finals that count.

### **The Finals, Ottawa, Ontario, 1969**

Although La Salle Cadets were definitely in the picture as championship contenders, all eyes were inevitably focussed on the Optimists and De La Salle. There was something here that was above the commonplace. These two fine Corps had been going at each other for close to eleven years now. If there had sometimes been bad blood between the two, and there had, the reverse was also true. If one of them had not been at this affair, it would have seemed somewhat unreal.



1969: Toronto Optimists Drum Line

Both Corps were extremely nervous, though for different reasons. For the Optimists, it was the same reason that had existed for the last eleven years. Their National title was at stake. De La Salle knew that this was the best chance they had ever had to win this coveted title which had always eluded them, sometimes by only a hair's breadth. They had beaten the Optimists ten times this year yet, without this one, it would mean little. De La Salle wanted this title more than anything else.

All the proceedings of the evening would be conducted in an atmosphere of electric tension. La Salle Cadets put on an excellent performance, in front of a hometown crowd. It ranked with anybody and made it evident that the outcome would not become known until the retreat.



1969: Toronto Optimists On The Line (Nationals)

When the Optimists entered the field, they were met with dead silence until they stepped off the line to "Hang 'em High". It was apparent to all that everyone was giving of their utmost and little, if any, booing was heard this year. This Corps was putting its heart and soul into its performance, one that outdid all previous ones this year. This observation was unanimous.

Then, of course, De La Salle took the field. No doubt due to nervous tension, it was noted that they did not put on as good a show as they had on previous occasions. It was, however, a match for anyone else. The outcome, as yet, was undetermined. Until the retreat, that is.

### **The Retreat**

Above all, this was a judges' contest. Uninvolved with records, nerves, emotions, tensions, and fears, they do their job as required. In the process, they determine who was the best on a given night. On this night there was no obvious, clear-cut winner. It would all be left to the fine points on the score sheets.

The announcer began his slow, tantalizing climb up the score sheets. When he got to third, there was a visible heightening of tension throughout the entire stadium.

In third place, it was announced, with a score of 78.45, a pause, then, the La Salle Cadets. They had performed well, but their time had not yet come.

Then another, greater, increase in suspense, as Drum Corps history hung in the balance.

In second place, a pause, with a score of 80.80, and in first place with a score of 80.85. It was agonizing.

In second place, with a score of 80.80, from Toronto (both corps were from Toronto)



1969: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Ottawa)

Then . . . . . *The Optimists!*

For a while, that was as far as the announcer got, as immediate bedlam took place. De La Salle displayed what was probably the greatest display of controlled frenzy ever seen on a Drum Corps field. Twelve years of frustration and disappointment exploded, as everything went up in the air, yet without breaking ranks.

They had finally done it. They had defeated the Optimists at the Canadian National Championship. It had not come easily. The crowd reaction was generally favourable, though definitely not unanimous. This had been a hard fought affair, as the margin of victory, or defeat, showed. It was only 0.50 but it meant everything!

De La Salle were to be congratulated. If they had not earned it, they would not have won. They had finally overcome the jinx of the "2nd place" feeling, clearing the psychological barriers to the road ahead. Now they could, and would, rise to even greater heights.

What about the Optimists? Were they now just another Drum Corps? Hardly!



1969: De La Salle (Batavia)



1969: Toronto Optimists drums at practice

The greatest Nationals winning streak ever seen in Drum Corps had finally come to an end. As they stood silently on the field, contemplating their fate, no doubt some members felt a heavy responsibility. They would be known as the ones who lost, broke the record, smeared the streak. In retrospect, none of them should have felt this way. In truth no other drum corps in competitive history has achieved what the Optimists had achieved.

All the changes in style, instruments, planning, and myriad other things had been absorbed, mastered, and successfully presented for almost twelve years. After leading the way in many of these things, they now had absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. In the future, it would still be a feather in the cap of any Canadian Corps to beat the Optimists.

It would also lead to some unpleasantness, as others would take an opportunity, now and then, to deliberately slight or snub this Corps. This being one of the less admirable traits of human nature and Drum Corps are, after all, made up of human beings.

### The Aftermath

For the first time in twelve years, the Optimists marched from the Nationals field second from last to cheers as well as boos. Not everyone, it turned out, agreed with the decision. What was seen were people removing Optimists buttons from their jackets and throwing them on the ground. Everyone loves a winner, and the Optimists no longer filled the bill. It's times like this when you find out who your real friends are.



1969: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation (Nationals)

Barry Bell who, earlier this year, had reverted to bugle instructor from music director, looked wistfully at his busload of proteges. For him, too, it was an occasion. His time had come, as one day he must have surely known it would. At least he had the consolation of knowing the Corps that had beaten his was partly taught by ex-members of his Corps.

When heads and hearts had cooled down, acting like the champions they had once been, a group of Optimists visited their conquerors to offer congratulations. Such a gesture was not uncommon and reflected well on the Corps. De La Salle had acted in a similar fashion in 1961, as had Scout House in 1958.



The subdued bus trip home was punctuated with pity comments – “I’m sorry”, “It won’t happen again”, “I let you down”, “What happened”, etc., etc., etc. The debates would go on for years.

## The Explanation

With the advent of new instructors to both of the Corps under examination, certain things happened to both that contributed to this year’s result. No one was to blame. It just happened. Drums had usually been the Optimists strong point. They had from the beginning used a closed style of drumming. It was better for execution.

This year, they had switched to a more open style, flashier, but more difficult to execute accurately. On the other side, De La Salle had adopted a more closed style, which was better adapted to good execution scores. Oddly enough, it was not this factor that caused the battle to be lost. Where it occurred was in the general effect drum caption.

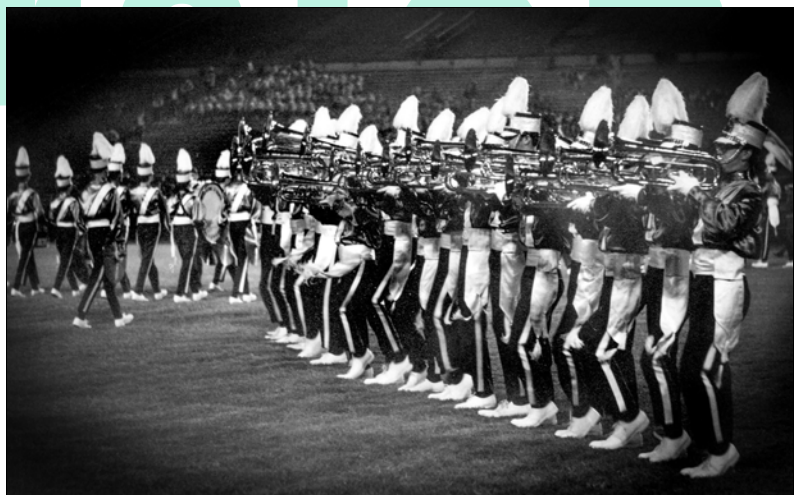


1969: Toronto Optimists (Batavia)

Different composition of lines of both Corps gave rise to one judge, an American, preferring one to the other. The result was a large spread in the general effect drum score. All other things being equal, this was where the contest was lost. De La Salle had won the trophy for best horn line and the Optimists that for best marching and maneuvering.

A quick glance back at the year shows that the Optimists did not defeat De La Salle once this year. So the end result could hardly be called a surprise. What occurred was a near miracle that made things very exciting.

Downright, cold, light of day analysis of the effect of this year has to show that what happened was probably for the best. For any activity to be dominated by one organization for so long is not healthy for the overall activity. That the Optimists finally lost was good for the Canadian Junior Drum Corps movement. It opened the door for others, as well as De La Salle, to contemplate chances of winning in the future. Others would rise, on their own initiative, not



1969: Toronto Optimists (Shrine show)

because the Optimists were gone. They were not. It had been shown that they were, after all, not invincible, and the field was now open to all comers. This still included the Optimists, who were now back in the pack where they had not been for a long time. How they were to fare in this unaccustomed position, we shall shortly explore.

Rounding out the year were two events, one with an appropriate name, whose meaning was altered by this year's events.

The Optimist Cadet Dance, billed as a "Celebrate the 12th" dance, was intended as a celebration of the twelfth title. Instead, it became a celebration of September 12th, the date on which it was held.

Secondly, the 8th Annual Corps Dinner was held to present annual awards and present plans for the future. For the first time, it was not a victory dinner. Corpsman of the Year Award was presented here, decided by a vote of the members themselves. Considering the effort that must have been put out by more than one person, in order to come so close, starting from so far back, this could have been a multiple award.

Now the year was over. It was time to lick wounds, relax for a while, and for those who were still of age, still interested, to contemplate next year. There would be no campaign for thirteen, at least comparable to that for twelve. It was possible that some in the Corps were glad of this. The pressure was off and no doubt some were relieved. They could go back to square one and begin again. The shoe was now on the other foot. The Optimist were history. They were legend, too.

Now, the Corps could move on to a different future.



1969: Toronto Optimists (Shrine Contest)



## Chapter 20: 1970 – A New Decade, A New Beginning

The morning after the 1969 Canadian Junior Drum and Bugle Corps Championships, the world went on as usual. Outside of Canadian Drum Corps circles, some in the United States, and some media, the rest of the world was unaware that the Optimists were no longer Canadian Champions. This is not to diminish the efforts of all involved, but to help put it in proper perspective.



1970: Toronto Optimists (CNE)

For the first time since 1958, the Optimists had to contemplate their future without the benefit of championship status. If this would take a while to get used to, it would be done and the Corps would survive. Many Corps had not survived similar happenings.

However, though the Corps was defeated, its spirit was intact. There would just be an absence of all the things that go to champions. That was now the choice of De La Salle.

One noticeable aspect of this situation was the lack of information abroad concerning the Optimists. The explanation was simple. They were now out of the spotlight. Most eyes were on, and most news about, the new champions. All this became glaringly apparent when researching this story. Only five pages of notes could be compiled from available information. So, maybe this is a good time to explore, for a while, other aspects of the Corps, and the Drum Corps movement in general.

### Drum Corps in the 1960s

The decade of the sixties produced some outstanding units. Also during this decade, Corps rose from obscurity, sometimes of long standing, and others disappeared. A few rose to great heights and then disappeared. This phenomenon occurred in both junior and senior ranks but here we are concerned with the juniors.

Overall, the rise of the juniors surpassed that of the seniors. Organizational changes in Junior Corps would soon alter the scene much more. The fastest rise in Canada had to be the La Salle Cadets, who in less than three years had almost won the Nationals. The days when a Corps could do it in one season were



1970: Toronto Optimists triple-bass (indoor show)



long gone. Also gone was the supremacy of a single Corps. This had been helped along by the formation of new Corps, thus cutting down available talent. Some had risen from the ashes of former Corps; other had totally new beginnings.

One of the former had recently become a member of the Western Ontario Junior “B” circuit, now in its second year. They were the Etobicoke Crusaders, formed from the now defunct Michael Power Knights. The western circuit of “B” Corps had anywhere from six to eleven members, which was good for Corps in general. A lot of people were learning the ropes, at their own level. These Corps could survive and flourish if they were not sucked dry by others seeking to fill their ranks. Unfortunately, maybe inevitably, this did happen, often with devastating results for the small Corps.

## Other News

Growing in popularity, another guard circuit was formed. The amount of activity in this field had grown to the point that it could support another circuit.

On the Canadian judging scene, Vince Macciocchi now became the Chief Judge of the Canadian Association. He had been a judge for a long time, serving as such under Al Baggs.

At the C.D.C.A. convention in Montreal, it was decided that this year’s Nationals would be held in Toronto, on September 12th. It might turn out to be an interesting contest, as the Optimists were intent on regaining the title. Towards this end, they were having closed rehearsals, keeping things under wraps.

This year’s O.D.C.A. Individuals took place at Cedarbrae Collegiate, in Scarborough. It again saw a record number of entries, over one hundred and twenty-five entrants. As a result, the evening finals took over four and a half hours to complete, longer than many full Corps competitions. The Optimists did well in solo boys’ rifle, baritone and rifle duet. They had excelled in these captions before.

The Scarborough Firefighters were changing from Junior “B” to Junior “A” this year. Starting in 1961, they had gradually worked their way up. To cement this new ranking, they became the newest members of the “A Junior C” circuit.

Closer to home, the Optimists announced the scrapping of their triple drums in favour of tympanis. The Nationals general effect score may have had something to do with this. Also, it was a conforming to trends that had begun during the sixties.



1970: Some corps members after a Christmas parade

Other changes that had occurred, in a general fashion, were the introduction of a rotary valve on horns, contra-bass bugles and mellophones. Corps horn lines had grown from a standard twenty-seven to around forty-five.

Drum lines had grown from a standard nine to as high as twenty-four. This figure was to increase again in the future, as were horn lines, until Corps reached the size of today.



1970: Singing the corps song (Woodstock)

If the Optimists were hoping to regain their title this year, fate had decreed that it would not be easy. Out of seventy-five members in the Corps, thirty were new recruits. A turnover this size makes it hard to hang on to anything let alone regain a title. At least they were willing to make the attempt, showing that there was still spirit.

In order to maintain and bolster this spirit, another tradition was created. This was T.A.S. night. “Tradition, Allegiance and Spirit” was a creation of Don Daber. Something like this was needed, and it would eventually prove its worth.

The purpose was to foster spirit and, if there were sparks, turn them into flames. A night was set aside for this, and it was a good way to make a guy feel at home. After one of these sessions everyone, new and old would know each other better. All would truly feel themselves to be Optimists. It also served to renew feelings of any members who may have been flagging in enthusiasm. If there were any, it would not have been many.

The serious side of all this was to promote and foster the spirit needed for regaining the Canadian Championship, making the Optimists number one in Canada again. It was a worthy goal, but one that no other Corps felt the need to attain quite so much. Vince Lombardi would have felt right at home here.

Behind all this, the years of pressure, the work, the victories, lay another Corps that we have barely glimpsed... the fun Corps.

Pictures from those years show happy smiling faces, not grim, serious ones. People happy with what they were into. When girls entered the picture, this was even



1970: Toronto Optimists (CNE)



more evident. Their presence had a good effect. This momentous change was not far off, beginning in the colour guard and spreading throughout.



1970: Toronto Optimists Guard (Shrine Parade)

The picture of grim dedication painted so far, year after year, in pursuit of victory after victory, was partially true; but it was also a lot of fun, for all. Most intensity and grimness was reserved for the field. Win or lose, the high spirits could not be contained for long. Had it been any other way, it would have ended long ago.

For some, leaving the Corps could be a major blow. Aging out, as it is often called, sooner or later affected everyone. If the Corps

was one's foremost preoccupation. Leaving the corps could leave a big gap in one's life. Those who had other interests did not find it so disastrous. Most people adjusted well and fitted into their place in society, which would have been their norm, Corps or no Corps.

This year was to produce some upsets that were totally unexpected. The Optimists were aware that it would not be an easy year for them (or anyone) but were not prepared to lie down on the job.

## The Shriners International

As was now commonplace, there were lots of contests this year. The first one of which we are aware is the Shriners International. In its sixth year, this had now become a major event, not just in Canada but in North America. It was still held in the CNE Stadium in Toronto, drawing crowds of many thousands. Here, this year, one of the major upsets took place. In fourth with a score of seventy-five, were the La Salle Cadets, who defeated De La Salle, in fifth place, by three points. Sixth, seven points back of La Salle, thereby, four behind De La Salle, were the Optimists. That La Salle was on top and the Optimists on the bottom, by a big margin, was the upset here. The top Americans, Racine Kilties, 27th Lancers, and St. Josephs had scores of 78, 76, 76, respectively, not that far ahead of



1970: Toronto Optimists



the surging La Salle Cadets. One might think that these results would set the pace for the year, but it was not to be. Changes would come.

## Overage Members

De La Salle, this year, was to fare better against the United States Corps than any Canadian Corps had ever done – including the Optimists in their heyday. With a powerful Corps, they were to place eight tenths behind Chicago and 1.6 behind the awesome Casper Troopers. Regardless of this, they were still to experience some difficulty in Canada, in two areas. One was on the field and one was the use of overage people. This issue had often arose in Drum Corps and usually caused bitterness and hostility. It was to do so now.

It began before the Shrine Contest, when the Optimists made the C.D.C.A. aware of their suspicions. No action was taken until a later date, at the North American Invitational, to be exact. At this time, the Optimists received a reply to their enquiries to the C.D.C.A. After the Invitational, the Optimists went over to De La Salle and picked out all the overage members of whom they were aware (five in all). Someone must have done some research. The matter was then brought before the C.D.C.A. for resolution by trial.

Del was given two choices. Pay a fine or forfeit the right to compete in the Provincial and National championships and leave the association. An added penalty was giving up prize money won at the North Americans, as well as relegation to last place in the standings of this event. This would put them in seventh place, behind the Optimists. That they chose to pay the fine is shown by the fact that they did compete in the two contests mentioned. After this, relations between the Optimists and De La Salle, already bad, became worse. Many letters were written to Drum Corps publications concerning this matter, and they were not unanimous in their conclusions.

De La Salle also filed counter charges against the Optimists, which were investigated and thrown out.

Of the many letters written, pro and con, one of the most telling was from a Claude Brisebois of La Salle Cadets. He was an ex-director of this corps and freely admitted that they had used overage members. He maintained that they could not have survived without them. It must be said that such open statements were skirting danger and may have been linked to the fact that he was an ex-director.

With this, the matter came to a close. It can aptly be summed up in a slightly altered version of an old adage – “All’s fair in love and war and, it seems, Drum Corps”.



1970: La Salle Cadets (Varsity Stadium)

Back in the real world of Corps activity, La Salle Cadets won the Provincial Championship. This was a first. Del was two points back and the Optimists another five back, in third. The chances for their regaining the National title did not appear good.

The earlier mentioned lack of information regarding this year now comes into play. Research conducted from an Optimist perspective would not reveal much because not much was being said, or written, about them. One aspect of not being champions or, as it now seemed, even contenders. What happened during most of the season as far as the Optimists were concerned remains unrecorded. Enough is known to be able to say that their drive to regain their title petered out. In fact, it never picked up enough steam to be a serious threat to anyone.

## Nationals

De La Salle won the National title, for the second year in a row, edging out La Salle by 0.85. La Salle, though, had given them much reason for concern during the year. The Optimists had not.

The goals that the Optimists had set were maybe a little too high, but in striving for them, they had achieved something. They were still in existence. They hadn't folded up. They weren't in the basement. They were still respectable. There was a good foundation on which to build, and again, aim for the top. They would always do this.



1970: Toronto Optimists (Nationals)

## Corps Banquet

The 9th Annual Awards Dinner was held at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Scarborough. The



1970: Toronto Optimists

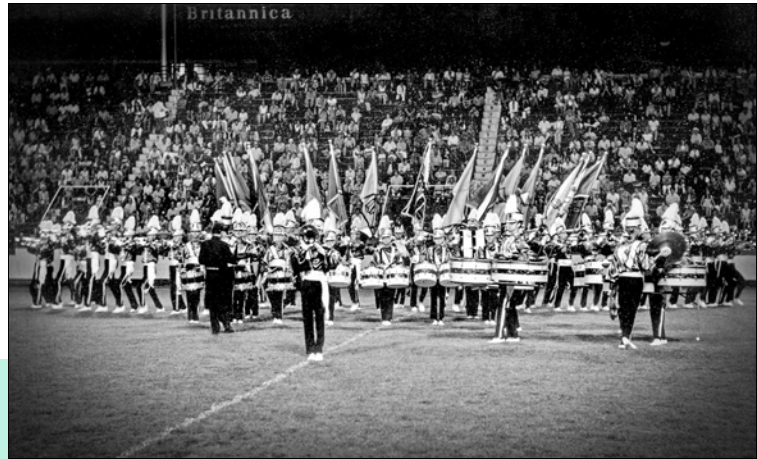
K of C and Optimists were, it appeared, hand in glove. The affair was sponsored by the Optimist Club of Toronto and was opened by Al Baggs. He had been a member of the club since he had persuaded them to take over the Corps in 1955. For the club, this was a momentous occasion, more than just a dinner. It was a farewell. They were giving up their sponsorship of the Corps and for sound reasons.



## Downtown Optimist Club stops sponsoring the Corps

As a sponsor, the club had been flawless, and the fact that the Corps was no longer the champions they had once been, had no bearing at all on their decision. Anything the Corps had needed to keep functioning had been provided without question. Yet direct control had been minimal. Just one person from the Corps was required, once a year, to give an accounting to a club member. Occasionally, a club member would show up at a Corps activity, only to see what was going on. All direction and instruction of the Corps was left to those responsible for it. Many professional sports organizations would envy such a situation.

What had brought this decision to relinquish the reins, of course, was that the Corps had become a victim of its own success and longevity.



1970: Toronto Optimists

In 1955, and even 1958, trips were far less frequent and much less distant. Many shows were local, requiring no buses or other expenses. The growing success and renown of the Optimists, combined with parallel growth of the Drum Corps movement in general, had changed all that. Financial support was now necessary to a degree that the Optimist Club was no longer prepared to underwrite. An activity that, in light of other club activities, was truly a minor endeavour, was becoming a major financial drain. This and this alone was the reason for giving up the sponsorship.

Setbacks, blunders, almost anything you could think of had happened to the Corps in the past. The club had, without fail, always remained stalwart in its support. Such drastic changes are usually not the result of a snap decision, or effected overnight. As early as the month of May 1970, steps had been taken, in the knowledge of



1970: Toronto Optimists

the club's decision, to provide an alternative. Without these plans being made, the club decision to pull out would have meant the end of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps.

## Creation of The Optimist Club of York-Toronto

The Corps had build up a lot of supporters, friends, and allies, over the years. These now, voluntarily, came into play. A new club, "The Optimist Club of York-Toronto" was formed. Its sole purpose was to support the Corps, which at this stage was enough.



The new club was given an official charter in May of 1970 and even admitted into the ranks of Optimist International. These actions, though adding legitimacy, in no way had a bearing on the function of the new club, which was to solely support the Optimist Corps and its offshoot, the Optimist Cadets.

The new sponsor was at first composed of Corps executive, parents, and alumnae. A field representative of Optimist International, from St. Louis, came up to help organize and select a name. To make it all nice and proper, the new club purchased the Corps from the old club for the princely sum of \$1.00. The first president was Al Tierney. Under his direction, it would flourish, as would the corps. All this, too, without missing a beat, so to speak.

## Back to the Corps Banquet

Having digressed some, we are still at the 1970 Corps Dinner. The guest speaker, always someone of note, was Mr. Tom Kendall, President of Kendall Oil of Canada. He received a thank you from the Corps.

