



# 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.

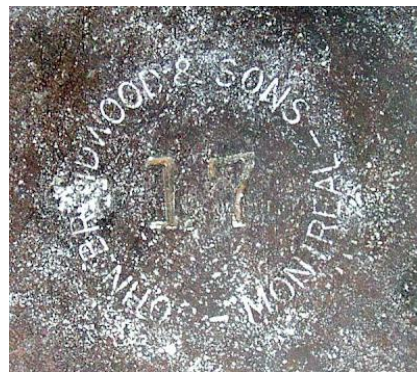
By 1979, the Canadian government's anti-tobacco policies resulted in the MacdonalD Tobacco Company terminating their curling sponsorship of both their Lassie and Brier Championships. By 1982, the Women's event became known as the 'Scott Tournament of Hearts' named after the new title sponsor, Scott Paper 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 75<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

