



75TH ANNIVERSARY STORY



Follow the Tracks

The history of the Canadian Pacific Railway reaches back to 1873. In fact, the first CPR spike was hammered down in Bonfield (previously known as Callander Station)! With the CPR pushing west from Callander Station, there came pioneers who influenced the development of our city. North Bayites will quickly associate the names of town pioneers such as Duncan McIntyre, James Worthington and John Ferguson with our city streets for example.

Back to curling and the railroaders. Curling clubs popped up in most populated centers along the Canadian Pacific Railway as the rails extended westward from Callander Station to Sault Sainte Marie (even stretching across the border to Sault, Michigan). The curlers of the day formed the Northern International Curling Association, with the main purpose of holding an annual bonspiel to determine a curling champion. As you have already guessed, with Sault Michigan's withdrawal, the name was changed to Northern Ontario Curling Association. This Association became affiliated with the Royal Caledonian Curling Association of Scotland. (A story of Scottish curlers playing in Canada is a future story of this 75th Anniversary story series).

Around the same time, a second railway line was pushing northward from North Bay toward Temiskaming and beyond. Curling clubs dotted this northern route at most every mining and lumber town. An association of curlers living along this rail line was inevitable. In 1931, the Haileybury Curling Club organized a bonspiel that was played at nearby New Liskeard. From this bonspiel in New Liskeard, the T&NO Railway Curling Association was born and its annual T&NO bonspiel became a reality.

To give the reader a sense for this enduring bonspiel, fast forward to 1954 when, by coincidence, once again New Liskeard was playing host. This would be the 24th T&NO Curling Association bonspiel with a total of 63 teams competing that year. Teams (#) flocked to New Liskeard (24) from as north as Kapuskasing (1), as south as Palmerston (1) and as east as Arnprior (1). The remaining teams hailed from Haileybury (17), Temagami (4), North Bay (2), Englehart (1), McIntyre (1), Noranda (2), Kirkland Lake (8) and Iroquois Falls (1). The T&NO

Bonspiel ran for six straight days with ice surfaces in use 15 hours a day. The bonspiel used New Liskeard's six curling club sheets plus five more sheets created at the town's hockey arena. Curlers could expect to play a minimum of six games over the week.

The T&NO bonspiel would become one of the biggest, and most historic, of the annual curling events in Northern Ontario, running for over 50 years, winners copping the Geo W Lee Trophy. T&NO Curling Association teams competed annually against NOCA teams to determine the Northern Ontario entry to the "Dominion-wide" competition called the MacDonald Brier.

Fun Facts:

George W Lee was once on Council and mayor for the town of North Bay, later the General Manager of the T&NO Railroad.

Taken for granted nowadays but advertised as perks for this 24th T&NO Bonspiel: all games were to be played on 11 sheets of artificial ice and all eleven curling sheets would be using matched rocks!

The current Northern Ontario Curling Association was formed in 2007 upon amalgamation of the T&NO and other Associations (Northwestern Ontario, Northern Ontario Ladies Curling, and the original NOCA).



A Story About 1955

Image for story is the Steski rink of (Lead to Skip) Ed McCormack, Owen Staples, Bob Wyatt and Rudy Steski.

This story explains the journey of two Northern Ontario teams in their pursuit of provincial and national championships.

The British Consols were a series of men's playdowns sponsored by MacDonald's Tobacco. Club representatives would advance to the Zone playdowns, with the winners progressing to the Association playdowns. The Association winners of course advancing to the "provincial" level where the British Consols Trophy winner was determined, then competed in the Brier to represent their province.

Since 1927, Northern Ontario has sent representation to the Brier. In 1927, it was the Haileybury rink skipped by Emmett Smith. During that first Brier, eight teams competed at The Granite Club in Toronto (NB, NOnt, NS, ON, PQ, SK, as well as the city champs from Montreal and Toronto). It wasn't until 1936 that each province sent a provincial champion to the Brier. In 1940, the Brier competition location was moved for the first time, when the host city was Winnipeg. (Newfoundland and Labrador did not compete in the Brier until 1949 when they joined the Dominion of Canada.)