The next speaker, now a major player, as he had been for a while, was Mr. Al Tierney. He gave Corps rings to Vern Johansson and George Tamaki, for years of sticking it out. They had, through thick and thin. Another award, most deserved, was given to Al Baggs for outstanding service to the Corps. For anyone who had read this far, there is really no need of explanation.

Bob Barnes, Don Daber, Joe Gianna, Paul Thompson, and Ron Kaiser all gave out membership certificates to their respective sections. Don Daber gave three rookie pins to three new equipment managers. Unsung heroes all, their names repose in the hidden recesses of someone's archives but not mine. Mr. Daber also mentioned a possible sponsorship connection with one of the boroughs in a couple of years. Strangely enough, this would come about, but not in the way he had in mind at this time.

The evening ended with the announcement of a new Drum Major for next year. Mike Arsenault. Gord Robinson wished all good luck and the Corps song was sung to close the festivities.

For the Corps itself, there were more money raising functions such as the College Bowl, and Santa



1970: Toronto Optimists (Woodstock)

Claus and Grey Cup parades to perform. The first one included the Optimist Cadets. The last one, all Drum Corps of note in the Toronto area. Finally, at a Santa Claus parade in Barrie, appeared the Optimist Lancers. The Optimist Lancers? Yes, it was a new Optimist feeder Corps, based in Etobicoke, that had been initiated under Al Tierney and the new Optimist Club. For them, this was the beginning of an unusual existence. These events really signalled the end of activity for the Corps in 1970.

Because the Corps was no longer tops in their region, nor even close to it, they were more or less left out of it. Yet, it was possibly the biggest upheaval in Junior Drum Corps since the introduction of the one valve bugle. It would eventually embrace all Junior Corps, including the Optimists. This, of course, was the founding of Drum Corps International<sup>16</sup>, or D.C.I. It was the creation of a number of the best Junior Corps in the United States. Its story, foundation, and development are best left to detail in another story. Enough to say here that it would change the face of the Junior Corps forever. Nobody who wanted to get anywhere could, now, disregard D.C.I. It was to become the ruling body. Drum Corps in the United States and Canada had originated from different roots so the C.D.C.A. did not cease to exist, nor did the American Legion, or V.F.W., in the U.S., those most affected by the rise of D.C.I. They just became less relevant and, in Canada, subject to conformity, as, indeed, they had been anyway.

The Optimists were not invited to be a founding member of the organization but De La Salle was. They were the current Canadian Champions and also on par with some of the founding Corps. Because past glories mean little, except to the record books, the Optimists were ignored. Rightly so! They now had no official standing, other than that of the striving contender. And not really considered a very serious one at that.

How have the mighty fallen. Would things stay that way? We shall see.



1970: Toronto Optimists Montage by Randy Cochrane

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<sup>16</sup>. *Drum Corps International was founded in 1972.*



## Chapter 21: 1971 – Strange But True

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

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



1971: Paul Thompson and the Toronto Optimists

Don Daber was still the corps director, beginning his ninth year in this position. Bugles were now under the direction of Paul Thompson, a graduate of the Cadets and the Optimists. He had taken over from Barry Bell in 1969. Was Barry finally fading out of the scene? Not exactly! He would always remain a supporter, fan, advisor, and club member filling a valuable but now accessory role. As with Lorne Ferrazzutti, his departure left a big hole to fill and whoever replaced him, would have a challenging job. The man to do this was Paul Thompson. Again, as with Lorne, Barry Bell cannot be dismissed so briefly. Barry was one of the founding members, the main bugle instructor until now and, without a doubt, the main driving force behind the Corps. He was mostly responsible for changes that moved the Corps from its effective but dated origin into more up-to-date methods. This enabled the Corps to compete successfully at a higher level. Beyond this, his dedication was undeniable, never missing any rehearsal other than for personal, health, or



1971: Toronto Optimists



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



1971: Toronto Optimists rifles

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

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

For the first time in history, girls were to be allowed into the Optimist organization. They would form a colour guard/drill team for competition purposes, preparing to enter circuit competition. More than this, if not enough boys could be found for the Corps guard itself, they would become part of the secondary colour section of the Junior Corps.

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



1971: Toronto Optimists

## Canadian Drum Corps Association

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

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

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

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

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



1971: Toronto Optimists in a parade with tymps on wheels



1971: Toronto Optimists on parade

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

At the individual and small group contest, those not now in the



C.D.C.A. were designated “open class”. The “open class” snare drum category was won by Larry Blandford of the Optimists. Dana Burrage on solo tenor and John Baye on solo rudimental base also won their events, with the Tim Tom drum duet placing second. All of these were Optimists.

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

There were to be more unusual things due to this unusual situation. One of them took place on April 24th – 25th. The three Ontario Corps, De La Salle, Optimists, and the Midlanders held a combined seminar/concert weekend. It was sponsored by a new record company called “Corpdisc”. Three knowledgeable instructors were hired whose names remain unknown as of this date, to conduct the seminars. After this, the three Corps held a concert at De La Salle College. Such things would help to cement the rift that had appeared, and help pave the way for later events. Coincident to this, it was also pushing the Optimists and De La Salle into co-operating more closely than would surely be normal. As the old saying says, “Politics makes strange bedfellows”.

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

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



1971: Toronto Optimists colour guard in competition (St. Mike's)

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

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



## The 1971 Season

### A loss to Scarborough Firefighters

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

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

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



1971: Scarborough Firefighters (CNE)

### Shriners International

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

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

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



1971: Toronto Optimists (Shriners)

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

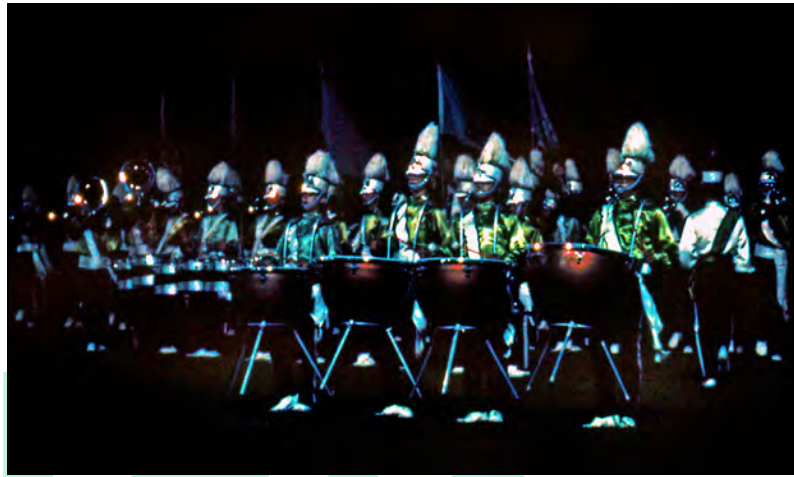
Here is what did take place. They placed a lowly second last again, in a mixed field of Canadian and American Corps that included both De La Salle and La Salle Cadets. They were the last place Canadian Corps. It appeared that current trends would continue, unless the rebuilding effort began to bear fruit.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

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

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

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

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



1971: Toronto Optimists



1971: Toronto Optimists initiations

## Alhambra Invitational

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

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



1971: Toronto Optimists

## CNE Invitational

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

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



1971: Toronto Optimists (CNE Invitational)

An organization by the name of the Canadian Open National Commission sponsored the Canadian "Open" Junior "A" Championship. This was the outfit set-up to run a contest for those Corps who had left the C.D.C.A. Although it was called a Junior "A" Championship, the real title would be the one awarded by the C.D.C.A. since they were still the ruling body. No information being available for this affair, we move on to ever more murky situations.



## Ontario Provincial Championship

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



1971: Toronto Optimists

## Canadian National Invitational

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

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

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



1971: Toronto Optimists (CNE)

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

## Canadian Championship

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

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

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

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

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

This, to all intents and purposes, was the end of the Canadian Drum Corps season. It had seen the Optimists hit their lowest point ever. It had also seen them pull themselves up to within four points of the De La Salle powerhouse during the course of the year. If ambitions and hopes remained unfulfilled, at least the progress made was encouraging. The Corps



1971: Toronto Optimists

spirit that had always existed was still there. Without that, they would not have done what they had. It was a reason for taking an optimistic outlook when looking ahead to 1972.

There is always next year.



## Chapter 22: 1972 – What Will Be, Will Be

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



1972: Toronto Optimists Full Corps photo (US Open)

### News

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

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

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

The Shriners contest, a big attraction, was changing its location from Toronto to Hamilton, Ontario. Since its inception, it had been held in Toronto. CNE Stadium, where it had been



held, was to be equipped with new drainage and artificial turf. This was for the Toronto Argonauts football team, whose stadium it was. The alterations would not be complete by the contest date, June 17th. Choosing to stick with the set date, the contest committee had to change the location. Hamilton Civic Stadium, now Ivor Wynne Stadium, became the new location. It turned out that this hurt neither the contest nor the crowd.

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

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

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



1972: Toronto Optimists (Big 10 Finals, Hamilton)

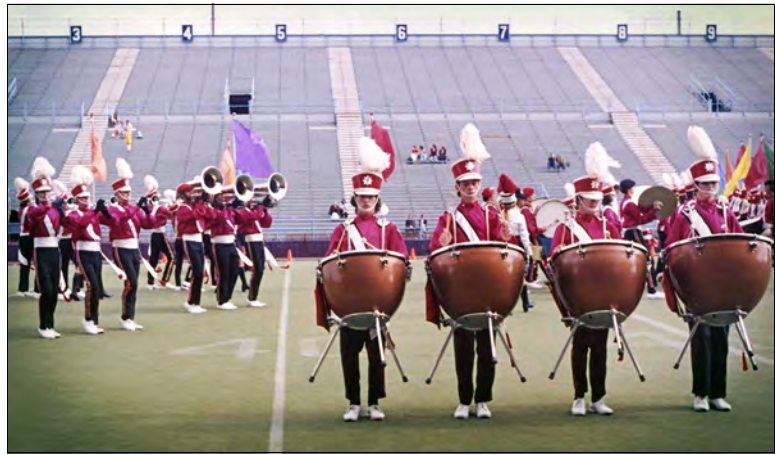
The next item of news was of significance mostly to the Optimists. The indestructible, indefatigable, overworked Don Daber stepped down as Director of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. He had filled this position for nine years and seen the Corps through some of its best, and worst, years.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

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

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

Scarborough Firefighters, now the Scarborough Princemen, having been taken over by the borough from the fire department, would sponsor this year's Ontario Individuals. They had done this for the last few years and usually ran a good show.

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



1972: Seneca Princemen (Big 10, Hamilton)

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

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

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

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

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

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

As far as the Optimists were concerned, they were planning to field a moderate size Corps, but with a percussion section that was large for this era. Eight snares, four double tenor, four tympani, backed up by a bass drum section and three or four cymbalists. This percussion ensemble would complement the most difficult music program in the history of the Corps. Moves such as these demonstrated that the Corps was still committed to moving onward and upward, aiming, yet again, to gain the coveted National title.

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

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

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

The Canadian National Championship in this category was held in Guelph, Ontario, April 22, 1972. After practising all morning in Toronto, where the show was broken down into details to



1972: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE)



1972: Toronto Optimists at the "Big 10"

improve its execution, off they went. Appearing thirteenth, they placed ninth, for a new guard, this was not bad. Above them in sixth was the Scarborough Princemen, and in first, the Canadian Ambassadors of St. Catharines.

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



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

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

## Girls in the Colour Guard

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

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



1972: Toronto Optimists first female rookies (Camp)

The promising Etobicoke Corps, the Crusaders, held an indoor concert on May 13th. It included almost all local Corps. The Optimists, in an unusual display, showed a flashing red light, with the number "12" on it. This could be interpreted as a show of confidence as regards their ambitions this year. It was unusual, because such displays of intent were not often promoted. It did, though, signal their intentions and confidence.

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

There were still some events to fulfill before the true season got underway. A parade at Ontario place saw a very poor performance in the morning. After a strenuous practice the afternoon show was much improved. The next day, and the day after, saw no poor showing. Indeed, on the third day, the Corps was seen as superb, both marching and music. The potential was evident.



1972: Toronto Optimists at Ontario Place

A parade in Hamilton on May 27th saw the Optimists and the Optimist Cadets in attendance.

The Cadets, although the first feeder Corps created since the demise of the “Peanut Squad”, were the most inexperienced at this. As a result, the Optimist Lancers became the number two concern of the York-Optimist Club. The Lancers would perform the pre-show exhibition at the Shriners Contest, a job previously handled by the Cadets.

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

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



1972: La Salle Cadets (CNE)

## 1972 Contest Season

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

## Scarborough

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

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

## Shrine Show

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

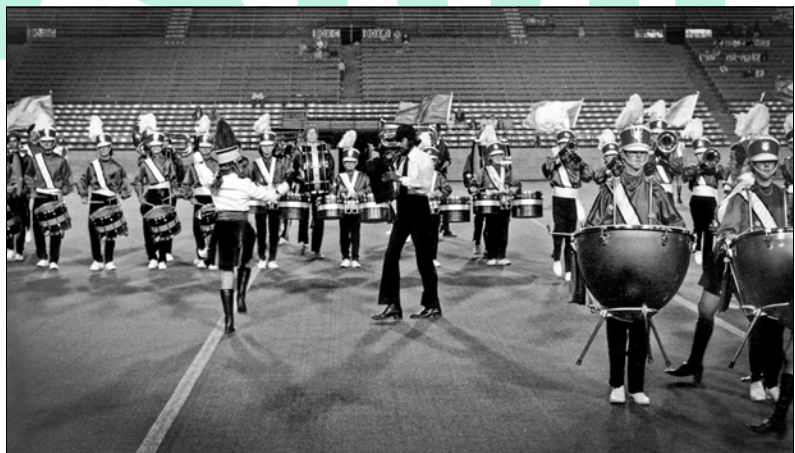
The season was yet young, so there was still time to effect change in scores and standings. This would become evident soon enough.

## Brantford

July 23rd, Brantford

1st	De La Salle. . . . .	82.25
2nd	Optimists. . . . .	77.95

A loss by 4.30! Tied for third at this show was the Etobicoke Crusaders and the Seneca Princemen, at 66.1. Note the name "Seneca Princemen". Formerly the Scarborough Firefighters, they had become the Scarborough Princemen; however, they had been somewhat rudderless since leaving the Fire Department sponsorship, and had at last accepted a good alternative. The whole Scarborough Drum Corps organization moved to the neighbouring borough of North York. There, they came under the sponsorship of Seneca College, to form the Seneca College Community Drum Corps Organization. The college, one of the fine community colleges in the Metropolitan Toronto area, offered to sponsor this as a student and community service. It would be open to all. The Junior "A" Corps became the Seneca College Princemen, soon to become just the Seneca Princemen. The Junior "C" Corps, once the "Sparkies", would become the Seneca College Knights.



1972: Scarborough Princemen



Back to the main topic, the competitive scene.

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

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

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

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



1972: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE)

### **Ogdensburg & Kingston, NY**

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

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

## Overtime in Marion, OH

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

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

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

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



1972: La Salle Cadets (Hamilton)



1972: Toronto Optimists Tymps (CNE)



## Windsor

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

Again, the now familiar line-up appeared.

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

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

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

Before the major showdown of the championship, which really is the one everybody wants to win, the Optimists had two good contests. Information is lacking regarding the first, in Titusville, Pennsylvania<sup>17</sup>. The Corps had been doing this one as long as anyone could remember. They were popular there, and probably could have become the town band, had the town wanted one. This affair, though, was but a prelude to what was to be one of the most exciting weekends in Canadian Junior Drum Corps since 1969.

## The Big 10

The Canadian counterpart of D.C.I., Drum Corps Canada, had scheduled its first Annual Championship to be held in Hamilton, Ontario, on September 2nd. This was only one day before the Canadian National Championship, to be held in Toronto. It could almost be considered a preview of the Nationals because fifteen of Canada's top Junior Corps would participate. Of this fifteen, only ten would reach the finals. This is why it was called the "Big 10" Championship.

It was running in conflict with another show, the Central Canada Circuit Championship,



1972: Toronto Optimists (Big 10, Hamilton)

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<sup>17</sup>. Editor's note: De La Salle won with 75.75; Optimists were second with 73.05



held on the same day. No matter, the Big 10 must have attracted the most attention. All the perennial rivals were in it and, although no major changes in standings had yet occurred, there was always a possibility.

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

As already noted, these were:

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

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

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

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

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



1972: Seneca Princemen Colour Guard (Hamilton)

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

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

The results were:

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

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

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

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

The actual scores were:

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

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

### Canadian National Championship

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

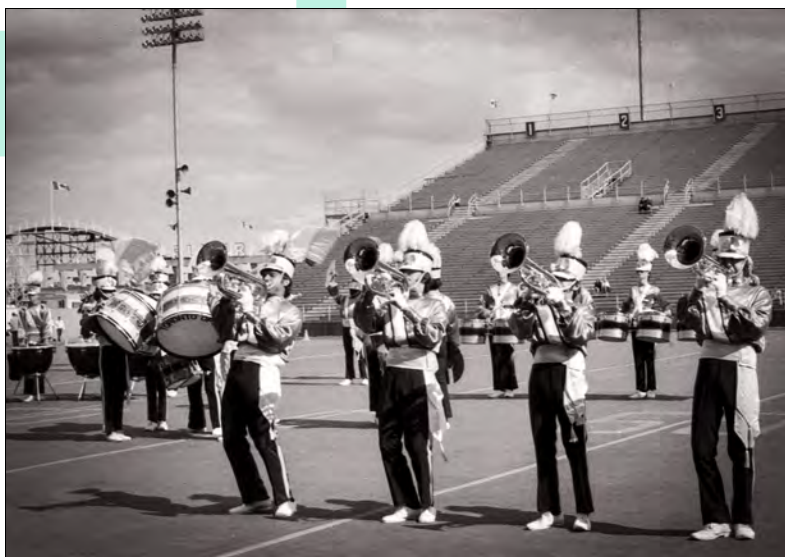
At the CNE Stadium, the next day, the promise of the previous paragraph was fulfilled as if it had been planned that way. For the Corps involved, it was nerve-wracking. For the fans, it was unprecedented suspense, ranging from euphoria to disappointment. The thrill of victory, the agony of defeat. What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

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

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

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

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



1972: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE)

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

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

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

Now what? Where would all this end?

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

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

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

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

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

Everyone was within 0.15! A crackerjack outcome.



1972: Drum majors on Retreat (Nationals)



1972: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE)



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

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



1972: Toronto Optimists with trophy for their 12th National title



1972: Toronto Optimists 12 Nationals  
Button

## Chapter 23: 1973 – What Now

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

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

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

Some of the items available were:

T-Shirts: official Corps, crest in... LG, MED, SM... \$2.00	
front, in green..... Boys LG..... \$1.75	
1972 Record (both field show and studio versions). .. \$2.00	
Number “12” Buttons – 3” size..... \$0.75	
Decal, in green, black, white..... \$0.25	
Pennant, white on green 6" x 18".. .. 0.50	
G.C.C.. .. 25¢ each, \$2.50 per subscription	
Optimist Pens. .... \$1.00	

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

## News and Changes

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



1973: Some corps members

Rex Martin moved up in the club ranks to become a vice-president.

He had already been involved. Now, he was responsible for communications, publicity, dinner meetings, speakers and Sgt. at Arms. A big job, but the club felt he was up to it. He was!

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



1973: Mike Arsenault, Toronto Optimists' Drum Major

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



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

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

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

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



1973: Toronto Optimists Rifle Line

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

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

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

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

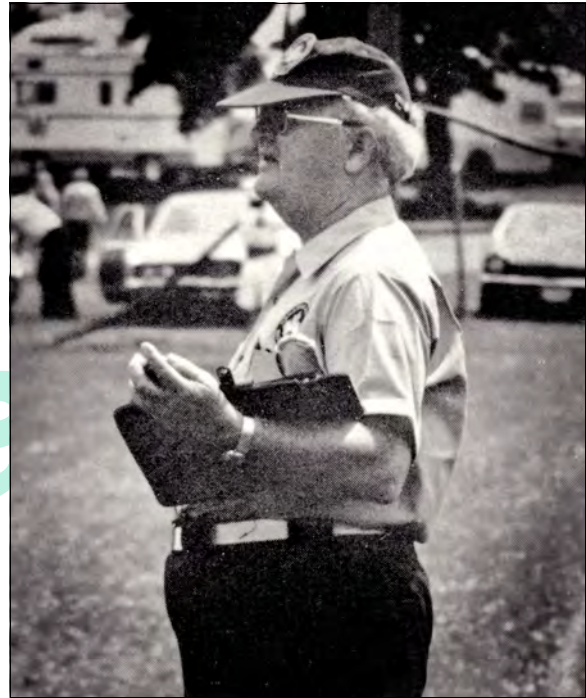
Rookie of the year was Corrie Branton, one of the original Optimist’s Guard. Corpsman of the year was one Peter Byrne, a man with a future. The Corps had worked hard in 1972, but was made aware that it now was committed to make vision ’73 a reality.

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

### Al Tierney

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

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



Al Tierney

Late in 1969, Don Daber retired as Corps Director for the first time, and Al became the interim Director. When the original sponsor quit, they gave the Corps a year's notice, in order to decide



1973: Toronto Optimists

what to do. It was under Al that a steering committee was formed, from which emerged the new York-Toronto Optimist Club. Forty members of the executive, and parents, constituted this first club, with Al Tierney being elected as Charter President. He resigned as Corps Director, and the position reverted to Don Daber. He got no rest. Actually, the first step of the new club was to start the Lancers, with \$500 from the club and a further \$500 from the Cadets.

Later that spring, the club took over the Cadets and, in September, the Junior Corps. Al remained as President of the club until September 1971 when he was succeeded by Bill Stevenson. When Al had to move to the Brantford area, he still remained a member of both the club and the Board of Directors. Even then, he became the first (temporary) Commissioner of Drum Corps in Canada and was appointed to the Board of Directors of the C.D.C.A.. On top of this, he became Director of "Information Drum Corps", the official newsletter of the C.D.C.A. Phew! Quite a record! We shall, believe it or not, see him again.

The Optimist Cadets were very active, with trips here, visits there, etc. Bob Davidson was the drill



1973: Toronto Optimists concert formation

instructor, as he had been in the past. A uniform committee was established to look at designs and material, and people for sewing them. One change was that of allowing girls in. After all, the Junior Corps had them. In fact, their entire guard now consisted of girls, so successful were they. The Cadets now had an "Optimiss" guard. The manager was Mrs. Stevenson, who raised the total from six to twenty-four.