In 1955, the North Bay Granite Club was represented at the Brier for the first time. This was also the year that our Club represented Northern Ontario in both the Men's and Women's Provincial Tankard play! After winning the North Bay Granite Club playdown, and then winning the East Zone playdown, Rudy Steski's team competed right here in North Bay for the NOCA championship, winning 12 straight games.

Next stop, the Men's Provincials took place in Fort William and involved teams from Northern Ontario, Northwestern Ontario and the Temiskaming & Northern Ontario Curling Associations. Steski's team faced strong competition, losing their first game and then reeling off three wins in the double round robin playdown. Their most exciting game was played against Jimmy Guy, a renowned Skip from Kenora. Down 5-0 after three ends, Steski roared back to make it 8-6 after seven ends. The game was tied after regulation (12 ends), and Steski drew against twain the extra end to win the game 12-11. Ultimately winning this playdown, the Steski rink of (Lead to Vice) Ed McCormack, Owen Staples, and Bob Wyatt won the British Consols Tankard and the right to represent Northern Ontario at the MacDonald Brier.

Equally exciting was the final game for North Bay Granite Club's Jo Wallace and her rink. The Wallace rink also won their NBGC and regional playdowns, as well as their Zone playdowns against rinks from Copper Cliff, Sudbury Granite, and Sudbury Curling. Jo Wallace won this Ladies' playdown earning her the right to compete in the Ontario Ladies Curling Association Tankard. Tied after 12 ends, Jo Wallace lost in the extra end to Toronto's Cottle rink, the team that won the Ontario Tankard. This was a tremendous showing for Jo Wallace's rink of (Lead to Vice) Martha McLeod, Charlotte Wyatt, and Marion Fisher.

Did you know?

*The Macdonald Tobacco Company's British Consols Trophy is named after a brand of their cigarettes, British Consols, originally introduced in the 1920s and made in Canada.

*For the curious readers: Yes. Bob Wyatt (the Steski team) and Charlotte Wyatt (the Wallace team) were a married couple.



It was St Paddy's Day 1936 at the Curling Club in downtown North Bay. This is a North Bay Nugget reporter's account of the evening:

Curlers Make Merry St Patrick's Night * Scotsmen Whip Irish at Gala Affair; Fun-making Parade Starts it.

It was St Patrick's Day ... but the Scotsmen won! That's what happened at the annual St Patrick's celebration at the North Bay Curling Club Tuesday night when the Irish and Scotch clashed in merry battle for besom 'n stane honors. It was an Irish festival, but the Scots refused to be kept in the background and made their presence felt by winning 13 games to their opponents' five.

The curling matches, however, were only incidental to the gala occasion. It was easily one of the most colorful and merriest affairs in the history of the club. The gents were kids again as they frolicked in sprightly fashion.

Fun Aplenty. It was a big night indeed. The fun started with a boisterous parade from which emanated a din that was heard far and wide. The fun-making curlers, decked out in all sorts of paraphernalia and accompanied by the North Bay Kilty Band, marched (?) from the club to Ferguson street after a spirited invasion of the Empire Hotel.

The jamboree did not stop then. The celebrants trouped merrily around the rink a number of times singing Irish songs and making a great noise in general. Approximately 125 curlers were on hand to typify the spirit of St Patrick's Day, and besides these there were more than 200 women and children who came to witness the fun.

The color green, of course, was in evidence everywhere. One funster, a Scotsman to the core, kept his race in the spotlight by turning out in kilts. Another wore a suit of underwear, presumably over his other garments.

The crowds that trampled around the ice did not do the ice any good, and for a while the going was heavy and sticky. As the night wore on, however, the ice conditions greatly improved and some splendid curling was enjoyed. Competition was keen in all the matches.

All Irish or Scotch. All nationalities were absorbed into Scotch and Irish for this occasion. All the games went four ends with the exception of the E.C. McKay-Dr. B.F. Nott tussle which was the last to be played and went eight ends, finishing in a draw.

The curling ended about 11:30pm but not by any means did all the merry-makers leave the clubhouse at that time. At least five didn't leave until it was time to bring the milk bottles in at home.

The lunchroom under the direction of T.H. Winters was a popular spot Tuesday night and did a rushing business as hungry curlers appeased their appetites. The eats' room was appropriately decorated for the occasion.