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

The Ladies Auxiliary never ceased to make its presence felt. This was a new one, formed on October 22, 1972. They had run the club's victory dance for that year, and the rummage sale. This was under Jeanette Arsenault, and the proceeds financed the banquet. Dorothy Kane handled the banquet, probably with capable assistance. They had many things planned for 1973, including catering a Monte Carlo Night, selling coffee and sandwiches at Corps Guard competitions, catering the "Wearing of the Green" dance in March as well as Bridge and Euchre parties. Later, they made

uniform bags and cummerbunds. Leading in this was one Helen Fossey, but there were others whose names must remain obscure. This has happened before. All involved were worth their weight in gold, because without them all these events would not have taken place. Maybe the Corps itself would have ceased without the extra funds that these endeavours either brought in or saved.



1973: Toronto Optimists



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

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

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

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



Promo Shot: members of Lancers, Cadets & Optimists



1973: Larry & Cheryl get engaged

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

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

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

Another clever scheme for money raising was the saving of Dominion store tapes. It was possible to get a colour TV if there were enough of them. The TV could then be

raffled off. These tapes were to be given to Doreen Botterweg. Botterweg! A name that meant a lot and should have been mentioned before. Evert and Doreen Botterweg were the kind of people every Corps should have. Responsible for one member of their household in the Corps, they became responsible for much of the Corps and its activities. Doreen, along with others, was a stalwart member of the Ladies Auxiliary. Evert's specialty became the equipment



1973: Toronto Optimists

department. The Optimists had long had an equipment department, run well by good people. Under Evert Botterweg, as the Corps grew in size, the department kept pace in capacity and appropriate organization. A strapping ex-Dutch naval officer, he applied his abilities and built the Optimist equipment department into one of the best in North America. Possibly the best. This was verified by the offers from other top Corps, with commensurate salary, to go and organize the same for them. He knew all the ropes, and things only went wrong if his directions were ignored.

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

## The Contest Season

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

### June Contests

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

1st	La Salle Cadets.. . . .	60.1
2nd	Optimists.....	53.90
3rd	De La Salle.....	51.25
4th	4th Brigade.....	42.35

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

### June 3rd

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



1973: Toronto Optimists



June 9th

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

Etobicoke Crusaders upset the Seneca Princemen

June 16th

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

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



1973: Toronto Optimists drums

June 17th

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

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

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

### Off to the Midwest

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

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



1973: Toronto Optimists



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

### **On to Ford Du Lac, Wisconsin.**

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

### **East Troy, Wisconsin**

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

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

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

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

### **Racine, Wisconsin, the next day**

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

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

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

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

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



1973: Toronto Optimists Drums

## Toronto – Hamilton – Brantford

### Toronto

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

The results:

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

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

### Hamilton

Next night – same problem.

- 1st La Salle..... 73.45
- 2nd Del..... 73.05
- 3rd Optimists..... 72.00

Again, execution left something to be desired.

### Brantford

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

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

### Tour Two

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

### Batavia

For the Optimists, this would be the worst weekend of the year. The absence of Don Daber was sorely felt on the first part of the



1973: Toronto Optimists

tour. They scored poorly in Batavia and the US Open in Marion, with nothing to show for it but \$900 worth of ruined plumes.

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

## Marion, OH

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



1973: Toronto Optimists Full Corps photo (US Open)

## Windsor

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

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

Much work was needed!



## Drugs, Resignations and expulsions

Worse was to come. After the rehearsal following the Windsor show, the Director and Music Director handed in resignations. The Corps seemed ready to be folded. After another rehearsal, and an all evening meeting, six members were expelled. Another twelve were cited for less harsh disciplinary measures. The continent-wide plague of drug use had finally caught up with the Optimists. Nothing in the entire history of the Corps had ever caused such an upheaval. Drugs

had always been banned from the Corps. The rule had been laid down in May, at camp. It was stated that the executive would resign if this rule was broken. It was. Resignations came. Why should they, or anyone, risk their freedom. It was illegal and still is. Those in charge would have got some backlash had the authorities been aware of this. The people doing it were old enough to know this. Somehow, the breach was papered over, resolved, and the Corps continued. But, it was a serious internal matter that may have had an influence on events later on.



1973: Toronto Optimists

## Titusville

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

## On to Nationals

One week to go and one more contest before Nationals.

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

“Don’t count the Optimists out until Nationals retreat” was an



1973: Toronto Optimists tymps

unspoken thought on many minds. In the finals, the Corps took the spotlight and glitter from all the others. They put on their best show of the year. Spirited and driving.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



1973: Toronto Optimists drumline

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

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



## Chapter 24: 1974

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

John Robins was now the President of the C.D.C.A. Part of the activities during this weekend was the awarding of plaques for outstanding service and dedication to Canadian Drum Corps. Recipients of these honours included Don Daber, Al Tierney and Dick Brown. A special award was given to Al Baggs, former Chief Judge of the C.J.A. These were only part of the awards ceremony. All these men had, at one time in their careers, been connected with the Optimists Drum Corps.

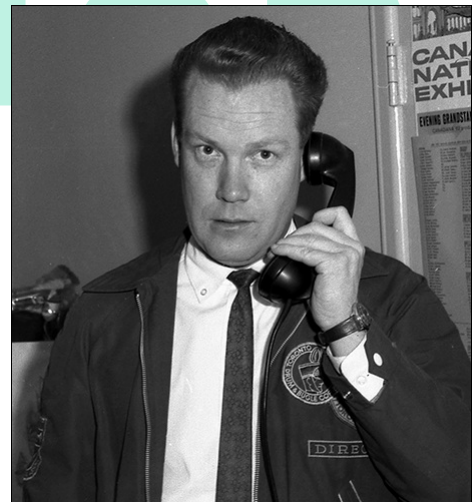


1974: Toronto Optimists

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

### Don Daber

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



Don Daber



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



1974: Toronto Optimists (CNE)

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

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

## Back to Symposium 1974

Still at the Symposium, another award made its debut that night. This award was picked by,



1974: Toronto Optimists Tymphs (CNE)

donated by, and presented by the Canadian Judges Association. It was to be an annual award, presented to the Corps that had made the most improvement. The first winner was none other than the Optimist Lancers of Etobicoke.

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

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

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

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



1974: Toronto Optimists in a parade

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

Senior-wise, Les Diplomates de Quebec were alive and well; however, the Syracuse Brigadiers were gone. Was it lack of interest? Syracuse had been one of the finest Senior Drum Corps, ever. They

had, at one time or another, beaten everybody. It was from them that Eric Burton first learned some of the ropes of colour guard operation, helping the Optimists get off the ground.

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

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

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

More fun ahead!



## Other News

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

Locally, the Shriners contest was now defunct, the last contest having been held in 1972. Even though it had always made money overage problems brought hassles and disqualifications that made it seem too much trouble. The Corps had cut their own throat. Partially compensating for this would be the "Canadian Classic" on June 22nd and D.C.I. North on August 11th.

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

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

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

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



1974: Toronto Optimists (CNE)



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

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

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



1974: Toronto Optimists (CNE)

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

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

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



1974: Barb and Cathy

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

## Contest Season

### Ajax

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

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

A low third place.

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

### Quebec

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

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



1974: Toronto Optimists rifles in a parade

### Guelph, July 20th

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

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

## DCI North, August 11

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



1974: Toronto Optimists



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

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

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

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

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

Their two dogged rivals on this night were the Seneca Princeton and the Etobicoke Crusaders. Where La Salle Cadets were is a mystery. The Seneca Princemen did the finest show that a writer for Drum Corps America Magazine had ever seen them perform. They, also, turned on. New bodies had been added to their Corps, which was cheered lustily by all the De La Salle fans present. Negatively, they booed everybody else. It was not hard to determine their hopes for the outcome.

To show the extent of the rain, a “Drum Majors only” retreat was arranged.

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

And the Optimists? Despite putting on their best show of the



1974: Toronto Optimists horns (CNE)

year weather and size had proved obstacles that could not be overcome. Indeed, they only managed to claim second place by 0.85 over the Etobicoke Crusaders. No matter, what had happened could not be changed, was now history. Next year would come soon enough! The Seneca Princemen were the Canadian National Junior Drum and Bugle Corps Champions for 1974. Congratulations to them.

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

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

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

Terry McKolskey was back with his original Corps, as the bugle instructor. In the interim, he had become a member of the Canadian Judges Association (C.J.A.), as well as a member of the D.C.I. Judges Chapter. As bugle instructor for the Optimists, he would have assistance from Kevin Martin and Peter Byrne, a five-year marching member. For Mr. Kaiser, this would be his fourteenth year with the Corps, eclipsed only by Don Daber. Greg Oxenham and Jack Roberts would handle drill. 1974 was the first year on drill for Greg, while Jack was returning after an absence. During this he had become a C.J.A. judge.



1974: Toronto Optimists

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

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

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

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

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

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



1974: Toronto Optimists drums (CNE)

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

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



1974: Toronto Optimists Colours on retreat



## Chapter 25: 1975 – The Last Roundup

### News about the corps

The 1975 season, for the Optimists, actually began on September 2, 1974. On that date, Doug MacKenzie announced that he had been appointed Corps Director for the coming year. He would replace the over-worked Don Daber. In a short talk, he laid out his plans and vowed that the Corps would be more successful in the year to come. As if to confirm this, during the parades and exhibitions that followed the '74 Nationals, the Corp pulled itself together. A solid unit set for 1975.

Terry McKolskey, who had returned to his original Corps, this one, left again. His various talents and interests kept him on the move. Taking over full control of the bugles was Peter Byrne. He would prove more than capable.

Jack Roberts and Greg Oxenham returned on drill, which was to be designed by Gary Czapinski. His experience was extensive. He had written, and taught, the drill of the Santa Clara Vanguard, 1974 D.C.I. Champions.

His cohort, Marie Kas, had been with the Norwood Park Imperials for fourteen years. She brought her knowledge to the colour guard, as consultant.

Ron Kaiser was still Chief Drum Instructor. Winter rehearsals were to go well for the bugle line, and it got built up somewhat. The colour guard lacked only numbers during this period. Drums had the numbers but lacked ambition. They did not labour as hard as they might, which would show later in the season. At this time, though, things looked good all around. Maybe, too good!



1975: Toronto Optimists

December saw the final meeting of the York-Toronto Optimist Club for 1974. A guest speaker, Mr. Tony Kunz, a realtor, was introduced by Optimist John Bright, and thanked by Optimist Peter Shore, a lawyer. Special guests of Doug MacKenzie were Bud Jemmett and Vic Score, Corps staff members. Club members Rex Martin, Joe Gianna, President, Peter Shore, and Frank Redmond all reported on events past or planned. This club certainly kept things rolling.

### New Music

In late December, over the Christmas holiday weekend, the Corps conducted a three-day rehearsal in the Shrine Temple. Although the Shriners no longer were involved with Drum Corps, the Optimists were still allowed to use their facilities. This favourable situation would

continue indefinitely. It was owing to Mr. Gord Robinson. He was the recording secretary of the Shrine. More relevant, he was a long-time supporter of the Corps. The long practice was used to learn a new concert. "Indian Lady", as well as a medley of Judy Garland numbers. Attendance was high. Wayne Downey, of Blue Devils fame, had arranged some of it and made a special trip here to teach all this. The permanent bugle instructor was still Peter Byrne. Gord Robinson was officially thanked for his co-operation.

Ron Kaiser, with twenty-seven in his drum line, also had outside assistance. Joe Morello, of Reading Buccaneers, assisted with arrangements.

January saw the first club meeting of the New Year, held at the Holiday Inn on Warden Avenue at Highway 401. This was now the usual meeting place. It was a convivial atmosphere with formal or informal surroundings, as desired, which encouraged people to attend.

One of their ideas, unfolded on January 31st, was an Optimist Alumni reunion at a Masonic Lodge. Well attended, it was somewhat subdued. Many of these people did not know each other as, by now, the existence of the Corps had spanned a couple of generations.

### **Merging of Cadets and Lancers**

Earlier in this month, a decision was enacted. After much soul-searching and consultation with parents, it was determined that the Cadets and Lancers would march together in 1975. If capable, they would enter competition at the Junior "C" level. It would be a trial year. With the two units at opposite ends of the city; the distances involved could work against this.

A decision to either maintain this arrangement or split up again would be made after the 1975 Nationals. The executives of both units had held good rapport and would be twinned all the way. Co-directors would be Ted Baker and Dick Brown. Towards all this, three combined rehearsals had already been held, January 8th, 15th, and 19th. One hundred and ten people were involved. Because it was a trial affair, the name would be "Cadets and Lancers".



1975: Cadet Lancers

### **Green Capsule Comments**

Drum Corps News columnist, Harvey Berish, had compared "Green Capsule Comments" to some other Corps publications. He concluded that G.C.C. was the one to which he would award the Drum Corps Pulitzer Prize, had one existed, for fine journalism, continuous publication, and overall excellence. This was a tribute to Don Daber. An anniversary issue had just been put out, in the format of a regular tabloid-sized newspaper. It was the fifteenth anniversary. Don Daber was listed as editor, still. He was now ably assisted by the McCusker brothers, with stories by Vern Johansson, Vic Decloux, and John McCullough.

Comments in other publications were revealing. Ian Stott, of Ports of Call in Drum Corps News comments on lack of familiarity of today's Drum Corps music. A judge says that Scout House was the greatest crowd pleaser of all time. True. No matter where they went, or who was there, they had the crowd. It would happen today if they were still around and good. They were so different.

### C.D.C.A.

Symposium 3, the plus annual session of the C.D.C.A. was held from January 31 to February 2, at Howard Johnsons. Bill Ryder was registrar.

### The Optimists Club

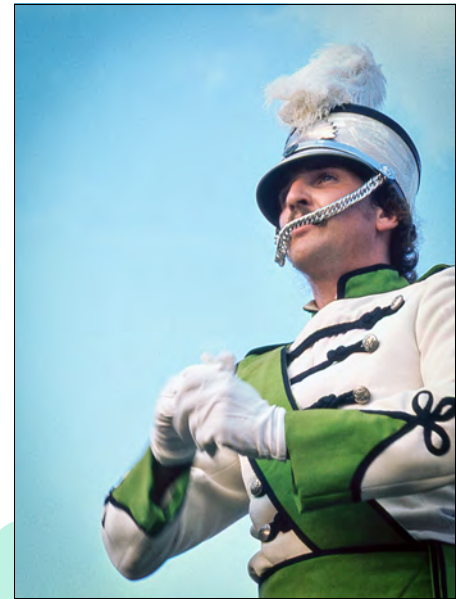
The Optimist Club of York-Toronto reconvened on February 18, 1975. This was a general meeting, with 23 in attendance. Three new members were inducted by past president, Rex Martin. They were Len Perrin, Doug Yarker and Kevin Martin. A stated goal was for each member to bring in one new one.

This was the scene of "The Great China Experience", a creation of Peter Shore. An earlier meeting of the club had revealed some picture of the scope of their activities. A planned calendar of events showed a host of ideas that were put into effect.

Some were:

February 7th. ....	Millionaires Night
March 17th. ....	"Wearing of the Green" Dance
March 27th. ....	Social Evening – Carlings Brewery
April? .....	Progressive Euchre
May 24th. ....	"Victoria Day" Dance
June? .....	B.B.Q.
July? .....	Cookout, then to a concert
Aug. ?. ....	Charter Bus to D.C.I. Finals
Sept. 13th. ....	Rummage and Bake Sale
	Social Evening at East York Curling Club
Oct.? .....	Junior Corps 1975 Banquet
Nov.? .....	Fall Dance
Dec.? .....	"Have a Merry Holiday Season"
January 1976. ....	Party for Junior Corps

Most of these events were social and recreational, combined with money raising. This list showed that the York-Toronto Optimist Club was a most effective working organization. As with the original Downtown Optimist Club, there would have been no Corps without them.



1975: Peter Byrne as Drum Major (Barantford)



## De la Salle College drops sponsorship of their Drum Corps

The most startling news of the off-season appeared in the Toronto Star, on February 8th. De La Salle, after 65 years, 17 as a Drum Corps, folded. This was news, indeed! It was an old story. They had, due to their success, outgrown their sponsor, De La Salle College. The school was no longer prepared to foot the bill. Drum Corps, especially good ones, as was De La Salle, can be very expensive to maintain. The school kept the equipment, and it looked as if there would be a big gap on the Canadian Junior scene. It did



1975: Etobicoke Oakland Crusaders

not happen, as a new entity rose from the ashes. The newly dispossessed members of De La Salle merged with the up and coming Etobicoke Crusaders. De La Salle's full name had been "De La Salle Oaklands", so the new Corps became the "Etobicoke Oakland Crusaders" Drum and Bugle Corps. Later to be known as the "Oakland Crusaders, or "Oakies". A new set of bugles and uniforms were to come, creating a unit distinctive from either of the founding Corps. The Director of the Crusaders, Mr. Bob Duggan, became the Executive Director of the new Corps. Mr. Bob Cobham, former De La Salle Director, would become Co-Director of the Crusaders. The new Corps would become a powerhouse.

This year's annual C.J.A. award for most improved Drum Corps went to the Peterborough Krescendos. In the future they would play a big part in our unfolding story.

Another club meeting in March saw Al Baggs and Harold Coulson of the Downtown Club present the Corps with a cheque for \$1,000, on behalf of the club. They were special guests,



1975: Toronto Optimists Drums

along with several alumnae; Ron Cook, Brian Hogan, Al LaVigne, Rick Robida and Rob Trimble. If we had to list all Corps Alumna, we would need another book.

At the same meeting, a treasurer's report for the York-Toronto Optimist Club showed \$2,000 put in the Junior Corps account for 1975 expenses. Rex Martin, Booster Club President, said \$1,700 from the "Wearing of the Green Dance" would go to the Corps. A suggestion was made that the alumnae could be a source of funds. Maybe, but they were a much looser, more informal group.

In March, the Dutchmen, of Kitchener, Ontario, ran a Colour Guard Contest. Eight units participated. The Optimist Guard placed second with 70.3. A 4.2 penalty did not help but they would not have won anyway. First place went to the Ventures with 79.20.

An Optimist directory was now almost a necessity to keep track of all operations. They were, at this time:

**Optimist Club of York-Toronto**

President: Joe Gianna

Secretary Treasurer: Frank Redmond

**Optimist Cadets/Lancer Drum and Bugle Corps**

Directors: Ted Baker, Dick Brown

**Optimist Cadets Booster Club**

President: Dalton Moore

**Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps**

Director: Doug MacKenzie

Assistant Director, Treasurer: Bernie White

**Toronto Optimist Booster Club**

President: Rex Martin

**Green Capsule Comments/Publicity**

Don Daber

All this organization had but one mutual object, to put the Corps on the field every year. Dominion Store tapes now went to Bud Jemmett. Canadian Tire Store coupons were collected to help with equipment truck upkeep. A Mr. McCullough was to be called if anybody had items for a rummage sale.

**Seneca Princemen**

A preview of other competition showed that the 1974 champions, the Seneca Princemen, had a full slate of instructors. On brass was Ted Key and Myron Melnyk. Mr. Key went as far back as 1956 with the Danforth Crusaders, then the Toronto Optimists. Mr. Melnyk was a De La Salle alumna. Tony Capizzano, Bob Stone, and Tom Furiano were on drill. John Cameron and Rick Hogan handled percussion.

An effective executive included:

Wolfgang Petschke. . . . . Director

John Henderson. . . . . Assistant Director

Les Hopkins. . . . . Secretary Treasurer

Ron Smith. . . . . Business Manager

Eric Ellis. . . . . Assistant Business Manager

Julia N. Martin. . . . . Publicity and Public Relations

Others were Gus Lemon, June and Frank Blakeney and John Johnson. This Corps wanted continued success.

## Other News

At the C.D.C.A. National Individual Championship, the Optimist Bugle sextet was a favourite with both the crowd and the judges. They won the prelims and the night finals. Duet rifle won the prelims, but lost the finals to Seneca. Susan Sklar won the individual rifle at the finals. A snare drum duet, Jim Stevenson and Mike O'Connor won their category, prelims and finals. Mr. Stevenson won individual snare. Such talents boded well for the general Corps future.

The Optimists had formed a circuit guard this year, as distinct from the Junior Corps colour guard. It consisted of 12 flags with 6 rifles, and was captained by Cheryl Blandford. Greg Oxenham was the guard instructor.



1975: Toronto Optimists in Brantford

Some letters in G.C.C. were interesting.

One, from a girl, complained that girls were not invited to the alumnae reunion on January 31st. It was signed "left out girl in the guard". Many of the alumnae had served in the Corps, and left it, long before girls were in. If some of this group were the reunion organizers, it could explain this omission.

A thank you note was sent to the Junior Corps Booster

Club, on behalf of the executive and membership of the Corps of 1975. It expressed the gratitude of all for a terrific evening at the March "Wearing of the Green" Dance. The authors were Doug MacKenzie and the executive of the Toronto Optimists.

Tuesday, May 27th saw the 2nd "Special Dinner Meeting". These were designed to add spice to meetings, which, had they been all business, could have become tedious. This time, the club had an "Italian Night", held at an Italian sidewalk café. All procedures were observed, guest speaker being Dr. Gordon Stewart, past moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

This was a "good" club. Optimist Peter Shore thanked him for his effort. The club now had charitable licences, listed as "The Optimist Youth Development Foundation". People who made cash contributions could now use a charitable licence number to claim tax credits.

The Ways and Means Committee was now headed by Len Perrin and Doug Yarker. Other members included Ross Cation, Jack Roberts, Ron Cook and Richard Robida. All of the people were former marching members, some as far back as 1958 and before.

Events in May, before the opening of the season, saw the Corps in concert at Birchmount Collegiate. The crowd was not as large as expected, but all monies made were turned over to the Corps.



May 17th-19th, using car pools, the Corps took off to Flesherton, Ontario, for a work camp weekend. It was considered a roaring success. Competition was less than a month away.

Less of a roaring success was a “get acquainted” dance at East York Curling Club. It was for parents and friends to get acquainted with those involved in helping the Corps year round. Only 27 parents showed up.

## The Competition Season

The biggest unanswered question this year had to be “How would the new Corps, the Oakland Crusaders, stack up?” It would soon be answered.

### Welland

The Rose Festival in Welland, Ontario, on June 7th was the first meeting of the Optimists and the Oakland Crusaders. The Optimists had progressed, uninterrupted, over the winter, carrying on as usual. The new Corps, however, had not really begun to get underway until March, after the merger took place and things were organized. So although they were expected to be good, the results of this first outing were not entirely unexpected.

1st	Optimists.....	68.40
2nd	Oakland Crusaders.....	65.35
4th	Seneca Princemen. ....	52.50
5th	Peterborough Krescendos. ....	45.40

The Optimists bugle line scored 3.55 over the Oakland Corps, showing that they had not been idle while the Crusaders won drums, both captions. This showed that the Optimist line, always a strong point, had maybe relaxed a bit over the winter. Drums were, though, to become a strong point of the Oakland Corps. Both were even on marching and maneuvering. So the big difference was on bugles. And size. The Crusaders were a big corps with forty-eight horns and twenty-nine drums dressed in striking, new, blue uniforms. The Optimists had thirty-nine horns and twenty-seven drums. The horns were excellent while the drums were only down 0.5 and 0.3 in execution and general effect, respectively.

The merger of De La Salle and Etobicoke had not yet produced the superior Corps expected. Yet. The Optimists, though better prepared, were not near peaking. Yet. The Seneca Corps had, as of now, a long way to go. However, the season was just beginning and much could happen. It should be very interesting.

A week later, they were at it again.



1975: Toronto Optimists

## Waterloo

Waterloo, June 14th

1st Optimists..... 72.80  
2nd Oakland Crusaders... 72.65  
3rd Seneca Princemen. . . 62.70

Same placings, but with scores much closer. Comments already making the rounds were: “Optimists great! Like the Corps of old! Horn line ranks with the all time Optimist greats. Drum line large and proficient.”

However, partly because of this, and the fact that they had started well and were new, the Oakland Crusaders were eliciting most general interest.

Next, in Ajax, June 24<sup>th</sup>

## Ajax

For the Optimists, this was “jinx town, looser city”. In four years they had yet to win this town. So it remained. The Oakland Crusaders won their first contest, downing the Optimists for the first time in the process, 72.10 to 71.75. After a week of poor rehearsals, the Optimists came up with a hot show back in Toronto. They turned the tables, upsetting the Crusaders 77.65 to 76.35. All these scores, this early, were indecisive; however, it was starting to look as if, in Canada, this would be a “two Corps” season.

After the Ajax show, everybody from the Optimist camp went to a B.B.Q. in Morningside Park, in Scarborough. It was a great evening, with great weather, lots of food, and over two hundred in attendance, members, parents, friends, etc.



1975: Oakland Crusaders Rifles

## Tour One

Both Corps under discussion now departed on tours in the USA. For the Optimists, this was known as tour one, and lasted from July 3rd to July 6th. Leaving Toronto on July 2nd, the next day saw them in Racine, Wisconsin. This, as always, was a different league and the Corps was not totally ready. Regardless, they acquitted themselves well, placing fourth, seven points behind the Racine Kilties, in first. A score of 62.75 put them three and a half over the once unbeatable Casper Troopers.

Next day, there were two parades. It was July 4th, American Independence Day. This was in Columbus, Wisconsin, and an improvement was recorded. In third place were the Optimists,

now nine points out of first, which was held by the Royal Crusaders (not the Oakland Crusaders). Strange business this. Or was it?

After a stay over in Columbus, it was on to Manitowoc. During the parade, the Corps was cheered. After the contest, the judges were booed. Royal Crusaders, with 72.45, were first, over Kilties, over Phantom Regiment and over the Optimists. Way back in fourth, the Optimists had 64.9. From here, west to Appleton, Wisconsin, it was the same story. Fourth, with the Kilties over the Royal Crusaders, in first, eight points over the Optimists, who had put on their best show thus far. Thankfully, it was now back to Toronto.

This tour had been a mirror image of many previous Midwest jaunts. Loved by the crowds, but not so favourable with the judges. Well, what can you do? Grin and bear it!

The Oakland Crusaders did not break any records on their tour either. A 66.75 in Alton, Illinois and, ominously a 73.6 in Michigan City, Indiana. This gave them second and third places, respectively. They were improving, so the next meeting of the two Canadian rivals should prove more than just interesting.



1975: Seneca Princemen Rifles

The last Canadian contest for the Optimists had been in Brantford on July 1st, before the tour. They had won an easy victory, eighteen points over the Peterborough Krescendos. Their score of 74.90 showed a marked decrease from their last outing in Canada.

Now, loomed the first meeting between the Optimists and the Oakland Crusaders since both had been on tour. It was at Birchmount Stadium in Scarborough, as good a field as anywhere. This new version of an old rivalry, Optimist vs De La Salle, had sparked a lot of interest and over two thousand people were in attendance. In Canada, especially for a non-championship contest, this was a lot.

### ***Birchmount Stadium***

What they saw was not totally unexpected.

1st	Oakland Crusaders.....	81.00
2nd	Optimists. ....	78.10
3rd	Seneca Princemen. ....	69.10
4th	Peterborough Krescendos. .	56.35

The Crusaders had opened up a three-point gap, with top scores on drums and bugles. Their bigger size helped, plus the fact that after the late start they were now beginning to gel. The Optimists were not finished yet, by a long shot. It was seen, though, that things would not



be easy from here on in. When had they ever been? Evening during their long unbeaten streaks, it had always required maximum effort to keep them intact.

### ***On to Toledo***

After this, it was three weeks until the next contest, in Toledo, Ohio. Things did not slide, although it could have been a vacation. The old spirit showed as turnouts for rehearsals were good, rehearsals were consistent. When they went, there were no bus problems, as had plagued tour one.

The name of the contest was the “Key to the Sea”, somewhat unusual considering Toledo’s location. However, much in Drum Corps is unusual, so maybe this was unusually usual. Significantly, this contest would be the first meeting outside of Canada, of the Optimists and Oakland Crusaders. Neutral territory.

### ***Toledo, Ohio – August 2nd***

#### **Open Class Prelims**

Here, that rarity in Drum Corps, a tie for first place. The Crusaders (Oakland) tied the Crusaders (Royal), each scoring 79.05. Our group was back in second with 75.55, just maintaining the pace vis-à-vis the Oakland Crusaders. The night finals, however, would tell a different story.

Oakland, it appeared, were improving each time out and there were no tie scores this time.

1st	Oakland Crusaders..	81.45
2nd	Royal Crusaders....	79.45
3rd	Optimists. ....	75.10

The pattern emerging here was that everybody was moving ahead; however, the Oakland Corps were moving ahead at a greater rate. The Optimists were seen to be gradually slipping behind. Oddly, the Optimist night show was much better than their afternoon show, but their score went down. At night, the Crusaders were described as “deadly”, meaning accurate. Their lead was now over six points. An effect of this “downer” was that at the next contest stop, Cleveland, Ohio, everybody, instructors included, was on each other’s backs. A tight rehearsal preceded the trip, in uniform, to the stadium, where the rain let loose.

Relaxing in the dressing room, the Corps loosened up, to good effect. Came the sun, and the Optimists went out and put on their best show of the year so far. Although the Oakland Crusaders were still ahead, the margin was now a much slimmer two points.



1975: Toronto Optimists bass Drums

Now it was back to Toronto, with the “bugle” bus arriving first. The other one was delayed due to a station wagon breakdown. Not considered a tour, this trip had seen the Corps start to pull up.

## **Tour Two**

### ***North Tonawanda***

Now, it was off on the official “tour two”. It began in North Tonawanda, NY, on August 12th. There was another bus breakdown, before leaving Toronto, delaying what should have been a 6:30 a.m. departure until 8:00 a.m. Due to this, the Corps arrived at the stadium just in time to change for the contest. A consequence of this, along with over confidence, was the worst performance of the year. This was still enough to gain third place, with a score of 75.00; however, this was the preliminaries. A good horn rehearsal and doing the show a few times amounted to good preparation for the night show. And what a show it turned out to be!



1975: Toronto Optimists

Adequate preparation paid big dividends with championship form, drive, spirit, execution and excitement. All these elements combined to bring the crowd to their feet. It also brought the Optimists first place with 83.50. Finally they were starting to get into the higher scores. This Corps was far from finished, showing spirit reminiscent of other days. If they could maintain this, anything could happen. What better place to test one’s resolve than the next show, the now accepted “Holy Grail” of modern Drum Corps, D.C.I. Nationals, Philadelphia.

### ***DCI, Philadelphia, USA***

Valley Forge – Sheraton Hotel. A fabulous place to stay. Certainly better than when George Washington had wintered his Continental army there. As far as Drum Corps were concerned, its drawback was that you could not practice there. The next day, August 14th, saw the corps, somehow, somewhere, conduct an all-day rehearsal. This was appropriate, as they were entered in the prelims on Friday, the 15th. At this, now “THE” contest, they



1975: Toronto Optimists

were on second. From a great show only days earlier, they did not perform as they were expected. Drive, which was needed to push them into the eighties, was lacking. That, and a low drum score, gave them a score of 75.0. Nobody could figure out why this had happened.

Don Whiteley, D.C.I. Publicity Director, was seen talking to Doug MacKenzie, Director, and other members of the Optimist executive. As a result of these discussions, the Corps walked a few blocks from the stadium to the Philadelphia Sick Children's Hospital. They had been asked, and agreed, to do a show for the critically ill kids.

Some of these were mentally and physically challenged. Some were even near death. The Corps had to play softly because they were only five feet from their audience, on a cramped balcony. After this good deed, it was back to the hotel to change out of uniform. This done, most of the Corps returned to the stadium to see the rest of the prelims. They were now in eleventh place. Only twelve made it to the finals.



1975: Toronto Optimists

Saturday saw the Corps practising again, in expectation of further competition. Until, that is, a

fateful phone call informed them that they were out of the finals, beaten out by the Precisionaires . The Optimists had beaten them before, four times, and each time by not less than ten points. This was an indication of their unsteady performance at the preliminaries.

Regardless, the Corps returned to the stadium to watch the night finals. These shows are too good to miss. Sunday saw them packed and ready to return home. A meeting was held with Doug MacKenzie and the executive.

Talk was of the 1976 season, even though this one was not yet over. In Canada, anyway. Jack Watt, the Business Manager, said he was pleased with the conduct of the Corps, as was the hotel. D.C.I. Nationals were now over. Optimists had jumped from 34th in 1974 to 16th where they had finally ended up this year. If it was any consolation, this was a bigger jump than anyone else had made.

## **Etobicoke**

Wednesday, August 20th – Etobicoke

With both Corps doing a poor show, the Crusaders nipped the Optimists by four full points. It continued. Ontario Championships.

1st Crusaders. . . . 84

2nd Optimists. . . . 77



## One Week to Nationals

A letter was received from the “Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia”. It expressed the thanks of the “Children’s Activity Department Play Therapy Program” for the show put on by the Corps. It said that the children had loved the music, costumes, and seeing a “parade” in a hospital.

At the D.C.I. finals, the Oakland Crusaders had placed sixth. Maybe this was why the Optimists had been talking about 1976 after their elimination. D.C.I. finals were to become an accepted indication of how the Canadian Nationals would turn out. Maybe it already was. This year, and often, subsequently, this was the case.

The Optimists had started this year on top. They had been going strong all winter and had been in good shape at the start of the season. Oakland Crusaders had not really got underway until March, after getting all the details of the merger ironed out. De La Salle had not folded until February. This union of two Corps, one a very promising up and comer, the other a well established powerhouse, had no chance to fail under the proper leadership. That leadership was present. Once this entity had got things in gear, they began to improve in leaps and bounds. They had the talent, instructors and executive. Their rate of improvement had been visually and audibly apparent to all observers. Along with this, their show was one of the most pleasing anywhere.

The Optimists, at times mediocre, at times brilliant, never bad, had shown an unusual inconsistency. This was a flaw often ascribed to others during Optimists days of supremacy. Whatever, it is not a good quality to ensure success. When the Oakland machine picked up steam, the Optimists could not catch them. Even though, at times, they pulled themselves very close.

The Seneca Princemen, small in size, defending champions, were an example of what was now, maybe always, had been a



1975: Oakland Crusaders (CDCA Nationals)



1975: Toronto Optimists (Brantford)

major factor. Size. With thirty horns and eighteen drums, they could hardly hope to win against two bigger, equally good or better, units. This factor worked against the Optimists as well. They were big enough to entertain hopes of ultimate victory, but in a toss up between equality of other factors, size would be a negative. As it was, the larger Corps was better, so such a theory was not put to the test.



1975: Toronto Optimists

### 1975 Nationals

Although the Optimists must have put on one of their best shows of the season, scoring an 84, at the Nationals, they could not upset the odds. In this, for once, general opinion was confirmed. If they, and others, notably the Seneca Princemen, wished to survive and prosper in the future, something would have to be done. Something drastic.

The run down of the 1975 Nationals was as follows.

- 1st Oakland Crusaders.... 88.30
- 2nd Optimists..... 83.70
- 3rd Seneca Princemen. ... 71.45
- 4th Krescendos. .... 62.25

These results, for the Optimists, probably held no surprises; it was why, after D.C.I. they were talking about 1976, not the Nationals. If true, it was a mood that would reappear, thus making the Canadian Nationals somewhat of an anti-climax.

Following is a brief chart of Optimist scores throughout the year. Inconsistency, to some degree, is evident throughout.

Welland..... 68.40	Appleton..... 66.80
Waterloo. .... 72.80	Birchmount. ... 78.10
Ajax..... 71.50	Toledo..... 75.10
York..... 77.65	Cleveland..... 77.50
Brantford..... 74.00	Tonawanda..... 83.50
Racine. .... 62.00	Philadelphia... 75.60
Columbus. .... 65.85	Etobicoke..... 80.50
Manatowac. .... 64.90	London..... 77.85
Nationals – Waterloo... 83.70	

The Cadets had prospered this year, and, with the people involved, this is no great surprise. Some of them were:

Ted Baker	Gus Morin	Jim Dynes
Vic Decloux	Coleen Deoni	Al Tierney
Marlene Trace	Ron Deoni	Guy Vezina
Jessie Baker	Les Gaudar	John O'Leary
Gord O'Halloran	Cathy McPherson	Nancy Hanselman
Doug MacKenzie		

## Corps Banquet

Regardless of the year and its outcome, there was always the annual banquet. This one was the fourteenth. Gord Robinson was emcee and introduced the head table. Bud Jemmett introduced the guest speaker, none other than that genial giant, doer of good works, local celebrity, Lord Athol Layton. He related his past involvement in Drum Corps, via the Shrine, and indicated an interest in further activity in this field.

Joe Gianna reviewed some of the club activities and issued an invitation to those now over twenty-one, no longer in the Corps, to consider membership. He then presented Corps rings.

Doug MacKenzie spoke about the season past and its success, which really it was. The corps was better than 1974, losing only to an unknown quantity. Plans included more exposure to big American Corps, beating the blue band more often, and new uniforms. This last would come about, but not quite in the way he had in mind at this time.



1975: Peter Byrne, George Nasello & Lord Athol Layton

Gord Robinson brought back the famous “21” mugs and gave two to Bernadette Schliebel and Barry Woods. They were now over 21. Unfortunates? Or were they? They would be back. Other recipients were Calvin Johansson and mighty McCusker.

George Nasello presented a silver service tray to Mr. and Mrs. Score, Vic and Flo. Nobody could have been worthier, his or her service having been long, hard, relentless, and unstinting. It would continue for a long time yet. They were two of the most worthy people throughout the life of the Optimists.



The current C.D.C.A. secretary-treasurer made some remarks, and Al Tierney, eloquent fellow that he was, made a good, off the cuff, speech. President Rex Martin, of the Booster Club, presented a cheque for \$1,500, raised over the past few months by rummage sale, dance, etc. The club certainly lived up to its name. He also presented pins to thirty-six rookies.

G.C.C. awards of merit, of its 15th anniversary, went to the more active 1975 staff. Other awards went to certain Corps members, no doubt for contributions. Last, but not least, Doug MacKenzie was given a "This is my last year" certificate. Joking aside, he was a long, long, time member of the Optimist clan. He had been the superb soprano soloist in 1962's the "Party's Over".

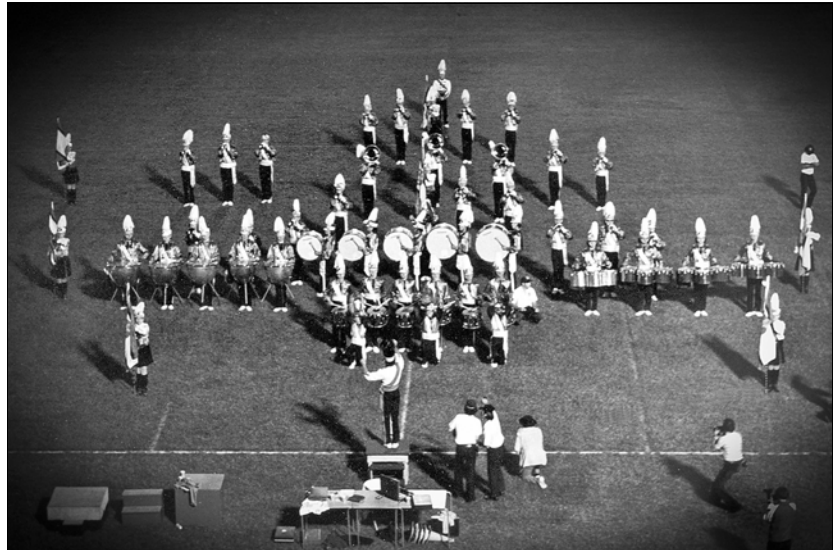
The now traditional awards were presented.

Rookie of the Year. . . . . Shaun Watt  
 Guard Award. . . . . Eileen MacKinnon  
 Most Improved Bugler. . . Allan Gillees (soprano)  
 Corpsman of the Year. . . Dave MacKinnon (mellophone)

To begin fund raising again, already (did it ever stop?), Mr. Robinson had a \$100 hamper of perfume and junk to be drawn for that evening. At \$1.00 a ticket, sold by the girl guard, well over \$100 was raised. It was a good beginning.

Winding down, a Corps film of 1975 Nationals was shown. To close the proceedings, a dance was held and a good time was had by all.

With that, the year and, no doubt, the Corps was laid to rest!



1975: Toronto Optimists



1975: Toronto Optimists (Brantford)



1975: Toronto Optimists Montage by Randy Cochrane

# Version



## Chapter 26: 1976 – An End and A Beginning

### News on the Drum Corps front

A survey of all seasonal events and parades in the Toronto area showed that all three major Junior Corps were alive and well – Oakland Crusaders, Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Princemen. These were, now, the three main Canadian Junior “A” Corps. La Salle Cadets and Metropolitains had, like a host of others over the years, departed the scene. Soon, though, another very powerful group was to emerge from a remote area of Quebec.

The current champion, Oakland Crusaders, was not fielding a competitive guard this year. In fact, it was not known if any shows at all would be held this year. The Optimists had added Tom Furiano to work with their colour guard. He was a De La Salle graduate and had worked with their guard and that of the Seneca Princemen.

The Cadet/Lancers, now of Etobicoke, had received Ontario Lottery (Wintario) grants for the purchase of new instruments and uniforms. Years later, such government largesse would dry up, due to tight, if necessary, financial readjustments.

Although D.C.I. was now the major player on the scene, its worthy predecessors, the V.F.W. and American Legion, still played an effective role in Drum Corps. The American Legion Nationals for 1976 were slated to be held from August 20th to 22nd, in Seattle, Washington. It was their 51st year of National drum corps competition. Without these two organizations, it's possible that there would be no Corps today.

Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights, after an attempted revival as a Senior Corps, were finally laid to rest. Forever. In January of 1976, Scout House was to be revived. This was one of several attempts before final demise. This one lasted for a while, as they were seen in parades.

Al Tierney was elected President of the C.D.C.A. for the 1976-77 season. He was a real workhorse. The super workhorse, Don Daber, was re-elected as Vice-President. Mr. Tierney, whose Corps career has already been briefly outlined, was a University of Toronto graduate with wartime army service. He was married with children, two of whom were responsible for him getting involved with drum corps. In December of 1975 he had left St. Johns Girls of Brantford. More relevant to our story was that he had been appointed Director of the Optimists for the 1976 competitive season. Retrospect shows that he was a good person to have around, to oversee all the changes that were in the offing.

Dick Brown, founder of the Etobicoke Lancers, had been elected Etobian of the week. This award, well intentioned, hardly reflects his work. He put together the Junior “C”



1976: Seneca Optimists rehearsing



championships, founded the Lancers and oversaw its development. Like Al Baggs, he had started in Scouting, playing in the Toronto Region Scout Trumpet Band. Also like Al Baggs, he got hooked on Drum and Bugle Corps. He was a founding member of the Midtowners Drum Corps in 1956. Later, he founded the Golden Monarchs, another Corps, under the North York Lions Club. He was Monarchs' Corps Director in 1962, and National Secretary of the C.D.C.A. In 1968, he became Treasurer of the Toronto Optimists. Shortly after, in the fall of 1969, he founded the Lancers. There is more, but I think you get the picture.



1976: Seneca Optimists (Michigan City)

The C.D.C.A. award of merit this year went to John Robins. He had been associated with Drum Corps for over twenty years. Awarded at the Annual C.D.C.A. "Symposium", Don Daber had been the first recipient. Other news from this August gathering was that Vince Macciocchi would remain as Chief Judge. New Caption Chief, bugles, would be Mr. Peter Brown while the new Caption Chief, percussion, would be Ron Kaiser. Jack Roberts held his post on M&M, while Larry Blondell retained his position for colour guards. A decision made was that D.C.I. age rules would now apply regarding Canadian Nationals.

## Toronto Optimists and Seneca Princemen merge

All of this news, interesting and relevant as it is, was overshadowed by the major news of 1976. Brought about by a chance remark, its ramifications were extensive. This was the merger of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps and the Seneca Princemen Drum and Bugle Corps. One immediate effect, of course, meant that there was now one less Corps on the scene.

### Background

The beginning of all this had its roots in 1975. Al Tierney and Wolfgang Petschke, directors of the Optimists and Princemen, while watching a show, observed that without size no Corps had much of a chance of getting anywhere. From there, it was a short step to discussing a merger. Many details had to be ironed out, politically as well as technically.

These Corps were considered two of the best in Canada and each had



1976: Seneca Optimists concert

earned these considerations because of its own traditions and methods. All this had to be reconciled. It turned out to be much easier than might have been imagined.

The Optimists held 12 Canadian National titles, 4 International titles, and 10 Ontario titles. They were the only Corps, ever, to win 11 consecutive National titles.

The Seneca Princemen also had an imposing history. Formed in 1961, as the Scarborough Firefighters Trumpet Band, they had worked up to a Drum Corps. They had outdone most other units by winning National titles at three levels. Novice Class in 1965, Junior “B” Class in 1970, and Junior “A” Class in 1974. In 1972, Seneca College became their sponsor. They hence had their own long, proud tradition.



1975: Seneca Princemen

In some quarters, this was regarded as a takeover of one Corps by a bigger

Corps. Had it been seen as such, it would not have worked as well as it did, with executive and members of both units meshing almost immediately and working smoothly, together. There was some dissatisfaction, which resulted in a falling away of some people. This is almost inevitable. We saw it in 1958 with the Optimist Trumpet Band and Danforth Crusaders. Eventually, on February 8th, after much planning, politicking, and maneuvering, here is how things settled.