The affair was a fitting climax to a most successful season at the North Bay Curling Club.

How they Fared. Results, with rinks designated by their captains:

Scotch		Irish
H. Burrows	beat	L. Rogers
L.B. Christie	beat	H.J. Reynolds
L.M. Duclos	beat	Hugh Gomoll
Del Emms	beat	R.A. Gauthier
A.H.Kilgour	lost to	D. Hamilton
J. Lillie	beat	E.J. Labreche
D. Logan	beat	A. Miller
I. Martyn	beat	Dr. F.W. McKee
R. Martin	beat	J.H. McCurry
N.H. MacDonald	beat	C.H. McColgan
G.W. McDonald	lost to	M.J. McGuinty
J.H. McDonald	lost to	T.E. McKee
N.J. McCubbin	beat	J.P. McKee
E.C. McKay	drew with	Dr. B.F. Nott
M.J. Pierce	lost to	J.C. Ross
T. Buchanan	beat	A.H. Cavanagh

* In 1936, the North Bay Curling Club was located on Worthington St between Ferguson St and Fraser St. The Empire Living. then the Empire Hotel, is at Fraser St between McIntyre and Worthington Streets. (The revelers did not walk far!)

* “besom ‘n stane” is Scottish meaning “broom and stone”

* Dr F.W. McKee was NBCC President (elected 04 Apr 1935). Trophy presentations were made following the banquet. Two trophies were won by coin toss (NBCC was natural ice)

* The donors of two trophies on display in our Club played in this St Paddy’s event (H. Burrows and A.H. Kilgour)



75TH ANNIVERSARY STORY



The Canadian Curling Championship Sponsors

There are many, many national curling championship divisions – Masters, Seniors, Mixed, Mixed Doubles, Juniors, etc. This story discusses the Men's and Women's divisions only.

Ladies first. The first Ontario women's provincial championship occurred in 1956 in North Bay and was known as the "All-Ontario Ladies' Curling Championship". You will read about Jo Wallace in an upcoming story and once you do, you will be sure our very own Jo Wallace had a hand in creating this championship! Three regional women's curling associations (the Southern Ontario Ladies' Curling Association, the Northern Ontario Ladies' Curling Association, and the North-Western Ontario Ladies' Curling Association) competed in a two-day, double round-robin series. In 1960, the provincial championship event expanded to four teams (the Eastern Ontario champion was added) with the winner representing Ontario at the Eastern Canadian Women's Championship in 1957, 58 and in 59. Each provincial tournament in Eastern Canada was referred to as a "Dominion Silver D" competition, with the major sponsor being the Dominion supermarket chain. Prior to 1960, there was a Western Canadian Women's Championship sponsored by the T. Eaton Company.

Records show that the Canadian Ladies' Curling Association (CLCA) was formed in 1960 and the first CLCA national sponsor was Dominion Stores Ltd. As this national competition was known, the "Dominion Diamond D" ran for seven years until 1967 when Dominion Stores Ltd. ceased their curling sponsorship. The CLCA hosted their own Women's Championship for the next four seasons without the support of a major sponsor. In 1972, the MacDonalD Tobacco Company began sponsoring the Women's Canadian Curling Championships, smartly named the 'MacDonalD Lassies', recognizing their trademarked "Scottish lassie" logo. As a result, the provincial championship became known as the 'Ontario Lassies', where teams competed for the opportunity to represent the province at the national championship.

On the men's side, the MacDonalD Tobacco Company had been sponsoring the Men's Canadian Curling Championships since 1927. The 'MacDonalD Brier' competition occurred annually for many years, with the exception of the war years, 1943-45.

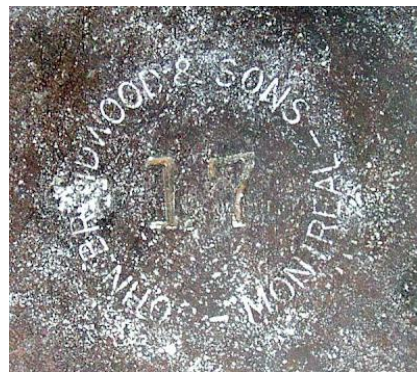
By 1979, the Canadian government's anti-tobacco policies resulted in the MacdonalD Tobacco Company terminating their curling sponsorship of both their Lassie and Brier Championships. By 1982, the Women's event became known as the 'Scott Tournament of Hearts' named after the new title sponsor, Scott Paper Limited. Since 2007 the Canadian Women's National Championship has been sponsored by Kruger Products, and the company chose to tweak the name of the event to the 'Scotties Tournament of Hearts' - hence, "The Scotties" that we are familiar with today.

In 1980 the Canadian Men's National Championship was renamed the 'Labatt Brier' with their Labatt Blue/Blue Light Tankard presented to the winners until 2000 when sponsorship of the event switched again, this time to Nokia. The Nokia Brier Trophy was presented to teams for four years and in 2005 Tim Hortons assumed sponsorship of the Canadian Men's National Championship. The Tim Hortons Brier Trophy was presented to the champions for 19 years (up to 2023). Most recently, in 2024, Montana's became the national sponsor of the championships, presenting the first Montana's Brier Trophy to record-setting, six-time Men's champion Brad Gushue, from Newfoundland and Labrador.

(Of interest - A "brier" is a small shrub whose roots are commonly used to make tobacco pipes.)



Iron and Granite Stones in Canada



Two images provided:

The Makers Mark image (referred to in the story)

The Decary Collection (three stone collection, image provided by Steve Decary)

There was a time in early Canada when some curling stones were manufactured using iron. Canada is the only country known to have used "irons".

The Royal Montreal Curling Club claims to be the oldest Canadian curling club. They boast a group of curling enthusiasts in Montreal that rallied together on 22 Jan 1807. Without a building the "club" curled on the St Lawrence River for many decades. It was in 1889 that their club built a three-sheet indoor facility (1850 Blvd de Maisonneuve Ouest) which still stands to this day as the Royal Montreal CC.

It is safe to say that the Royal Montreal Curling Club used iron back in those days. JOHN BRAIDWOOD & SONS MONTREAL was one company that produced "irons" and stamped their company name on the underside of their irons in the raised hollow. "Irons" were the common 'stone' in Lower Canada. In speaking with curlers possessing iron stones, many irons do not have maker's markings.

Clubs that played with “granite” stones were generally called 'Granite' clubs to distinguish from the clubs playing with irons. The 44 pound granite stones were physically larger than the heavier irons that tipped the scales at roughly 60 pounds. The question is what happened to the irons? With iron curling stones being used in Quebec and Eastern Ontario and granite stones being used everywhere else in Canada, it would take a major curling sponsor to streamline the Canadian curling stone community. In the 1920s the MacDonald Tobacco Company was considering sponsorship of a national curling championship event. With company executives expressing a preference for granite stones, MacDonald Tobacco Company influenced the stone decision. It was the beginning of the end for the heavier iron stones. In March 1927, MacDonald Tobacco Company sponsored the first national curling championship. With eight teams (representing Western Canada, Ontario, Northern Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and two cities Toronto and Montreal) playing 14 end games using granite stones the championship was played at the Granite Curling Club in Toronto. The first recipient of the MacDonald Brier Trophy was Team Nova Scotia skipped by Murray MacNeill of Halifax.

About the granite. There are three types of granite used for curling stones – ‘Blue Hone’ and ‘Common Green’ both found on Ailsa Craig a Scottish island and ‘Trefor’ found in the Trefor quarry in Wales. These micro-granites are extremely dense variants, very strong with low porosity, ideal for curling stones. The company “Kays of Scotland” has been making curling stones with these granites since 1851. Of interest, Kays of Scotland has the exclusive rights to harvest the Ailsa Craig granite and is the only company certified to make curling stones for the World Curling Federation.

In case this story has you thinking about your backyard rink, a new set of 16 granite stones will set you back about \$14,000 (just shy of \$1000 Cdn per stone). The good news is: for that price, plastic-coated steel handles are included and the purchaser gets to choose the colour of the plastic!



From Brooms To Brushes



Pictured is a George Wallace team from the 1940s taken at the North Bay Curling Club.