### **Sponsorship, Instructors, etc.**

This would be: The Seneca Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps, Toronto, Ontario Canada. Headquarters and main indoor rehearsal place, Seneca College, Don Mills, Ontario.

Corps Director. . . . . Allan J. Tierney

Assistant Director. . . . . Wolfgang Petschke

Sponsors. . . . . Seneca College of Applied Arts & Technology  
The Optimist Club of York-Toronto Inc.

Publicity. . . . . Don Daber

#### **Instructors**

Program Co-Ordinator. . . Gary “Chops” Czapinski

Bugles. . . . . Peter Byrne, Myron Melnyk

Percussion. . . . . Sam Kays, Al Murray, Pat Irvine

Guard Co-Ordinator. . . . Marie Kas

Silks. . . . . Wendy Paquin

Rifle Instructor. . . . . Debbie Miller

Drill. . . . . Gord Oxenham, Tom Furiano, Gilles Paquin

Drum Majors. . . . . Mike Williams, Dawn Canning



Colour Guard Captain. . . . Laura King

Marching Members: 128

Bugles . . . . . 58  
Percussion . . . . . 30  
Colour Guard . . . . . 26 flags, 10 rifles  
National Colours . . . . . 2  
Commanders . . . . . 2

There it was, the new Corps. Marching members, instructors, executive, all of them experienced. Could this big new Corps challenge the one year older Corps across town? Could it make inroads into previously uncharted territory? We shall see. Anybody, who is aware of the local Corps scene, as it existed at the time, can see that the names listed are heavily in favour of the Optimists. This is true, and helped reinforce the rumour of a takeover. However, to the best of my knowledge, all of the Seneca people stayed, were used, and proved to be invaluable. The lack of friction was evident from the beginning, as the new unit, from day one, got down to work.

### A Distinct Uniform

What helped all this to happen was the selection of a uniform distinct from that of either of the founding Corps. A brilliant yellow, cadet-style uniform, replaced the green of the Optimists and the red of the Princemen. If any tears were shed, they were not evident.

What was evident was a common desire to get on with it, win Nationals, make D.C.I. These goals fuelled the machine and inspired the events of the next few years.

### The Author and the Equipment Department

We have left out one important, if subsidiary, detail. The equipment department. Mr. Evert Botterweg took the people that he needed from both Corps, moulding them into the kind of instrument that he wanted. He had been with the Optimists for many years, as had, his wife, Doreen. This couple brought with them to this new creation extensive knowledge and experience.

One more item before we move on. In 1975, your author returned to Drum Corps. I would often go to watch the Optimists, my old Corps, practice and, in the process, became familiar with some of them. At first I knew no one. Eventually, I became acquainted with



1976: the author, Colin Hedworth (centre), and the publisher, Bob Carell (striped top), with the rest of the Seneca Optimists equipment department



Mr. Evert Botterweg. Evert said that if I was going to come out as often as I did, I might as well come and work for them. I agreed, and thus, thirteen years after leaving, I was back at it. Due to all the changes, it was almost a whole new ball game, with much to be learned. So, this was how I got to be in at the start of the Seneca Optimists. And I was also in at the start of the Toronto Optimists. Then, as now, I was an eyewitness, so for the next of our tale, we shall have this to aid us.

### **Corps Schedule, Music, etc**

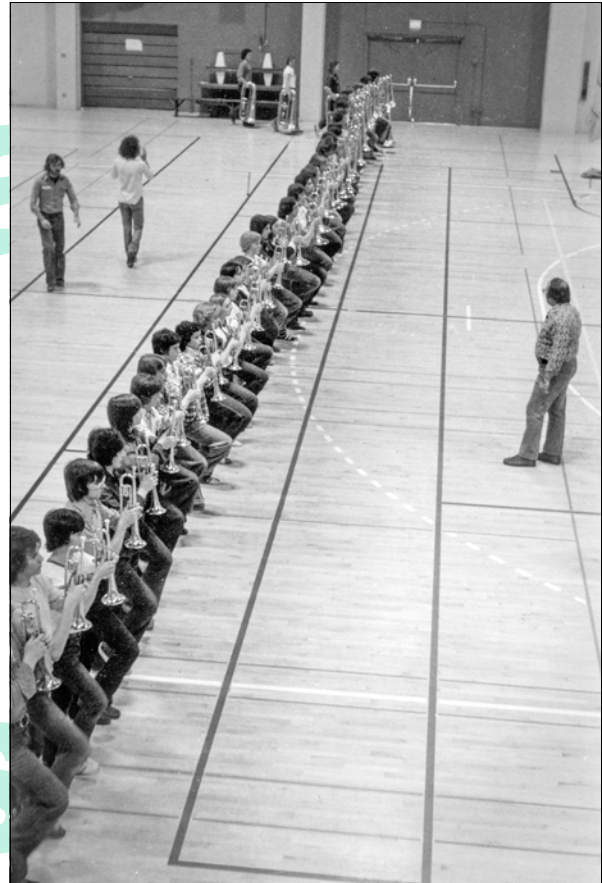
Awaiting this Corps was an impressive schedule. It included two exhibitions, four parades, and twenty-five contests, thirteen of them in the United States. Mr. Tierney, like Mr. Baggs of yesteryear, plunged his Corps right into the thick of it.

From the first day, there was much enthusiasm. Since attendance at winter and spring rehearsals averaged 90% the program moved forward at a fast pace. Numbers even grew a bit, as others, from outside, were attracted. Anyone could join; you did not have to be from either of the original Corps.

The music, reflecting current trends, was a few long numbers tilted toward classical, semi classical, and popular.

- ▶ Mahler's 7th Symphony Finale
- ▶ Farandole
- ▶ Indian Lady
- ▶ Road Ode

To help put all this together, drills had been practised in the spacious gym at Seneca College, and a camp weekend was arranged. On April 24th and 25th a first weekend music camp was held at the Seneca College, King Campus in Aurora, Ontario. The regular May weekend camp of music and drill, would be held at Flesherton, Ontario, a former Optimist location.



1976: Seneca Optimists first drill rehearsal

In a light-hearted fashion, Bob Duggan, Director of the Oakland Crusaders, presented Al Tierney with a certificate good for five points at any contest in June 1976. Tierney wondered if it was worth anything without the signature of Vince Macciocchi, Chief Judge.

The Krescendos Corps from Peterborough, now had a larger Corps and were having their music arranged by California arrangers. They, along with the Dutchmen of Kitchener and the Seneca Optimists, would all be wearing new uniforms this year.

Bugles now in use included: Contra Bass, French Horn, Soprano, Bass Baritone, Mellophone, Baritone and Flugelhorn. In 1958, there had just been Baritone, French Horn and Soprano.

A Corps in Aurora, the Ambassadors, under the direction of Paul and Bev Ranson, had on their instructional staff:

Horns: Ray Bassett, Steve Dunn

Drums: Dave Phillips, Mike Robinson

These people were all members of the Seneca Optimists. There was no restriction on this kind of activity, as the Optimists had once seen fit to impose.

Information Drum Corps, a C.D.C.A. publication since 1972, under the direction of Al Tierney, advertised the Toronto Optimists 1975 yearbook. It was forty pages,

a pictorial record of the year, that sold for \$3.00 For any that were in it, it was more than good value for the money. Green Capsule Comments had ceased to exist in its original format. There was no green Corps anymore, as there was no Optimists anymore. The famous publication, in a clever move, was reconstituted as “Gold Capsule Comments”, its new name alluding to the yellow uniforms now in use. Thus renamed, it continued, equally as good, equally informative.

Information Drum Corps, itself, was a newsletter for all members of C.D.C.A. Corps. It had a circulation of 4,500. Its editor was who else but Don Daber.

By this time, it was noted, by those in the know, that the anticipated problems regarding the Seneca Optimists had not developed. Conversely, some problems not expected arose. Many of these were teething pains that would be resolved as time wore on.

The Oakland Crusaders were, this year, the host of the 1976 Individuals Contest, held at Etobicoke Collegiate. It turned out to be one of the biggest and best in years, a real tribute to the Crusaders.

The Seneca Optimists did well in the percussion division, but did not fare well in the brass. Oakland had six wins in the brass division, Seneca none. Where they did do well was in the rifle and sabre division.

The Individual results were not totally an indication of what would happen on the field this year, though the guard captions were.



1976: Seneca Optimists rehearsing



1976: Seneca Optimists (Michigan City)



1976: Seneca Optimists rehearsing

The Cadet/Lancers, growing in quality, had a tour booked in the United States this year, from July 1st to July 5th. They would be doing parades and contests in New York and Pennsylvania.

A man, whose name will appear later in this story, was John Jones. He started in Drum Corps with the Pickering Blue Notes, and then went to De La Salle. Staying with them, he, eventually, became the Personnel Director, Director, then Business Manager. Due to the merger of last year, he was now Business Manager for the Oakland Crusaders.

have been discussing are the only ones that really apply now. This year, in the Canadian Junior scene, they were the only ones that would have any meaning, competition wise, as they strove to outdo each other. Other Corps were of good quality, providing entertaining shows, but these two were in their own league, score-wise, in Canada. As best we can, with the scanty information available, we shall follow their fortunes. The Oakland Crusaders had already cracked the charmed circle of the D.C.I. top twelve. The Seneca Optimists had that as one of their goals for this year. The latest up and comer, Offensive Lions, from Jonquiere, Quebec, would make their presence felt quite a bit later.

## The Tour Begins

The first contest for which we have any records took place on July 10, but there were others before that. So, maybe, fortunately, our eyewitness memories can come into play. Two weeks after the Corps camp in Flesherton, the Seneca Optimists entered their first contest of the year. It was on June 5th, at Borough of York Stadium, in Toronto. Also in it were the Oakland Crusaders. This was the first meeting, ever, of these two units. For Seneca, it was also their first public field show and competition.

That the merger had worked well was proven by the fact that the Seneca Optimists defeated the Oakland Crusaders in their first ever competition. A difference between now and last year was that the newest



1976: Oakland Crusaders (DCI Finals)



Corps had started out on top. In 1975, the Oakland Corps had started out in second, picking up steam as the year progressed. Seneca Optimists were off to a good start. It continued. A second victory over the Crusaders was recorded one week later, at Seagram Stadium in Waterloo. Things were looking good until Ajax, one week later. Having a reputation, for any Optimist Corps, as “loser city”, this strange tradition was upheld. For the first time in three contests, Oakland Crusaders won at this location. As if to bear out whatever misgivings that our Corps had about Ajax, the very next day, in Peterborough,



1976: Seneca Optimists (Michigan City)

Ontario, the tables were turned, again. The Seneca Optimists scored a full five-point victory over their rivals. Strange business, this. So strange, in fact, that the future would see some reaction to this situation. Following in rapid succession were contests in Welland and Kitchener, Ontario, against the same Corps. Then Tonawanda, NY, Kingston, NY, Oswego, NY and Fort Wayne, Indiana. These shows were against other Corps, in neutral territory. Seneca Optimists were received well wherever they went, scoring high, never last, even winning one or two. Fort Wayne, Indiana, was part of the final leg of a U.S. tour, after which they went to Michigan City, Indiana. It is for this affair that we now possess some information.



1976: Seneca Optimists (World Open)

On July 10th, less than half way through the season, the Seneca Optimists found themselves up against some of the best, south of the border.

Their show found favour, as they pulled into third place.

1st	Phantom Regiment.....	78.15
2nd	27th Lancers.....	76.35
3rd	Seneca Optimists. ....	71.85
4th	Cavaliers.....	70.80
5th	Blue Stars. ....	66.70

These were all good Corps, and Seneca defeated two of them, the Cavaliers and Blue Stars. This was a real first for the new unit. Probably, the first time for all the members of the founding Corps. It was an indication of how well the merger had worked.

Back in Canada, it was to Birchmount Stadium, in Scarborough, and Kitchener, on July 17th and 18th. A football game in Hamilton, Ontario, then provided a brief respite from the pressures of competition.

On July 31st, the Seneca Optimists, the “Mellow Yellow” as they were now being tagged, took off for Ogdensburg, N.Y. Their main Canadian rival, Oakland Crusaders, was on a U.S. tour. During this, they placed fourth, on July 31st, eight points behind the winning Phantom Regiment. Three weeks earlier, Seneca Optimists had lost to them by only 6.30, so the season still looked very promising.



1976: Seneca Optimists (DCI)

Next, in Ottawa, Ontario was the Canadian Capital Open Contest. Seneca competed against a field of Canadian and American juniors, minus the Oakland Crusaders. At this point, it would have been good to be competing against them. Seneca swept the field with one of their classiest displays yet, almost eleven points over the second place Offensive Lions of Jonquiere, Quebec. This result showed it was a one Corps contest. It also showed that the rest of the Canadian season was likely to be a two Corps affair.

Only two days later, the Oakland Corps, still on their U.S. tour, was only four and a half behind Phantom Regiment. There was much action to go on yet, but it was evident how things were shaping up regarding the Canadian scene.

August 10th, Pontiac, Michigan, D.C.I. North. In a field of all D.C.I. Corps, Seneca pulled off a fifth place, scoring 80.5. This put them behind the Cavaliers, whom they had previously, defeated, by over two points. The California Corps, Blue Devils, who were far ahead of everyone this year, won it. Seneca did manage to defeat the 27th Lancers, another first.

Ominously, on the same date, the Oakland Crusaders placed only 0.45 behind Phantom Regiment, of Rockford, Illinois. With a score of 83.65, they were seen to be rapidly improving, just as they had last year. Their U.S. scores were now surpassing those of the Seneca Optimists.



1976: Seneca Optimists rehearsing

In Canada, the Offensive Lions were definitely a good Junior “A” Corps, destined for future honours; however, it was doubtful whether they could make any inroads this year. The Seneca – Oakland rivalry was the one sparking the most interest. As yet, its outcome was undetermined.





1976: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

Rochester, N.Y., was the next arena for our Corps. It was still somewhat of a Corps town, but not the hotbed of activity that it had once been. It would be once again. Lots of D.C.A. shows would be held here. D.C.A. was the senior version of D.C.I., though no doubt with some differences.

One day after Rochester, the Seneca Optimists appeared in Verdun, a suburb of Montreal, Quebec. A top-notch contest, featuring mostly American Drum Corps it was won

by the Santa Clara Vanguard. In second were the Madison Scouts, with 86.35. They were the 1975 D.C.I. champions but were having trouble this year. Blue Devils were conquering all.

Third place at this tough venue was our Corps, the Seneca Optimists, scoring 81.90. This, placing them above the resurgent Casper Troopers, was a good showing against more experienced, longer established Corps from south of the border. Their score also compared favourably with that of the Oakland Crusaders, in the United States. There was still room for optimism.

The Canadian Nationals were less than four weeks away, but there were still some very big contests before that. Very big.

For the Seneca Optimists, two of them were the World Open in Lynn, Massachusetts, and the C.Y.O. Nationals in Boston. Both were top rated shows, but neither were indicative of Drum Corps supremacy in the United States. That distinction now belonged to the D.C.I. Nationals. Before the advent of D.C.I., it had been both the V.F.W. and American Legion Nationals.

Union City, New Jersey, the last home of Blessed Sacrament, was the scene of the final contest before D.C.I. Nationals, for the Seneca Optimists. As the new unit, this would be their first attempt to crack the charmed circle of the big twelve. Everybody wanted to accomplish this feat so not much was allowed to interfere with the smooth running of things. D.C.I. shows are run along very professional lines, and any misdemeanours or lapses can be costly in terms of points, even before you get on the field. These situations are where a good Corps Director proves his worth, and Al Tierney was one of the best. The date for this grand spectacle was August 18th-21st. The location, again, was Veterans Stadium, in Philadelphia.



1976: Seneca Optimists (Michigan City)



## D.C.I. Nationals

Adding spice to this for the Seneca Corps, trying to break in for the first time, was the presence of the Oakland Crusaders. They had made the top twelve the year before, placing as high as sixth. Both Corps had done well in the United States this year, and the outcome was bound to be less than predictable.

The preliminaries showed how things were shaping up. It was won by the Blue Devils, with a score of 91.25, but there was no surprise at that outcome. Still trying to preserve their 1975 status, only two points behind were the rising Madison Scouts. Four Corps back, in sixth place, with a score of 86.15 were the Oakland Crusaders.



1976: Seneca Optimists rifles

With numerous corps in the prelims one's score and placing were not known until sometime later, after tabulation was complete. As a result, one did not know who had made the finals until all were finished. Seneca Optimists, after doing one of their best shows of the year, returned to their billet to await the results. These would determine their immediate future.

They were billeted in Valley Forge again, this time in a Military College barracks. There, they relaxed, practised, took it easy, but really everyone was awaiting the outcome of the preliminaries.

A phone call signalled the moment. A great shout of joy went up. They had captured eleventh place, making the finals. The score, 83.50. They were over the Troopers, and only 0.75 out of eighth. Their Canadian rivals, the Oakland Crusaders, were up by 2.65 over the Seneca Optimists.



1976: Seneca Optimists

Now, though, come what may, it was on to the night finals. This was to produce some change in standings. Seneca Optimists slipped back to twelfth place, thereby remaining behind the Oakland Corps who, playing well, retained their middle of the pack standing, with a substantial lead over the Seneca Corps. Still, they were more happy than sad. This outing was a definite plus. In their first year, they had secured a firm footing in the ranks of D.C.I.

Now it was back to Canada. There were still the Canadian Nationals to contend with. This was at Seagram Stadium, Waterloo. By the time it came around, the mood of elation from Philadelphia had evaporated. It was replaced by a lethargic resignation. They had lost to Oakland at Philadelphia, so could not possibly win at the Canadian Nationals. This was the mood that took hold. It was an unhealthy indication of U.S. influence on Canadian Drum Corps.

As far as this Corps was concerned, they had lost all their incentive and ambition. Nobody wanted to do anything, thinking that now all was preordained. It is not necessarily so, but this mood was to reappear at other times. As with the Optimist Corps of 1961, it took one of the executive to kick the stuffing out and get thing moving again. Mr. Evert Botterweg injected the necessary spirit. He was, always had been, effective in more ways than one.

The Corps picked itself up, dragging itself out of the slough of despair into which it had slid. Practices got underway that would lead to a good contest at the Nationals.

In the Junior "C" Division, the Lancers took first place, scoring 78.80. They were now the Junior "C" Champions for 1976.

The Junior "A" preliminaries showed what could be done, and would not have happened, had the Seneca Optimists continued in their funky condition.

1st	Oakland Crusaders.....	81.85
2nd	Seneca Optimists. ....	80.80
3rd	Dutchmen. ....	61.60
4th	Peterborough Krescendos. ....	49.70

So, the Corps had managed to pull themselves to within 1.05 of first place. If not a victory, it was an improvement, and, more importantly, a sign that success in Canada does not always hinge on events in the U.S.A.

## The Finals

Here, a big spread on drums gave the Oakland Crusaders their second National title. Even though Seneca had improved to 83.65 in the night show Crusaders had done better. Seneca finished in second place, 2.45 behind Crusaders' 86.1.



1976: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

A large spread on drums was responsible for much of this. 1.6 behind the Crusaders to be exact. In earlier years, drums had been a strong point of the Optimist Corps. Now the shoe was on the other foot. In fact, the Oakland Crusaders' drum line was to become famous.

Seneca Optimists best caption was marching and maneuvering, taking first in both execution and general effect. These usually go hand in hand. Summaries of the year, by neutral observers, were very revealing.

Seneca Optimists “had one of the finest shows of 1976 with dazzling yellow uniforms and a wonderful Czapinski drill. Pleasing, if not great, music. Show with a few rough edges, but which did bring them firmly into the big time.” and “A magnificent Corps.” Rough edges can be ironed out.

The Oakland Corps commented on by the same observer, were said to have musically, a much better show than Seneca does. Their “Swan Lake” was, to all, a spine-tingling production. At the 1976 Nationals, overall, the Crusaders had looked sharper than the rest. They had deserved their first place score of 86.10.



1976: Seneca Optimists Drum Major, Mike Williams

So that was how things stood, in Canada, at the end of the 1976 competition scene. For the Seneca Optimists, there was next year to look forward to, changes to be made, a good first year to build on. They had beaten some of the best around.

More events were still to take place this year, for others, as well as our Corps. Following what seemed to be a trend, the Flying Dutchmen of Kitchener and the Dutch Boy Cadets merged to form a new Junior “A” Corps, “Northstar”. Their director would be none other than Bob Christie who had, briefly, been Director of the Toronto Optimists. He had lately been with the St. Johns Girls of Brantford.

In Early September, the Seneca Optimists had appeared at the CNE, for an evening of pageantry that had included bands as well as Drum Corps. Also in this display were the Oakland Crusaders. Both were well received, but the music of the Crusaders was more pleasing than that of the Seneca Corps. This bore out earlier observations and would lead to changes.

On September 25th, the Corps helped launch a new parade Corps in Owen Sound. This was the Georgian Lancers, and Seneca played their show at a local school in order to publicize the Drum Corps. There was not much activity in this region.



1976: Seneca Optimists rehearsing



Progressing, the D.C.I. Rules Committee made a decision to allow the use of two-valve bugles. Piston valves, rather than one piston, one rotary. Rotary valves never were perfected, always breaking down. This decision helped overcome the fact that the use of slip slides was illegal. The Drum Corps bugle was still unique, in that there were certain notes it still could not play. Were three valves far off?

A final announcement was that the D.C.I. Nationals were to be held in Denver, Colorado, in 1977, at Mile High Stadium, the home of the Denver Broncos football team. Preliminaries would be in the foothills town of Boulder, Colorado. This would be the first time D.C.I. Nationals had been held west of the Mississippi.

The Canadian Nationals would be at Birchmount Stadium, in Scarborough, Ontario, scene of many a confrontation.

So, for the Seneca Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps, it was back to the drawing board, buckle down to work. There was a large crowd left, ready to go at it again.



1976: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

## Chapter 27: 1977 – The Only Way To Go

With most of the Corps' executive and instructional staff still intact from last year, prospects looked good for the year ahead. More importantly sponsorship was still there. Officially there were three, Seneca College, the Optimist Club of York-Toronto, and the Seneca Optimists Booster Club.

There were changes within all of these departments, but all were to prove beneficial.

Mr. Rex Martin was now the President of the Booster Club. He had held this position with the Toronto Optimists.

The executive consisted of:

Al Tierney..... Director  
Ric Brown..... Assistant  
Evert Botterweg..... Equipment Manager  
Don Daber..... Publicity, public relations, etc.

The instructional staff had changed but had full complement.

M&M Field Design. . . . Gary Czapinski  
M&M Instruction. . . . . Greg Oxenham, Gilles Paquin, Tom Furiano, Doug Coull  
Colour Guard. . . . . Marie (Kas) Grana, Wendy Paquin, Debbie Miller  
Bugle Arrangements.... Wayne Downey  
Bugle Instructors.. . . . Peter Byrne, Myron Melnyk, George Nasello, Wayne Dillon  
Drum Arrangements.... Sam Kays, Pat Irvine  
Drum Instructors..... Sam Kays, Pat Irvine, Bill Bula, Wayne Lewis

Most of these people were home grown, but originating with various Corps. Those who were from elsewhere, the United States mainly, were occasional, coming for long weekends, or camps. These were Gary Czapinski, Marie Grana, Wayne Downey, and sometimes Fred Sanford on drums. All others listed were permanent staff. They were greatly responsible for what appeared on the field, the occasional instructors adding invaluable advice and knowledge. With this crew, things should go well.

Peter Byrne, on bugles, had started in Corps at the age of eleven. Joining Grantham, he spent a few years in Optimists then had played for one year in the Anaheim Kingsmen, winners of the first D.C.I. Championship. He claimed that his biggest problem as an instructor was adjusting to a D.C.I. calibre Corps. Well, whatever, he had done well so far and was to continue this year.



1977: Seneca Optimists members on a bus



1977: Mike Williams, Seneca Optimists Drum Major

In 1976, Seneca Optimists at one time or another had beaten all but four Corps, Blue Devils, Madison Scouts, Santa Clara Vanguard, and Phantom Regiment.

Myron Melnyk, one of Peter's assistants, was a member of De La Salle for six years. He had wanted to stay on as an instructor, but it did not work out. He played in the Blue Devils for one year and, returning, went to the Princemen, until the 1975 Nationals, then, the Optimists. Feeling out of place at first, understandably, with his history, he eventually fitted in and stayed.

Sam Kays, on drums, had originated with the Midlanders Drum Corps. He had scored the highest score in his caption at an individuals, highest score of the day.

Under Wendy Paquin, on silks, and Debbie Miller, rifles, the colour guard had made, and maintained, a reputation as one of the best in North America. This year, they were to get off to a slow start, but making up for lost time, were to come through again.

The Corps itself was full in all sections, with a full marching complement of 128.

Bugles. ....	58
Percussion. ....	32
Guard: flags.....	24
Guard: rifles. ....	10
Nationals Colour Party....	2
Officers. ....	2

Most of these were from last year, but there had been some turnover, almost inevitable. Some of the rookies, this year, had interesting backgrounds.

Jacques Dicaire, from Quebec, was a baritone player. He came from 4th Brigade and wanted to play in a D.C.I. Corps during his last year.

Janice Bell, a soprano player, had started in drum corps at age 10, with the Peterborough Krescendos. She had been their Drum Major in 1976.

Johanne Briere had joined Corps when 12 years old. She had marched with Mousquetaires, Chatelaines, and 4th Brigade. Also, she had taught drumming to several Quebec Corps. A unique distinction was that she was the first girl to march in the drum line in the history of the Corps. Girls were now commonplace in the corps but none had been in the drum line, until now.



1977: Seneca Optimists rehearsing



Finally, Sylvain Menard, contra bass had been in Corps since age 13, with 4th Brigade. He joined Seneca and was a Seneca Optimist nut.

The Drum Major this year would be Mike Williams while the Colour Guard Captain would be Dianne Tenaglia. Dianne was a graduate of the Optimist Cadets, moving to the junior Corps in 1974.

Altogether, twenty-five members of the Corps were from out of town. One of them, Tony Lidstone had, last year, and would, this year, hitchhike twice a week for practices from Kitchener, Ontario, 100 miles away.

Across town, the Oakland Crusaders reportedly also had a full 128-member Corps. A difference was that they had had a big turnover, and many of these people were new.

Other potential competition, the new “Northstar” Corps from Kitchener was an unknown quantity. Directing them, now, was Doug MacKenzie.

The Optimists Cadets Director was now John O’Leary.

The Ontario Drum Corps Association had a lot of familiar names on its roster. Jack Roberts, former Optimist player and instructor was now the Executive Director. Al Tierney, Seneca Optimists Director, was President of the Association. Don Daber was Secretary Treasurer, John Jones of Oakland was Vice-President, Recording Secretary was Jacqui Kennedy and other directors were Dick Brown, Jim Towie and Jack Turner. I mention all these people because without them there would be no Drum Corps.

Back to the Corps.

The horn lines had improved steadily over the last couple of years, those of Optimist and Seneca. Last year, after the merger, Myron Melnyk had started a program to improve tone and intonation. This had paid off, but consistency was the biggest factor. Each performance was better than the last, except for D.C.I. finals.

Things moved ahead rapidly even though quite a bit of music had been changed for this year. Off-the-line was still Mahler’s 7th Symphony, but with a modified entry. The lively



1977: Northstar from Kitchener



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI)

“Children’s Dance” led in to concert which, as yet, had not been selected. A long drum solo then displayed changes. Congas and Bongos had replaced triple drums. “Pippin” from a musical of the same name followed. Changes and alterations would occur, but basically this show was of D.C.I. calibre. The concert, which was selected later, would be a medley from “West Side Story”. This music was the most challenging ever played by the Drum Corps.

Drill rehearsals began in January. The double gym at Seneca College was large enough for the whole Corps to learn and practice parts of the 1977 drill. Later, it could all be put together outside.

On January 21st and 22nd, the O.D.C.A. Symposium 5 was held. It was considered a fabulous success. The largest symposium ever held for Drum Corps in North America. Presented by the



1977: Seneca Optimists

O.D.C.A. and C.J.A., over 500 instructors, managers, and judges took part.

For the bugle clinic, the horn line of the Seneca Optimists was used for demonstrations. Wayne Downey conducted sessions on both days. The Oakland Crusaders drum line was used for the drum clinic, with Fred Sanford conducting. M&M was handled by Mike Maxley, Gary Czapinski, Marie Grana, and Len Kruszecki.

This year’s “award of merit” went to Barry Bell. It was overdue.

At the conclusion, over 600 people assembled for dining and socializing. Al Tierney opened the program. At the head table was the Hon. Robert Welch, Ontario Minister of Culture and Recreation. He was partly responsible for the “Wintario” program, from which Drum Corps had benefited greatly. Bob Duggan and Al Tierney, directors of Oakland and Seneca, respectively, received “special awards” for their two Corps. This recognized the accomplishments of both in



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI)

international competition. These were presented by Mr. Welch. The fact was highlighted that Toronto was the only city in North America with two Corps in the D.C.I. top twelve. A distinction probably not recognized outside of Drum Corps circles.

A letter in “Information Drum Corps” slammed the publication for its definite slant towards the Seneca Optimists. This magazine printed what was sent in to it. Only a few co-operated.

Another letter was received, from Nonie and Bernie Beer, who were wintering in Florida. They wanted, and were getting, “Information Drum Corps”.

Al Tierney and Bob Duggan represented the O.D.C.A. at a D.C.I. Management Seminar in Chicago.

Two measures of note, in March, were:

- ▶ The first issue of “Gold Capsule Comments”.
- ▶ The Seneca horn line got the new 2-valve bugles.

Though costly, these new 2-valve bugles were necessary if the Corps wished to remain competitive.

Seneca College announced that it would sponsor a D.C.I. contest this year. Don Pesceone and Bill Howard, both from the D.C.I. Executive Board, came to the college to discuss this with the people listed below.

Peter Shore. . . . . President of the Optimist Club of York-Toronto  
Joe Gianna. . . . . Past President  
Rex Martin. . . . . President of the Seneca Optimist Booster Club  
Al Tierney. . . . . Corps Director  
Wolfgang Petschke. . . . Corps Co-ordinator with the College

Another merger had taken place. The Lancers, in a final break with the Optimist organization, merged with the Oakland Crusaders Parade Corps. It was planned to increase it to 80 boys and girls and would be known as the Etobicoke Knights.

At the O.D.C.A. individuals this year, sponsored by the Oakland Crusaders, the Seneca Optimists took nine firsts. The Oakland Corps outdid them with eleven. The Seneca Optimist Brass Quintet scored 89.5 for their first place. The “Mellow Yellow” also recorded numerous seconds and thirds. All this was reported in the April issue of “Gold Capsule Comments”.

In May, Wayne Downey flew in from California, bringing the new concert of West Side Story. This was the Victoria Day weekend, for the Corps, a camp weekend. It began with a T.A.S. night, a custom inherited from the Toronto Optimist’s side of this Corps. Drill-wise, Gary Czapinski introduced the “parachute” a novel idea for general effect. It was to amaze audiences all over. With camp over, everything intended had been accomplished. It was less than two weeks to the first contest, which was on June 3rd, in Toronto. It was the International, sponsored by the Seneca Optimist Booster Club. No one was ready. Due to this, the Oakland Crusaders pulled out of it. Their problems would become apparent later. Everybody else competed.



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI)



Seneca Optimists were eager to go against the new Corps “Northstar”, to see what would happen. What happened was the Seneca Optimists won by nine points, even with a two-point penalty. Their show was shaky, and the concert showed that it had been played for less than two weeks. But a win is a win, and now they only had to go against the Oakland Crusaders, to see where they stood in Canada.



1977: Seneca Optimists rehearsing

It was not heavy competition time yet. That would be here soon enough. The next day, another Optimist tradition was observed. Nobody seemed to mind. They were all in fun. This one was M.O.O.G., Most Organized Optimist Games, always reserved for the day after the first concert. It took place on Toronto Island, starting around 12:00 noon. Egg-throwing contests, mooger ball, tug-o-war, and buck-buck were all part of the fun 'n games. The Booster Club showed up later to cook hamburgers and hot dogs. The last ferryboat left at 12:45 a.m., with the last partiers. After this, things would get more serious.

Gold Capsule Comments came out this June, but, surprise, it would be the last issue this year. Due to printing costs, it would now only appear from January through May. There would be a yearbook though.

The Corps had twenty-seven contests scheduled to date. This could change, either up or down, but probably not very much. Coverage of them will be condensed as much as possible.

### June 11th – Waterloo

Seneca wins, already starting to come together, doing the type of show one would expect from a D.C.I. Corps. The next week it was a two-stop trip to the United States. For the first time this year, the competition included the Oakland Crusaders. This Corps had suffered a large turnover in personnel, and it showed. Seneca Optimists were second, two points behind Garfield, and, unheard of before, twelve points up on the Oakland Crusaders. The “Oakies” scored high drums. Their drum line was superb. Everybody could see that. Next day, it was Waverly, N.Y. and, again, a second place to Garfield. The score for our Corps was in the 67-68 range. Back in



1977: Seneca Optimists Conga (DCI)

Canada, on the 25th in Welland, Ontario, another win, both parade and contest. The number “Children’s Dance” clicked for the first time. It was a difficult piece. The score was 74.30, an improvement, but now only six points above the Crusaders.

Now, in Port Dover, Ontario, on the warm shores of Lake Erie, was the second Corps camp. Other Corps were there too, and all put on an exhibition for the townsfolk. “Ventures”, the fine Girls’ Corps, made breakfast for the Seneca Corps

the next morning. A party was held at the home of Mark Lewis, a Corps member, his parents, Mr. & Mrs. Lewis, being most accommodating. The final day of camp was spent perfecting the “parachute” maneuver, for more U.S. competition the following weekend. This brainchild of Gary Czapinski, when executed properly was sensational, drawing oohs and aahs from many crowds.



1977: Seneca Optimists

The U.S. competition was actually to last four days. It was to prove a gruelling trip.

After an exhibition at an Argonaut football game, it was away, off to Ramsey, N.J. The guard was issued new flags, and the Corps did an inspired performance. It was the first showing of the “parachute”, and the reaction was one of stunned amazement, before the cheers. This show was a good one for this Corps, placing third. Four points behind Phantom Regiment, in first, and only 2.3 behind the Madison Scouts. The closest they had ever been. That was July 8th.

The very next day, the contest was in Allentown, PA, and it was D.C.I. East, the first big show of the season. The Corps for some reason was mediocre, placing sixth, at both prelims and finals. We were off, now, to Boston, for the C.Y.O. Nationals. The tour routine was practice, compete all day, ride, sleep all night. Seneca was again in sixth place, with a score of 74.35, almost identical to that of Allentown.

It was here, in Boston, that the flaws in the Etobicoke Crusaders presentation became evident. They did not seem to have the show or personnel to make up the necessary ground. They would pull themselves up but they had old music with an uninspired drill. Tonight it was 10th place, with a score of 64.35.

Seneca Optimists, though, were on their way.



1977: Gary “Chops” Czapinski and Marie



The next show was one they had been waiting for all year. Last year had been their first appearance at it, and the crowd had loved them. This was proven by the fact that at their rehearsal there was a large crowd. Word was out that the Seneca were here.

Leaving Boston at midnight, they neared Montreal at daybreak. The show that night was the best, so far, of the season with the crowd showing its enthusiasm. Montreal, July 11, 1977.

1st	Madison.....	80.80
2nd	Phantom Regiment . . . .	80.30
3rd	Seneca Optimists. . . . .	78.10
4th	Kingsmen . . . . .	69.60
5th	Oakland Crusaders . . . .	66.15
6th	Royal Crusaders . . . . .	65.05
7th	Velvet Knights. . . . .	52.05

The Seneca Guard was in the top three.

The same placings, and almost the same scores, occurred on July 15th in Toronto. This was the show sponsored by Seneca College, and marked the return of D.C.I. to Toronto, after a three-year absence. Again, with Madison first and Phantom second, Seneca Optimists were third, 2.8 out of top spot. This was, for this Corps, a period of new highs. Oakland Crusaders, with only 109 people on the field, were still having their problems. Still, although in fifth place with 67.55, and almost eleven behind Seneca, they captured the top drum score. This would happen all year, against all the best. The “parachute”, playing to new faces wherever it went, was partly responsible for the standing ovation received by the Seneca Optimists. Their concert of “West Side Story” was being compared to that of the Madison Scouts. Things, during this period, looked very rosy for this Corps. This early, on July 15th, it looked as if they could go a long way. They would, but a flaw was to appear later that would slow things down a bit.

The Ontario Provincial Championships, on July 23rd, saw the Seneca Optimists win their first major title. Oakland Crusaders, defending champions, put forth a supreme effort and managed to draw within five points of the new Canadian powerhouse.

1st	Seneca.....	81.75
2nd	Oakland.....	76.85
3rd	Northstar . . . .	71.75



1977: Northstar Rifle



1977: Seneca Optimists snare line





1977: Seneca Optimists

It was here that it was noted that the Crusaders drum line had beaten those of all the D.C.I. Corps that they had met.

At this contest, the Peterborough Krescendos won their division. They had reverted to Junior "B" from Junior "A". The Seneca Optimists now dominated junior "A" in Canada, with the Oakland Crusaders and Northstar still possible contenders. The Corps director for Northstar was now Doug MacKenzie, a former Optimist.

Next day, in Kingston, and a week later in Simcoe, Ontario, it was the same story, with Seneca in first, maintaining, and even increasing the spread.

North Tonawanda, on August 1st, was something of an event. The Corps was an hour late on the line, holding up the show, as they were due on first. Why? The equipment truck was late. Why? U.S. customs officials held it up at the border, until a dog had inspected it, sniffing for drugs. Fortunately, it was drug free, so the truck and myself, the driver,

were allowed to continue. With a police escort, we found the stadium. It was thought that my assistant, Bob Carell, and I had stopped for a long lunch, or more. Whatever, the Corps went out and, with an 82.30, still won the contest. The truck had been held up once before, prior to tour one, when involved in a minor accident on Hwy. 401. Before police were informed, due to a pressing schedule, the driver took off. He was a wanted man when he returned. The police understood but a stern warning was issued.

As an aside, had drugs been found on the truck, prior to Tonawanda, it would probably have been game over for the Corps and the driver. U.S. customs officers do not fool around. It was a good thing that none were found because two days later, on Wednesday, August 3, tour two would begin. This was the big one that would end in Denver, Colorado with D.C.I. finals.

## Tour Two

### *Day 1 – Wednesday, August 3rd*

After a noon hour rehearsal at Keating Park, delayed due to a late equipment truck, the Corps reassembled at Seneca College. From there, it was onto the buses and heading westward to Ypsilanti, Michigan. The 1977 D.C.I. tour was underway.

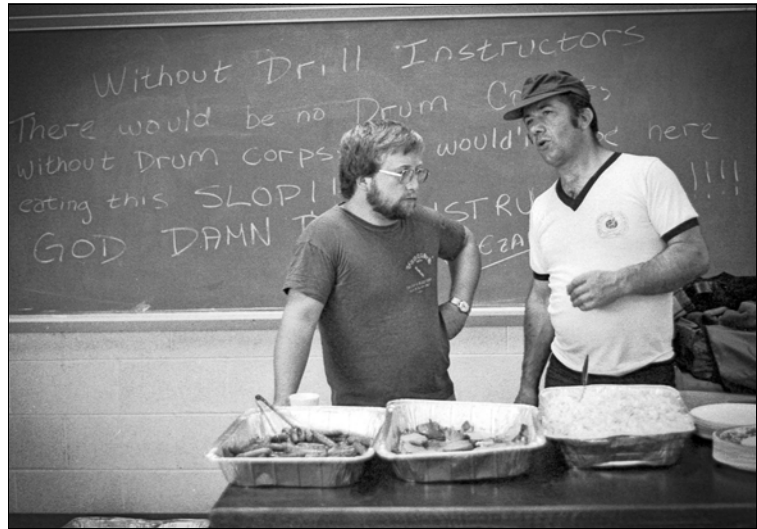


1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

*Day 2 – Thursday, August 4th*

### **D.C.I. North, Ypsilanti**

The whole Corps was up at 7:00 a.m. for the first meal at “Konstantinou’s Kafe”. A father of one of the girls in the Corps, John Konstantinou was a most valuable member of the staff. Cooking was his profession, and he was accustomed to catering for a large crowd, in this case, 150-160 people. Throughout the entire tour, he and his assistants, under his direction, were to capably keep the Corps and staff well fed. All this on a couple of bar-b-que type open griddles. It was a demonstration of great skill. Not because of John’s breakfast, the Corps had a bad rehearsal, after which it was off to the stadium for the prelims. A good performance gave a score of 77.30. It was a better show at the finals, moving up to 79.30, but with no change in standings.



1977: Our servers – Steve Malloy & John Konstantinou

*Day 3 – Friday, August 5th*

After another gourmet breakfast, it was away to Marion, Ohio, for the U.S. Open Contest.

*Day 4 – Saturday, August 6th*

### **U.S. Open, Marion, Ohio**

All were very excited about this show, as there was a strong possibility that this Corps could become the first Canadian unit to win this title. Appearing early for the prelims, 11:19 a.m., the spirit showed with a score of 81.95 for first place, a close second, by 0.5, were the Crossmen of Pennsylvania.

Following this, an afternoon practice, of the kind that makes a championship Corps, set the stage for the evening finals. Then, rain, rain, rain. Some Corps got their shows over, and the rain eventually seemed to end at 10:30 p.m. There were still five Corps yet to perform when it started again heavier than ever. Executives, sponsors, and judges all met and decided to wait it out.

Finally, Seneca Optimists got on the starting line at 1:45 a.m. Sunday morning. The show was fantastic, and it had to be, as the Crossmen were also fantastic.



1977: Jim Kane with U.S. Open trophy



The result:

1st Seneca Optimists. . 85.05  
2nd Crossmen. . . . . 84.85

The Corps became hysterical. The Crossmen were downcast. Both were excellent, and it was anybody's show. However, the "Eagle" trophy came to Canada for the first time.

In the class "A" division, as opposed to the "Open" division, the Cardinals of Precious Blood won the title. They were from Scarborough, Ontario, so it was a great day for Canadian Drum Corps.

*Day 5 – Sunday, August 7th*

This was a travelling day, to Alton, Illinois, with a stop in Indianapolis for lunch. A treat was the view of the St. Louis skyline. Arriving in Alton, the Corps was greeted by a monstrous thunderstorm, with tornado warnings posted for the city.



1977: Seneca Optimists

"Youth on the March" saw this Corps give, for them, an unsatisfactory performance. Again, a third place finish.

Now it was on to Wichita, Kansas. On the route were seen the Mississippi River, the Missouri River, and the Stadium of the Kansas City Royals baseball team. Such diversions were good, as most of these tours were work, travel, and sleep. There was not much time for fun. Home base this time was a local Salvation Army Camp. As might be expected, it was a neat, well kept place. A rehearsal in the late evening was interrupted by the local sheriff. An angry housewife had alerted him, and the practice had to be called off. Such problems are common to Drum Corps, loud as they are.

*Day 8 – Wednesday, August 10th*

These contests were labelled with appropriately colourful names. "Drums Across the Plains" was the name of this one. It could have been the title of a western movie. Practice was difficult because this turned out to be the hottest, most hurried day of the tour. However, everybody



would be in the same boat, so things were equal. For the Seneca Optimists, the practice field was less than perfect. Up hill, down hills, trees, high grass. Attacking indians would not have been out of place here. Struggling though a rehearsal as well as could be done, the reward was a most spectacular performance at the actual show. They thought they had finally defeated the 27th Lancers. Alas, it was still third place. Again.

A very low drum score contributed to this. Also M&M was not up to its usual standard. Due to rain, it was a drum majors only retreat. Back to the camp and a change of plans. Instead of staying over, it was decided to push on to Denver that night.

#### *Day 9 – Thursday, August 11th*

Arrival in Denver was to a cool 50° F, up in the mountains now. Settling into a school in Sheridan, a suburb of Denver, the practice facility was examined. It turned out to be excellent. It was just down the road, part of the “Fort Logan Mental Health Centre”. When the Corps practised some of the staff and inmates came out to watch the proceedings. Somebody commented that they must have felt right at home.

While at this location, the Corps would participate in several contests, in scattered locations, some quite a distance away.

August 12th, the day after arriving, was spent rehearsing for the entire day. There would be little rest at this end of the tour. Next day, it was off to Glenwood Springs, 185 miles west. It took five hours and turned out to be the most colourful and exciting part of the whole tour. Until now, we



1977: Seneca Optimists

thought that we were in the Rockies, but actually were only in the foothills. On this trip, we had a glimpse of the real Rockies, and they were awesome to us dudes. Through Glenwood Springs to the mining town of Carbondale. “Drums Along the Rockies” saw the Seneca Optimists put on a good performance, placing four points behind Santa Clara Vanguard. This was good for this Corps. After a dip in the local “Hot Springs” courtesy of free passes from the contest sponsor, it was back through the mountains to Denver.