Pictured is the Ladies team of Jean Price, Edna Heslop, Sybil Wallace (plus the fourth team member unidentified at time of publishing) showing their brooms.

(Two images donated by Jack Wallace for use by the North Bay Granite Club 75th Anniversary Committee. Thank you, Jack).

In the beginning, when the lakes were frozen, Scottish outdoor enthusiasts slid rocks from one target to another. Household straw brooms came out to sweep away any chips of ice as the stones rumbled down the playing surface.

Fast forward to the early 1900s. The rocks now machined to be round, the cambered top and bottom slid and curled much better. Pebbled ice. The game was evolving. Everyday household brooms that kept the snow from impeding rock travel also evolved. This is the story of the curling broom.

As the corn and straw curling broom developed, they became heavier and better bound for rigorous sweeping with less broom debris. Brooms evolved to conical corn brooms such as Edna Heslop's broom (see image). Interestingly, brooms were "soaked in water overnight" to maintain their flexibility. They evolved with a piece of leather added inside the center to give them a better shape. As the corn broom continued to improve, a fabric version was introduced. This started with the 'RinkRat', a three-finger plush material broom. Next was a single fabric paddle version that was lighter and provided sweepers better contact with the ice. The handles were made of aluminum instead of wood - the noise was incredible in small rinks! Of course, anyone from a curling family had an old corn broom to help clean off the car in the winter months.

The science of curling pointed to more ice contact in front of the thrown rock. This concept inspired designs of the first curling brushes which were made of horse or hog hair. Both brush styles had stiff bristles and were very good at clearing frost and debris. The push broom was popular with many curlers as it added stability for delivering a rock and was easier to use than a corn or synthetic broom. Push brooms stayed around for a long time and the debate of horse hair vs hogs hair continued into the mid 80's. Everyone also remembers the discussion between the '8-Enders' and the 'Icicle' brooms.

As the brooms were effective in removing frost, “dumping” also came into play, a technique where a sweeper lifts their broom to slow down a rock that was traveling too fast. Tricks like dumping resulted in rule changes. The rules were changed to ensure sweeping fully crossed the path of the rock before lifting the broom. More technology changes included broom head size increasing from 8 to 10 inches, and handles changing to fiberglass to lower the weight of the rock.

At the same time, corn brooms were used to help “junk” up the game with straw everywhere. This made rocks curl and “pick” all of the sudden. This was used by teams to help “come back” if they were losing. By 1987, the rules changed limiting curlers to only use one style of broom for sweeping and this ultimately led to the demise of corn brooms in curling.

The invention of the ‘Brownie’ push broom in late 80’s was revolutionary as it was the first cloth push broom. It had a fiberglass handle, with a wooden and fabric head that looked like part of a couch cushion. This was offered in many colours and angles to appeal to all curlers.

By the mid 90’s the fabric head was fully developed, and many manufacturers saw this as the future of curling. This was now the norm for all curling brooms and by the 2000’s horse hair was almost impossible to buy.

In parallel with broom-brush evolution were the scientific advancements in ice making. (In a future story, we will learn about Shorty Jenkins, who revolutionized ice making). Needless to say, curling ice got faster and more consistent. The topic of directional sweeping was causing a stir within the World Curling Federation. This technique allowed sweepers on each side to control the travel path of the rocks. The game had changed. These new sweeping techniques and new brush head technologies led to the World Curling Federation regulating and standardizing brush pads for competitive play.

Now you know how curling went from household brooms to brushes to the brush pads of today!



If The Banners Could Talk



Next time you are standing by the viewing glass in the North Bay Granite Club lounge, look up. Suspended from the ceiling, the banners of our Granite Club champions hang proudly on display.

Each banner immortalizes a capstone achievement. Fitting that these “soldiers of supremacy” hang over the ice sheets where these very champions honed their skills. There are 35 banners hanging at the North Bay Granite Club and, as of writing, approaching 100 different member names appear on these banners.