1977: Bernadette and Colin as Corps members take a food break in Colorado

The return trip was interesting with breakfast in Glenwood Canyon, beside the Colorado River, some mountain climbing, and collecting rock samples for the folks at home. The busses picked up some members of Northstar, whose bus had broken down. Finally reaching Denver, the Corps continued east to Greeley, Colorado.

This was another “Drums Along the Rockies” as was the next one after it. It was a good show, as most of them now were, but the Seneca Optimists could still not defeat the 27th Lancers.



1977: Seneca Optimists congas (DCI Finals)

*Day 13 – Monday, August 15th*

South 115 miles to Pueblo, and the last chance to beat a major Corps before D.C.I. prelims. It was a chance neglected, losing even to the Kilties for the first time. Hard work lay ahead, but there was not much time. We had not even met the Blue Stars or Cavaliers yet.

*Day 14 – Tuesday, August 16th: A day off at last.*

*Day 15 – Wednesday, August 17th*

Devoted entirely to practice for the imminent D.C.I. prelims.

*Day 16 – Thursday, August 18th: D.C.I. Preliminaries*

It was here, the prelude to the culmination of the tour, D.C.I. preliminaries. For some, it would be the final tilt on this circuit, this year.

Arriving in plenty of time for a good warm-up, the Seneca Optimists were the first Corps on. After stepping off to what was their best show of the season, chances looked good for the Seneca Optimists. Too good. The score sheets saw them finishing in 9th place overall, lower than expected. However, what's done is done, and next day was the finals.



1977: Seneca Optimists “parachute” at DCI prelims



*Day 17 – Friday, August 19th*

## **D.C.I. Finals**

All the work of the past year had been aimed at this contest. This was it! Now!

Excitement ran high within the Corps, and it grew with the size of the crowd, 30,000 plus, the only crowd of this size on the tour. Applause for the “parachute” number was a thunderous frenzy



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

from a crowd this size. Also, cheering for the Seneca Optimists were the Northstars and the Oakland Crusaders. These two Corps had not made it into the finals. Setting aside any past rivalry, they all cheered lustily for the Seneca Optimists. In a fine display of national unity the Oakland Crusaders displayed a Canadian flag.

In the exalted company, which was at this show, nobody could tell how they had done on the field. All the other eight Corps were watched, while waiting for the retreat.

## **The Retreat**

A very un-D.C.I. like spectacle followed. Disorganized and, at first, for the Seneca Optimists, disappointing. They tied for eight place with the Capitol Freelancers, with a score of 82.40. Disappointing because the Corps had set out this year with aspirations to a higher standing. Later, though, it was decided that this was an accomplishment. It was. Eighth best in the world, against more experienced units, and only in their second year. De La Salle and Oakland Crusaders, one and the same really, had placed higher at earlier finals, but, nevertheless, it was still a major feat. Just to enter the top twelve was. Many dozens tried. Eventual recognition of what they had done made all the time, work, and pains seem worthwhile. Very few Corps achieved this. They had done their best and had reason to be proud. Looked at from a different viewpoint, out of 4-5 billion people in the world, they were now in the top 1,152 in their field.



1977: Seneca Optimists Parachute (DCI Finals)

Now, all the excitement over, it was time for the long haul back to Canada. First stop, Lincoln, Nebraska where, arriving late, an appearance at the State Capital was missed. Given the night off.



Next stop, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, arriving late again, one bus, an exhibition at the Wisconsin State Fair was missed.

### Day 20 – Monday, August 22nd – Last day!

The guard bus and drum bus dashed straight for home, while the horn bus took its time, stopping at a McDonalds in Michigan. The equipment truck was stopped at the border, it, and its entire contents, being confiscated in the name of the Government of Canada. The Corps, as of now, ceased to exist. Some phone calls to Toronto, and back, cleared up the misunderstanding and the truck proceeded on its merry way, the Corps now being back in business. All agreed that the C.N. Tower was a sight for sore eyes.

Still to come, in Canada, were the Canadian Nationals, and it took some adjustment to prepare for it. To recover somewhat from the rigours of the tour, Tuesday and Wednesday were taken off. Practices both Thursday and Friday were poor, being hard to get into with enthusiasm. It was a now familiar situation. After the D.C.I. finals, anything else seemed an anticlimax.

The right attitude finally returned on Saturday, just in time. One hundred percent attendance at rehearsal and high spirits showed that the Corps, again, meant business. It was the last chance to perform the show this year, and they were determined to make it a good one. It was!

Pulling out all the stops, the Corps performed as never before, doing their best show and to a hometown crowd. The biggest threat was the Oakland Crusaders, the defending champions. Over the course of the year, they had pulled themselves up by the bootstraps but it was not quite enough



1977: Seneca Optimists



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

The Seneca Optimists won their first Canadian National Championship by three points. Oakland Crusaders were to be credited. They had started the season 10-12 points behind.

A very brief review of the year shows that drum scores, noted in judges' comments, on score sheets and tape recorders, had hurt this Corps. It was an often heard comment that if Seneca's horns and Oakland's drums were combined, they could have taken on anybody. Possibly.

The “parachute” maneuver was the most effective part of the drill show. It drew much favourable comment.

The whole visual show was pleasing, so much so that its constant flowing movement somewhat overshadowed the music. It was a credit to Gary Czapinski and Marie Grana. The music ensemble was presented properly, and the music itself was of the right calibre for this level of competition.



1977: Seneca Optimists exiting “Parachute”

The only grey spot in this scenario was the low scores of the drums. Something was lacking, and the Corps would have placed higher had it not been. The overall impression at D.C.I. was, “watch out for this Corps next year”. Well, next year was next year, and many things could, and would, change by then.

Now was time for all the awards, congratulations, discussions, etc. Most of this all took place at the 2nd Annual Awards Banquet. This had been the second year of the Seneca Optimists, so this was the second banquet. The Toronto Optimists banquets had ended in 1975.

After a fine roast beef dinner, prepared by the Booster Club, Al Tierney, “Uncle Al”, gave a speech, his final one as Corps Director. He had had enough, but would be the Corps D.C.I. representative. Also, he could spend more time as the President of the O.D.C.A./C.D.C.A.. He was presented with a picture of himself, taken at the 1977 Nationals. His story has been covered before, and his contribution to the whole Drum Corps movement had been considerable.



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

Special presentations followed.

Numerous trophies, plaques, and mementos presented to different people for various reasons.

- 1977 Guard of the Year. . . . Debbie Biggs
- 1977 Drummer of the Year. . Tommy Sams
- 1977 Bugler of the Year. . . Enzo Morella
- 1977 Corpsman of the Year.. Mike Williams

These four were the most prestigious.



The least prestigious, indeed highly embarrassing awards, were the G.C.C. awards. Of course, these were meant to be humorous.

- “Biggest Boobs in the Drum Line” Award
- “Mouths That Roared” Award
- “Short Shorts” Winner
- “Most Gullible Person of the Year” Award
- “Miss Butterfingers” Award

These were just some of the “dreaded” awards, all helping to lighten things up.

After all this, the disco centre opened and the Corps enjoyed themselves after a most successful year.

There would be a yearbook for 1977, but it would come out much later. Most of the credit for this goes to Mike Grimes and his staff, who had worked on the 1976 yearbook. They wanted to make the 1977 one better and put out a first class publication. Anyone, who has one of these, or one of the Toronto Optimists books, has a keepsake for life. A letter from Don Daber, to the Corps, saluted Mike Grimes and his staff.

A final note for this banner year was that an advertisement on the back of “Yearbook ‘77 ” featured the Seneca Optimists horn line. It promoted DEG Dynasty bugles. Shown in the ad was Mr. Evert Botterweg who had been Equipment Manager of the Toronto Optimists for many years and was currently Equipment Manager for the Seneca Optimists. Evert had also conducted numerous clinics on Corps maintenance and equipment at both C.D.C.A. and D.C.I. Symposiums.

Dynasty bugles were used by a host of the top Corps so Seneca was in good company.

1978 lay ahead, together with an uncertain, unforeseen, future that was yet to unfold.



1977: Evert Botterweg and corps members (from a D.E.G. Dynasty advertisement)



## Chapter 28: 1978 – What Goes Up, Must Come Down

For this Corps, right at the end of last year, things could not have looked better. If nothing had changed, they could have carried on where they had left off, probably surpassing the accomplishments of last year. If nothing had changed, that is.

The biggest change, and the one that counted most, was the loss of half of the marching members of the Corps. This sort of thing happens, sooner or later, to many Corps. If a well-trained feeder unit can be used to fill the gap, the effects can be alleviated somewhat. If no such organization exists, then there can be problems. This was the case now.



1978: Seneca Optimists

For most of their existence, the Toronto Optimists had maintained such a group, and it had often proven its worth. Here, no one had thought to, or bothered to, start and maintain a feeder Corps. The Optimists and Seneca Corps had both had feeder Corps, but they had been allowed to lapse when the merger took place. (Some still called it a takeover.)

Now, this situation was to lead to one of the most unusual situations ever seen, anywhere, in Canadian Drum Corps. The need finally being noted, a Parade Corps was started at Seneca College, for boys and girls 9-14. They would practice every Sunday from 10:00 – 1:00, at the College sports centre. They would be called the “Seneca Optimists Cadets”, a division of the “Seneca Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps”. Mr. John O’Leary would be the director. This was the right way to go, but would be too little too late to be of much use to the Junior “A” Corps. What was done to help resolve this situation we shall cover when, in time, it happened.



1978: Mike Grimes with friends

Meanwhile, the Corps kept on going. The new director, to replace the retired Al Tierney, was Gord O’Halloran. He went back in Drum Corps to 1956, with the Danforth Crusaders. Later, he played and marched with the Toronto Optimists, Canadian Commanders, was a drum major, drummer, instructor, and all around Drum Corps person. Probably the only things he had not done were play a bugle and be a director. Now he was a director!

Money was a big problem this year and Gord had a personal one-on-one with every member to encourage regular payment of dues. These were now necessary. There was even a scheme floated for each member of the staff to donate a thousand dollars to the Corps. This did not find enough favour to become reality.

In October 1977, a Drum Corps Rules Congress took place, accommodating over 800 participants. Representatives from Canada were:

Seneca Optimists. . . . . Al Tierney  
Oakland Crusaders. . . . . Bob Duggan  
O.D.C.A. . . . . Jim Towie  
C.D.C.A. . . . . Wayne Elliot  
Quebec Jr. "A" Circuit. . . . Maurice Corey

The weekend of January 20th, 1978, saw Symposium 6, the showcase of the C.D.C.A. and O.D.C.A., held at the Sheraton Centre Hotel.

Mr. Evert Botterweg gave a presentation on inventory control and purchasing. He stressed the problems that Canadian Corps had with customs. He was the one to listen to, as he knew exactly how to handle this. He passed his knowledge along to his successors, and, when his instructions were followed, there were never any problems.

Al Tierney spoke on "Corps conduct and pride", an important topic, what with all the trips to different places. He also presented the association awards for this year. This year's "Award of Merit" went, deservedly, to Dick Brown, now the Director of Hyliters Drum Corps.

Gary Czapinski and Ralph Pace (27th Lancers) conducted the M&M clinic. Colour Guards by Len Knuszecki, Marie Grana, and Stan Knoub.

Twelve people conducted the management seminar, among them Don Pesceone, Jack Roberts, Al Tierney, Bob Duggan, John Jones, Jacqui Kennedy and Evert Botterweg. There was more – a mini-corps.

Reports from across town said that the Oakland Crusaders were stepping up rehearsals to one night a week, plus long sessions on the weekend. Getting 90 members out, and expecting 125 by spring, they had experienced a very small turnover of personnel. It seemed they were on the road to recovery.



1978: Seneca Optimists Parachute

Seneca Optimists were undergoing the opposite, having lost half of their people. Some of these were instructors. Sam Kays and Doug Bass, percussion, were now with the Oakland Crusaders.

In a tribute to the past, ex-Optimists George Wright and Bob Trimble started a Colour Guard. It was formed of old Toronto Optimist



members, and had appeared in Christmas parades. Joining the Canadian Colour Guard circuit and the International Colour Guard circuit, they planned to compete and were looking for members.

From February 20th through April 10th, eight half-hour TV specials ran on cable TV. April 3rd saw the Seneca Optimist 1977 field show screened. Three C.J.A. judges, Al Anderson on drums, Ted Keys on bugles, and Greg Oxenham on drill, discussed the Seneca performance for the enlightenment of the viewers.

The Seneca Optimists held a dance on March 25th. Regardless of the loss of so many members, things were carrying on. The Corps was booked into a lot of contests, including all the D.C.I. ones that they had entered in the last two years. Somebody must have known something. Somebody did, though how far ahead of subsequent events is anybody's guess. No matter, it was to lead to one of the most unusual arrangements ever seen in Drum Corps, even by today's standards. It all took place, on the surface, in May of 1978, though it must have been thought of long before.

It was all made possible by the fact that the Peterborough Krescendos had decided to go inactive for a year. They were a fine Corps, and its members were proud of it, its people, its history and traditions. They had marched and suffered side by side through good and bad and were a close knit family. They had worked their way up and eventually became Junior "A". Maybe hastily, as this was a tough division. Finally reverting to Junior "B", they had decided, this year, to stand down. Possibly reorganize, revamp, re-orient and take another run at things at another time.

Peter Byrne, Bugle Instructor of the Seneca Optimists, approached Gerry Hemsley, Director of the Krescendos, about a deal. The Seneca Optimists needed people this year, not only to compete but also to get on the field. What was proposed was a temporary amalgamation of the two Corps for the rest of the 1978 season only.

A meeting was held at a Holiday Inn, attended by the entire executive of the Krescendos and representatives of the Seneca Optimists. Due to this, the people in the Peterborough Corps knew that something was up, because this was a rare occurrence. Between these two factions, bolstered by the instructors from both Corps, a total of 13 hours of meetings took place. As a result of this a formal agreement was signed, on a Saturday night. It stipulated that final acceptance rested on at least 25 of the members of the Krescendos agreeing to it.



1977: Peterborough Krescendos

Mr. Hemsley, the Director, presented the proposal to his group the following day, Sunday. He explained that they would have to adjust their loyalties for the next three and a half months. After that, they would again become the "Krescendos".



Many of the Krescendos saw an opportunity to belong to a D.C.I. Corps, if only for a short period. Indeed, at this time, Seneca Optimists were the only D.C.I. Corps in Canada. They realized that there would probably never be another opportunity like this. Many of them hungered for the opportunity. Some of them had long before this. It meant much more travel and exposure to big time Drum Corps competition. As a result, at least forty members approved of this realignment, far more than stated in the agreement.

So, with the stroke of a pen, the Peterborough Krescendos were now part of a D.C.I. Corps. For most of them, though big adjustments were involved, it was to be a heady experience. As a premonition of this, many of them wondered what the people from Toronto would be like. As it turned out, they were no different from anybody else. Maybe just a bit more “Corps”.

It was planned that the official “lend-lease” get underway at Camp ‘78 to be held in Minden, Ontario, Camp Kilcoo.

The Seneca Optimists would arrive there, with the “inactive” Peterborough Krescendos arriving the next morning. The camp was a nice place, with a large mess hall adjacent to a lake. Other visitors, of course, were mosquitoes and blackflies.

After breakfast, the Seneca Corps went to the practice field, and lo and behold, the Krescendos were already there. A lot of them, lined up and waiting! When the latecomers joined them, the Seneca Optimists, as they all now were, looked huge.



1978: Seneca Optimists in Simcoe

This was not haphazard. All had been planned at a staff meeting in Peterborough, earlier. Not much was left to chance. The two Corps had now met each other. After this, the executive, instructors, and junior executive of both Corps were introduced. Representatives of each branch made a speech and even champagne was served. Finally, there was a toast to “The New Seneca Optimists”, appropriate, no matter how temporary.

The rest of the long weekend was devoted to practice. There was much to be done. First of all, the new people had to learn the entire Seneca drill and music, from top to bottom. Learning the drill was hampered by rainfall, so the time was spent learning and polishing the music.

A lot was done that weekend, with the Peterborough people picking up the new stuff and fitting in very rapidly. The size of the Corps was very impressive.

The following Thursday, the Krescendos people had another meeting, mainly to see what the reaction of their members was to the whole thing. There were a few bitches, but it was noted how small the problems were. Therefore, it was decided that it would work, and it went ahead as originally planned.

It was May 1978 when all this took place. Had it been any later; it would have been impractical, even impossible. The contest season was very close already. Now, a great part of the Corps had to learn and perform the show, and then fit it in with those who already knew it. In double quick time. That it was done, and done quite well, maybe as well as could be expected, was a tribute to both Corps, especially the newcomers. The American Corps had all gotten stronger over the winter, and the cross-town rivals, Oakland Crusaders, had not experienced any big changes. Because of the late date of all this, there would be some unusual, but not entirely unexpected, results.

One result, off the field, was that a lot of bussing took place. People from Peterborough had to be bussed to Toronto for shows, departures, and, mostly, rehearsals. It is evident that such an arrangement could not have worked without the utmost co-operation from both sides. This attitude had been fostered at the camp, with a sign in the mess hall that proclaimed: ***“Seneca Optimists and Krescendos equals Super Corps”***

In size, yes. Other directions would have to wait awhile. Also, a T.A.S. night was had, hoping to induce a unified spirit, although tradition and allegiance, strictly speaking, were now somewhat diluted. However, this was not apparent. What helped, though, was the almost universal desire of Corps-oriented people to march and play. It was as competitive as Bay Street, as compulsive as Saturday Night Fever.

One extreme example of this was Allan Plumb. For him, there was only one Corps, the Seneca Optimists. He had paid his own way here, sacrificing a chance of a summer job, to march with “his” Corps. Where was he from? Oh! Only Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.

Now, with all the amalgamating, predicting, compromising, and whatever else took place, over, it was time for competition. Time to see where all this would lead. There would be surprises. Not all of them were concerning the Seneca Optimists.

June 10th, Kitchener, saw a nice, neat Canadian Corps from Scarborough, Ontario, upset an applectart.

1st	Squires.. . . . .	56.40
2nd	Cardinals . . . . .	55.15
3rd	Oakland Crusaders . . .	50.80
4th	Ventures. . . . .	50.75

The Squires were American. The upset was that the Cardinals defeated the mighty Oakland Crusaders.



1978: Cardinals

Cardinals had been around a long time. Always neat, always trying. Never yet making the “big time”, but always a presence. They were proud of the fact, rightly so, that they had never merged with anybody, retaining their identity. All these mergers could be described as short-term pain for short-term gain. Corps always disappeared during such maneuvers. Of all the Corps that had merged, not very many are around today. Cardinals are. Still not big, or great, or what have you, but still there. It happened, again, the next day and this time with Cardinals eight points up on the Crusaders.

A week later, it was Seneca Optimists turn. By five points. Seneca were over Oakland by one point. Both, supposed big guns, were being humbled by the Cardinals. Seneca at least had the excuse of a late start, and that this contest was in Ajax, hex town for any Optimist Corps. So deeply was this believed that they had pulled out of it in 1977, when of all years, they should have won it. Reality, though, said that this state of affairs could not continue, and gradually, it began to change.

Welland, June 24th

1st	Oakland Crusaders.....	58.4
2nd	Cardinals.....	58.3
3rd	Seneca Optimists. ....	54.0

A tour was coming up for the Seneca Optimists. Tour One began on July 8th, in Allentown, PA, and was to be instructive. This was D.C.I. East, in with the big boys again. In fact, this tour was to encompass all D.C.I. calibre contests, ending in Toronto.

Myron Melnyck was back with this Corps, which was a good factor. He had left for awhile. Other additions included Bob Steward, formerly of the 27th Lancers.

Seneca, understandably, were off to a slow start but were slowly improving.

After Allentown, where nothing extraordinary took place, the next three days were spent competing in Garfield, N.J., Boston, Mass., and Montreal, Quebec. Verdun, to be exact. This was July 11th, and we can now see how things stood.

In a field of all-American D.C.I. Corps, the Seneca Optimists were eighth, out of eight. A score of 65.20 was a long way from the first place Madison Scouts, with 86.35. Over 21 points! This was a big disappointment, but not totally unexpected. They had not really got going until May.

At Montreal, the crowd loved them, as they always had, and they had put on one of their best shows to-date. The results pointed up the fact that this year would be a race against time. They were still a fine Corps, but a far cry from last year.



1978: Seneca Optimists Drums

The tour ended at Lamport Stadium, in Toronto. This was the show put on by Seneca College, featuring eight 1977 D.C.I. finalists. Of these, Seneca Optimists were again in eighth position, a little improved score-wise over Quebec. A 66.5, that to some, seemed not quite deserved. Should have been higher. They were three and a half points behind 7th place Garfield who they had hoped to beat.



Three things had conspired to help bring about this situation.

A talented horn line was suffering from a lack of numbers. Despite the amalgamation, there was still a shortage. They would have to rely on age and experience to pull them through. Tenuous factors at this level.

Another problem was percussion. Although, after the union, the section was huge, thirty-seven to be exact, it was not yet clicking or pulling its weight. It was, if only a little, out of its depth.

Thirdly, some of the material was not going over as expected, with the crowd and judges. Although 1978 “Parachute Power” T-shirts were for sale at \$4.00 each, what they represented was not going over. When first introduced last year, it had brought nothing but gasps and applause. Now, it seemed to provoke yawns. Those who knew said that it failed in the “artistic sense”.

Musically, the program, most of which was new and some of which was challenging to the new people, left something to be desired.

The off-the-line was the most pleasant number this Corps played, by a horn line that had blend and balance. Not size, though. “Puttin’ of the Ritz” was, maybe, a bit difficult. It must be realized that, no matter how much the Peterborough people wanted to be D.C.I., not all of them were of that calibre. Some of the Seneca people were not either, so we had a D.C.I. Corps, that entered D.C.I. shows, but without a full complement of D.C.I. calibre people.



1978: Seneca Optimists



1978: Seneca Optimists

The five day tour, though, was considered a success. A great improvement had taken place between the start of it and the finish. It had served to point out where changes might be necessary. As a result of this, the 1976 number “Farandole” was brought back, and inserted in the second half of the show.

After all this negativity, there is a positive side. What the two amalgamated Corps had accomplished in such short a time was nothing short

of amazing. The Krescendo people had made the utmost effort. Without this, coupled with the efforts of the Seneca people, they would not be where they were now. Discipline and appearance were excellent all round. In other words, Class. Despite all the losses, they were still optimistic, if that word still applies. Spirit was still undaunted.

July 15th, Peterborough showed cause for optimism. Cardinals were back in third place, after their brief but commendable fling with victory. Seneca was second, with 70.15 to the Oakland Crusaders 72.75. A difference of 2.60.