Perhaps our Club’s most well-remembered is Rudy Steski known as the first skip to take a Granite Club team to the Brier. It was the 1955 MacDonald Brier held in Regina, SK. Rudy also skipped three club teams to the Royal Canadian Legion championships winning the provincial title in 1964 and 1967 and winning the national title in 1968. Rudy’s name appears on a total of five banners, the fifth in 1971 when he skipped his team to win the Northern Ontario Senior Men’s title. Only one other Club member’s name appears five times, Don Harris, who played 2nd and Vice for Tom Melnyk’s rink (1988, 1989, 1990 and 1992) as well as sparing for the Wayne Lowe rink in 1998.

A scan of the Club’s banners reveals just a few members who are named on four different banners. The first of this special group is Ed McCormick who played once at Lead, once at Second and twice as Vice for Rudy Steski. Chronologically, the second member to win four titles is Skip Tom Melnyk who won the Northern Ontario Senior Men’s title three years in a row (1988, 1989 and 1990) and then a fourth time in 1992. The third name is particularly noteworthy for his selfless contributions to the Club. A tremendous volunteer and teacher, Dave Cerisano, coached four Junior teams to championships in 1990, 1992, 1993 and in 1994. The fourth Club member is Pat Dayes. Pat won as a member of the Northern Ontario Senior Ladies winning team four times. Pat played as Vice in 1996 and won as Skip in 1997. Pat skipped to her third Northern Ontario banner in 2006 and, just last year (2024), Pat played as Vice for her fourth appearance at the Canadian Senior Ladies in Chicoutimi, PQ.

The North Bay Granite Club has produced many tremendous teams over its 75 years. As Club members, we can be very proud of these accomplishments.



Arenas in North Bay

North Bay Curling Dates Way Back (with reference to North Bay Nugget article from February 7, 1944)

Rumour has it that curling was first played in John Ferguson’s shed (lived at 95 McIntyre St W) in 1886. John Ferguson (1860-1946), a pioneer resident and a North Bay merchant, is considered one of the founders of North Bay. This article is a history of the arenas used by curlers in the North Bay area.

Around 1892, North Bay’s Palace Skating rink was built at the corner of Ferguson and Worthington streets for recreational skating and curling. Mother Nature dictated when the ice went in and out each year. At the turn of the century, the sport of hockey needed a larger ice surface. A larger rink, the North Bay Arena was constructed in 1907 at the corner of Main Street W and Murray Street. The new

rink had dressing rooms, a refreshment booth, curling rinks and a viewing gallery above the ice. This rink met all of North Bay's covered arena requirements for just over two decades. Unfortunately, the North Bay Arena burned down in 1928.

Eight years later in 1936, North Bay's third "covered" rink was built at the corner of King and Ferguson Street. It included four sheets for curling. This North Bay Arena was financed through public subscription and shares totaling roughly \$25,000.

It is interesting to note that "artificial ice" first became a conversation in North Bay in Oct 1946 when Mr. Sargent of the Sargent Rink Ice Company (Montreal) met with Curling Club President Jim Allen. Mr. Sargent offered to install in-floor piping under the four sheets at the Club for roughly \$10,000.

In 1950, the present-day North Bay Granite Club was constructed for curling. Building construction was funded by share-holding members. With its six sheets of artificial ice, the Club boasted longer curling seasons and remained a private Club for 25 years.

Also in the 1950s, the Royal Canadian Air Force Base constructed a curling club. The RCAF Curling Rink operated four ice sheets, two on each side of the compressor. With unification of the RCAF, Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Army in 1968, all air, navy and army bases were renamed "Canadian Forces Base" and this curling rink was referred to as the CFB North Bay curling rink.

In 1954, ground was broken for the present-day Memorial Gardens on Chippewa St. The North Bay Arena on the corner of King and Ferguson Streets was demolished and this land became a shopping mall in the 1960s.

In the late 1960s, the Four Seasons opened on top of Thibeault Hill, operating a curling rink with 8 ice sheets and an alley with 26 lanes. Unfortunately, the Four Seasons closed its curling programs in 1982 so Four Seasons curlers joined the CFB or the NBGC programs. In 2004, the CFB Curling Rink was shut down leaving the North Bay Granite Club as the sole curling rink in town. Today, curling rinks endure in the region at Mattawa, Powassan, Astorville, Huntsville, Sturgeon Falls and New Liskeard.