A camp intervened and planned changes were to be put into effect. In an attempt to breathe new life into the second half of the show, two numbers would be dropped, so that "Farandole" could be inserted. Camp was in Peterborough, a sign that the operation, successful or not, was working. Bussing and all, which went on, back and forth, for the duration.

The next trial was the Provincial Championship taken back now by the Oakland Crusaders. The scores are revealing.

1st	Oakland Crusaders.....	74.95
2nd	Seneca Optimists.....	73.05
3rd	Cardinals.....	63.45

The Seneca Corps was now only 1.9 behind Oakland, a sign that things were coming together. You would think. The Provincials were on July 22nd, and on July 30th, in Simcoe, Ontario, the Crusaders opened their lead up to six points.

Tour two now approached, which meant meeting, again, top U.S. Corps plus Canadian rivals.

The first stop on this jaunt was Ypsilanti, Michigan, for the D.C.I. North contest. The Corps had to accept the fact that they were not as good as last year. This was apparent to others, as well. It did not, however, stop them from giving their best at each stop. Three potential Canadian champion Corps were following roughly similar schedules, and we shall try to touch on all three, seeing how they compare at the finish. The three were:

1st	Seneca Optimists
2nd	Oakland Crusaders
3rd	Offensive Lions.

Ypsilanti, D.C.I. North was won by Phantom Regiment with 86.65. Far back, in eighth, were Oakland Crusaders with 69.4 Seneca Optimists ended in tenth, with 64.95. A pattern was set that would vary, but not change.

On August 11th, The Offensive Lions were second to Phantom Regiment, but by 14 points. Northstar, of



1978: Corps on Retreat in Simcoe



Kitchener, was back another 11 points from the Quebec Corps. With scores like this, it was improbable that any Canadian Corps would defeat anyone of note, though one or two could possibly make the top twelve.

In Alton, Illinois, on August 9th, Crusaders and Lions met, with Crusaders on top by three. Yet the next day, they were only 1.5 up on the Lions. The Quebec Corps was beginning to move.

Seneca competed in Sioux City, Iowa, on August 10th, coming 5th with a 69.00. They seemed mired in low placing, with low scores. They had pulled out of the U.S. Open in Marion, Ohio, which they had won last year. If it was to avoid defeat, they were suffering it now.



1978: Seneca Optimists

There were other dates before D.C.I. finals, and this was to lead to a serious split. One of these dates was an exhibition. Half the Corps wanted to do it. They were booked in. The other half wanted to skip it in order to practice for the upcoming D.C.I. contest. The Corps Director, Gord O'Halloran, had a dilemma on his hands that should not have arisen. As it turned out, they did the exhibition, as they should, but not without some lingering resentment.

After this had settled down, it was off to Denver, at last, for the 1978 show of the year. An article in the August issue of Drum Corps World, noted that ten Corps appeared to have a spot in the finals all but locked up. All others were seen to be struggling. Among these were listed the three Canadian Corps that we have been discussing. They would have to work like crazy to get anywhere this year, but it was a bit late for that now.

The D.C.I. show was August 15th through 18th, and competition for the perceived final two places would be intense.

The preliminaries sifted out those who were fated to go on, and those who were not. Among the latter were our Canadian Corps.

17th	Oakland Crusaders...	76.70
18th	Offensive Lions. . . .	76.45
23rd	Seneca Optimists. . . .	71.40

So, Canada, and Toronto, that used to have two top twelve D.C.I. Corps in existence, now had none. They would now head back to Canada to battle it out for local honours at the Canadian Championship.



This brought out the best in everybody, and along with it some changes.

For the first time in living memory, the Canadian Junior “A” Drum and Bugle Corps Championship was won by a Corps from Quebec. The Offensive Lions, from Jonquiere, Quebec, 500 miles north of Quebec City, were Junior “A” Champions for 1978. They had been creeping up all year, to finally conquer. Being from such a remote area adds lustre to their achievement. They were to be congratulated. Technically, they impressed the most people, with all sections looking and sounding very solid. An impressive, entertaining show capped it off, with a score of 83.3 for first place.



1978: Offensive Lions win Nationals

Second place went to the Oakland Crusaders, not far behind with 82.05. They used much appealing solo work, combined with an overall solid horn and drum line. From their pedestal of last year, the Seneca Optimists dropped to a lowly third, over six points back of the Crusaders. Everybody had tried hard, all year, but it was not enough. The makeshift arrangement of May, with all its fanfare and hopes, was maybe a bit too late. After this, the last important contest of the year, the arrangement was due to expire, as had been agreed upon at the beginning. What happened then, we shall see in the next chapter.

One bit of unsettling news that had not helped Seneca in its drive for another title was the departure of two Drum Instructors. Two young men had come, from California, to instruct the drum line. When things did not quite work out as they expected, they departed, leaving the Corps in the lurch.

The August 1978 issue of Gold Capsule Comments showed who was now in charge.

Editor..... Mike Grimes

Associate Editor. . . Mhairi Cumming

Photographs..... Don Daber, Gareth Skip, Steve Trevor

Layouts & Art..... Don Daber, Paul McCusker

Production..... Mike Grimes, Don Daber

Feature Writers. . . Mark Lewis, Gareth Skip, Arlene Janicki, Steve Vickers,  
Mike Grimes, Mhairi Cumming

The editorial offices for GCC were now at 126 Lakeshore Drive, Toronto.

An excellent yearbook would come out this year. They had always been very good, with pictures of every marching member, scores, rundowns, etc., etc.

Oakland Crusaders, who had a disappointing season in 1977, had not had a great one this year. A mid-season changes of instructors, loss of personnel, and internal problems could account for 1977. What had happened this year?

Seneca's music program this year had made the D.C.I. top twelve hit parade for 1978, if the Corps itself did not.

"Sorcerer and the Latin"

"West Side Story"

"Puttin' on the Ritz"

"Barn Dance"

"Soulero"

Two numbers in the second half were later removed for the re-insertion of "Farandole" from the 1976 show. This program was popular.

A most interesting article had appeared this year in Drum Corps News Magazine, on June 21st to be exact. It was a brief story, covering the existence of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps from 1958 to 1976. It was generally positive; saying that win, lose, or draw, this Corps always displayed class. This was true. It was promoted from within. It also said it set records that might never be broken. Also true. They haven't yet. Saying it was prominent for 17 years, it omitted to say that it had existed for 18. Ten consecutive titles were cited, when it was eleven. The biggest fallacy was saying that the founders of the Optimists had spent considerable time studying the operation and management of the Chicago Cavaliers. Further to this, it said that the Corps was a carbon copy of the Cavaliers. This last claim was false. Anyone who has read this far knows the true story. Probably, though, many people did think that all this was true, even without articles such as this. I guess it depends who you believe.

Further, the writer said that, along with many others, he considered the 1962 Corps the finest Canadian Corps ever fielded. This is saying something after the rise of De



1978: Seneca Optimists Rifle



1978: Seneca Optimists Horns



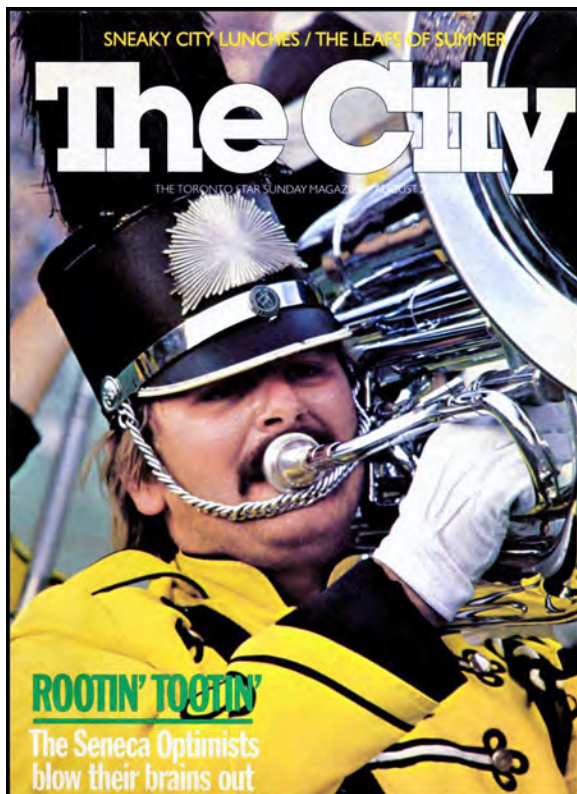
La Salle, Oakland Crusaders, and Seneca Optimists. More. When the Optimists lost the Nationals in 1969, the entire Corps showed class in defeat. They did, according to De La Salle full honours. It also said the average age of the Corps that year was 15. Very young, against older, more experienced Corps. Going on to outline the Corps until its merger in 1976, the article overall was highly complimentary, just some of the facts were a little wrong.

A glaring omission, there are many in this chapter, due to lack of data, is that the Drum Major of the Seneca Optimists this year was Keith Gallagher<sup>18</sup>. He had done a fine job during a trying year.

Seneca had a couple of entries in a Drum Corps book of world records, now in print. They have the oldest continuous Drum Corps newsletter, G.C.C. begun in 1960 as Green Capsule Comments. Now Gold Capsule Comments. All told, it had seen 18 years of publication.



1978: Mike Grimes and Keith Gallagher, Seneca Optimists Drum Majors



1978: Seneca Optimists (Cover of City Magazine)

Seneca was the first Canadian Corps to win the Open Class at the U.S. Open. Toronto itself had a mention as the first city to place two Corps in D.C.I. finals in the same year. It only lasted one year.

Late August saw the Seneca Optimists featured on the front cover of the Toronto Star, Sunday magazine. It showed a contra-bass player, playing his horn, in full uniform. The caption read “The Seneca Optimists blow their brains out”. More seriously, it stated that “our crack Drum and Bugle Corps has been waging up and down battle all summer to stay among the top twelve in North America. This was right on, but as the article was likely written sometime before publication, it did not say that it was a battle they lost.

One final cheery note on which to end this chapter is that Bernie Beer was inducted into the D.C.A. Hall of Fame, along with five other notables. D.C.A. is the Association for Senior Corps.

<sup>18</sup>. Mike Grimes was the Drum Major while Keith Gallagher was the Assistant Drum Major.





1978: Seneca Optimists

# Version

## Chapter 29: 1979 – “TAPS”

There was lots of news around this year, but most of it was about other Corps, not the Seneca Optimists.

Offensive Lions had a big recruiting campaign and were stepping up rehearsals to four a week during the winter. Gary Czapinski was writing M&M for the Cavaliers. These outside instructors came if you hired them. At \$1,000 a weekend, plus food, accommodation, etc. they did not come cheap.

Marie Grana was now with Madison Scouts. Oakland Crusaders were said to be quite strong compared to the last two winters. They still had Harry Clark on drums, with Terry Kirkpatrick. On horns they had Peter Byrne, on guard Debbie Miller. If those names seem familiar, they were. Peter Byrne and Debbie Miller used to be with the Seneca Optimists. What had happened? They had not been the first instructors to leave. Sam Kays had left the year before, and others. It was part of a slow decline, the roots of which are difficult to pinpoint.



1978: Seneca Optimists waiting for the Santa Claus parade to start

At the end of last year, the Krescendos people had gone back to their own Corps. It had been fun for them but it was only for the summer of 1978. They reformed their own Corps. This left the Seneca Optimists where they had been at the beginning of the 1978 season, with about sixty people, all experienced and all used to top level competition. The way things looked right now, they would have to become a Junior “B” Corps to get on the field.



1978: members of the Seneca Optimists

An alternative was to do what the Boston Crusaders had done after their decline and concentrate on having a top quality small Corps, forgetting about size. They had done this very successfully but had to accept that they would never win big shows with a small Corps. It seemed that both of these choices were not acceptable to the remnants of the Seneca Optimists. More importantly, neither was presented as a possibility that could have led to a rebuilding operation. Why was this?





1978: Seneca Optimists in Toronto Santa Claus parade

strength". He was also a gofer, which we all were at one time or another. On the night that Ric was formally handed the reins of control, it was obvious that nobody wanted the job more than he did. It was also obvious that nobody else wanted the job. It takes a certain quality to take over an enterprise that is seemingly in decline. Ric had that quality, combined with eagerness, which makes it even harder to explain subsequent events.

All this took place at a huge meeting, held at Seneca College, and a really odd thing took place. Some people were dissatisfied with the Booster Club and its performance. Why, I don't know. The result was that the incumbent leadership was voted out; however, nobody was voted in! Probably nobody wanted in. So, on one vote, there was now no Booster Club. There had been, as we have now seen, a falling away of instructors, executive, players and, now, the Booster Club. The whole complex was coming unravelled. It was as if there was writing on the wall and everybody was reading it.

Before Christmas, Seneca Optimists had put on a terrific display in the Toronto Santa Claus parade. They were captured in a spectacular T.V. shot that gave no hint of any disturbance ahead. To anybody outside the Corps, everything must have looked very solid.

It was after this that things started to slide. One indication was the 1979 Individual and Small Group Competition. In the percussion caption, Seneca had one entry, to fifteen for Oakland. Brass saw no Seneca entries, as



1978: Seneca Optimists in Santa Claus parade

Well a lot of strange things went on during the winter that might shed some light on things. And a lot of things did not go on. First of all, the Corps got another new Corps Director, Mr. Ric Brown. He had been around a long time, beginning with the Toronto Optimists in the guard then as a bass drummer. He had stayed on during the years and ended up with the Seneca Optimists. Here, Ric served as Assistant Director, under Al Tierney. Always known for an independent mind, to quote Al Tierney, Ric was "a tower of



against nine for Oakland. Colour guard had four Seneca entries, as opposed to seven for Oakland. Other Corps had entries, but I have used the Oakland Crusader figure because these two Corps were nearly always equal in such events. Clearly something was wrong.

At Symposium 7, held on January 19th, 20th, and 21st, no one who was connected to the Seneca Optimists was doing anything. There were just people who had been. It was as if they no longer existed. Well, of course they still existed. People were still coming to practice every week. More than enough to keep things going. The problem was, there was nothing going to keep going. Instructors were few, absent, or non-existent. People who came out found no unified activity going on. Many people came



1978: Some Members of the Seneca Optimists

from other Corps, either to watch, or join. Nobody took them in hand to get them enrolled; in fact, the machinery for it did not exist. So, potential recruits, interested enough to come down, were allowed to drift away. Probably to go and join another corps.

Regardless of all this, at this stage there still was a Corps; they had been booked into a lot of contests, including D.C.I. contests. It was as if a big spirit would suddenly come along and set things on the right track. That was not likely to happen, the “spirit” all having long gone. This situation was to reach absurdity before real evidence of the state of things became apparent.

As the winter wore on, things got worse. Fewer people began to come out, as enthusiasm dwindled, and what spirit there had been began to dissipate. A partial explanation of this could be that after a merger, and a temporary amalgamation, there was no spirit, or tradition, to build on. Constant mergers can dilute the identity of the Corps, to the point that you are not in “A” Corps or “B” Corps, but just a corps. There was no long tradition to maintain, no spirit to whip up in the name of one’s Corps. Also, there were many more things to do these days than in older days, and people were not so inclined to stay with an ineffective organization as they once might have been.



1978: Some Corps members of the Seneca Optimists

Another major factor contributing to this was that there were no local smaller Corps around to gobble up. The two big Toronto Corps had merged them out of existence.

All of this discussion is speculation. What was reality was that a major rebuilding job was necessary. This could take years, and even then was not a sure thing. The calibre of Drum Corps today was such that no one was going to come up and win in one year as the 1958 Toronto Optimists had done.

For such a process to take place, a dynamic personality was needed, someone with the foresight and knowledge to know what it would entail. When things go wrong like this, it is convenient to blame the one at the top, the Director. In this case, this must be looked at again.

The past versions of this Corps had more than enough people for everything. Everyone wanted a piece of it. Now, the Director was virtually alone. There was Jack Watt, the Business Manager, an Equipment Manager, and a few others like Harold Bradley and myself. None of us did much because, "It wasn't our job". It wasn't, but one man could not do everything. So, eventually, things came to a head.



1978: Some members of the Seneca Optimists

There had been a news conference held, at which was announced the Drum Corps International Canadian Regional Drum and Bugle Corps Championships. What that mouthful really meant was the first "D.C.I. Canada". D.C.I. granted the O.D.C.A. a charter to run this first annual contest. The Seneca Optimists were represented at this news conference and, as if everything were all right, they were booked into it.



1978: Some members of the Seneca Optimists

They were, once again, booked into D.C.I. East, at Allentown, PA, on August 10th and 11th, along with Oakland Crusaders and Offensive Lions. They now came under the listing of "Associate" Corps, a category created by D.C.I. for those who had not made it into the top twelve.

Contests in Canada, on their schedule included Ajax, Welland, Hamilton, Toronto, and the Ontario Provincial and Canadian National Championships, along



with D.C.I. tours, of course. In fact, they had a schedule lined up that was the equal of the previous two years. Why! Because when these shows were booked, there was every indication that there would be a Corps on the field, and there could have been. But over the long winter months, it had been allowed to slowly dissipate, no action being taken to halt or reverse the trend. Most of the members were now more interested in playing hockey.



1978: Some members of the Seneca Optimists

Realization of the true state of affairs began to surface. One indication was in "Corps Fax '79". This publication, the brain child of Don Daber, could have been given to someone who knew nothing about Canadian Drum Corps. After reading it, they would have known all about them. How they operated, were judged, celebrated, competed, and anything else. The second half of this booklet was a directory of all Corps in Canada that had bothered to send in information, which was just about all of them, including some American ones. Each Corps had a picture and underneath it was a complete listing of its officers, instructors, and a phone number where they could be reached. You could have organized a contest with this book alone.

Under a fine picture of the Seneca Optimists on parade, the total information given was a Toronto postal box number. Under this, the barren statement, was "No information available at time of publication."

It was time for something to happen, and it did. A meeting at a private home was held in early May, where the absurdity of the whole situation was brought clearly into the open. In attendance were four or five members of the executive, waiting for the Director to take charge and chair the meeting. He began by stating how they were attempting to get the "Judy Garland" theme music



1978: Some Seneca Optimists corps members

for the off-the-line number. This piece, a medley actually, had been played years before by the Toronto Optimists. The absurdity was, that by this time of year, the Corps should have been outside marching and playing, polishing the show that had been learned over the winter. They were still trying to get music. There was no show. Such things were the responsibility of a Music Director, but there wasn't one, at least not officially. Something had to give, and it did.



One of the members blew up, blaming Mr. Brown for letting the Corps trickle down the drain. He accepted full responsibility and immediately stepped down. I think he was relieved. The job was beyond his scope at this time. Although no one person was totally to blame, he became the man whose name would be associated with the whole debacle. This is not absolutely true. There were many factors involved, beyond the control of any of us.



1978: Some Seneca Optimists Corps members

None of us would have done much better. Maybe all of us, like the members, had, after all, had enough. To Ric's credit, he picked up the reins that no one else was willing to hold and gave it an effort. He rates an "A", if only for that. When things had settled down, Jack Watt now became the Director. Things carried on for a while, but nothing much changed. Seneca had already pulled out of a May 12th concert because they were not ready... for anything. Ric Brown became driver on the equipment truck. He seemed a lot happier.

Mr. Watt, the Director, answering a request from the community services people, took on a person to work with the Corps who was serving a sentence of community work. He was about as interested in it as the Corps members themselves seemed to be, which, now, was very little. One weekend, at Seneca College, a group of the executive was inside discussing the state of things, wondering whether it was worth the trouble trying to keep anything going. A decision was reached.

Two corps members were seen walking across the large parking lot. It was a gorgeous day, with not a cloud in a clear blue sky. This was a parking lot that once was full of cars, thronged with people. In the distance sat the Corps equipment truck, alone, forlorn, still crammed with the instruments and paraphernalia of a Drum Corps.



1978: Some members of the Seneca Optimists

Two of the executives walked over to meet the two members who had turned up for practice. They were the only two. Disappointment was evident on their faces when informed the Corps was now disbanded.

*Every legend has a beginning.*

*Every legend transforms itself into a never-ending story  
told time and again by those that were part of its unfolding.*

*None of us will recall how things ended.*

*No, we prefer to remember how things were when we were Optimists.*

*The legend lives on... in all of us.*

## Epilogue

Well, there it is folks, the whole story.

Although this tale was supposed to be the story of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps, I felt it would not be complete without the build-up from 1952 to September 1957. Likewise, with the events that took place from early 1976 to the final denouement in 1979. The Toronto Optimists marched as a unit from 1958 through 1975. Before that and after, it was not the Toronto Optimists but I felt, essential to the story.

There was a brief attempt at a revival that fared no better than many other attempts by other Corps. It lasted a couple of weeks.

Many of those in the story you have just read are no longer with us, mostly due to natural causes. The known ones are Al Baggs, Bernie Beer, Mrs. Nonie McKolskey-Beer, Al Tierney, Gord Robinson, Doug McPhail, John Johnson, Wolfgang Petschke, Norm Cardwell and, no doubt, many among the original Optimist Club. Even some who were Corps members.

As for the rest, where are they now? All over! Most got married and settled down, building successful careers for themselves and their families. A few are still involved with Drum Corps. Some disappeared, never to be seen again.

No matter, wherever they are, they all have one thing in common. They were in the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. They all have fond, or even sentimental memories, which helps to fuel an alumnae association that is still active to this day. A 45th anniversary reunion was held to honour Barry Bell, Lorne Ferrazzutti and Don Daber, three of the main stalwarts of those early years. People from all walks of life came, sharing memories, reliving past glories, rehashing old battles.

This is now where it belongs, in the realm of memory. Any tarnish will disappear, and past glories and legends will glow brighter as, for one more day, the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps takes to the field.

From Toronto... The Optimists!

It's better that way.

Colin Hedworth





## About the author



Colin Hedworth began his drum corps career with the Danforth Tech Crusaders. He was a charter member of both the Toronto Optimists, as a marching member, and the Seneca Optimists, as a member of their support staff. He played tenor drum with the Toronto Optimists until he aged out at the end of 1962. Colin joined the equipment department of the Toronto Optimists at the end of 1975. As a result, he was also there when the Seneca Optimists began. He stayed with the Seneca Optimists until the Corps folded. During the intervening years Colin maintained an active connection with the corps and its members.

This book is a manifestation of Colin's love for the Optimists. Colin spent a great deal of time, over a number of years, researching the information that has been included. He contacted former staff and members of the Scout Band, Opti-Corps, the Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Optimists. He also talked with staff and corps members of some of Optimists competitors. His goal was to gather and discuss various versions of stories in an attempt to validate the veracity of the material included.

Sadly, Colin passed away in July 2013 without having had the opportunity to see his book published.



**"FROM TORONTO... THE OPTIMISTS!"**

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