

Chapter 14 Drum & bugle corps in Ontario

by Jodeen Popp

Even though there are but a few drum corps currently representing our Northern neighbors, Canada, over many years, has provided many excellent, proud and competitively successful units.

Let me lead off with brief descriptions of a few of these very special groups.

De La Salle was formed in 1910 at the De La Salle Institute in Toronto to parade their cadet corps. As did many other Canadian corps over the years, De La Salle began as a military bugle band. A bugle band simply meant B-flat "bugles" and drums and did not include other band instruments.

Even in the early years, the band became known as "Del" which was how we referred to them as they earned their way into the exalted position as a founding member of DCI in 1971.

In 1927, the organization consisted of 120 members; 48 percussionists and 72 brass players. The old grey and green uniforms were replaced with flashy new blue and gold, and

soon thereafter "Oaklands" was added to their ID when that high school was built and added to the De La Salle complex.

The band was an extra-curricular activity at the school and competed with like units in the district. When the band headed out on tour, they paraded in uniform to the train station, cheered and followed by a crowd of well-wishers.

In June, 1939, the band was invited to the New York City World's Fair, where they traveled by train and stayed an entire week, performing daily, including the American Legion National Convention parade.

As changes occurred over the years, with modern life leading to fewer parades, etc., in 1957 the uniforms, instrumentation and types of appearances changed as well and the famous Del band became a drum and bugle corps, allowing them to compete with drum and bugle corps in the United States.

The switch led them into the pageantry and minute detail with which we are all familiar.

When decisions were reached on uniforms, they were white with red and green accents and white shakos with red plumes.

Their first drum corps competition was in June, 1958 -- they placed second behind then national champs, Preston Scout House. In the nationals that summer, the Toronto Optimists became the new champions, Scout House was second and De La Salle third.

After joining the New York-Canada Drum Corps Association, regular visits were made into the United States. They won their first Canadian National title in 1959.

In 1975, Del split with the school and merged with the Etobicoke Crusaders, presenting us with the Etobicoke Oakland Crusaders. They placed in DCI Finals the next three years, then performed through the 1980s as a smaller class A unit before folding in the early 1990s.

The Canadian Drum Corps Association was organized in 1934. They followed the U. S. patterns, just a few years behind. By the early



DE LA SALLE OAKLANDS, Toronto, ONT (1974).
Photo by Jane Boulen from the collection of Drum Corps World.



DUTCH BOY, Kitchener, ONT (1990).
Photo by Dale Eck from the collection of Drum Corps World.



VENTURES, Kitchener, ONT (approx. 1977).
Photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World.

1960s, all of the bugle bands had become drum and bugle corps, many of them seniors. This was done, of course, so that they could compete with each other and with U.S. corps under similar rules.

There was one bugle band which chose to remain just that -- Preston Scout House. They were formed in 1937 by a druggist named Wilf Blum. Their proficiency and popularity grew, through the hard work with which we are all familiar. This caused a problem with other Scout leaders, who felt the band took too much time away from their other training.

By 1953 the band pulled away from their Scouting connection. After that separation, new uniforms were designed consisting of red, short-sleeved shirts, very short navy blue pants, white gauntlets, red knee socks and black Aussie-style hats and shoes.

They marched with a waist-high knee lift and did a wide variety of dance steps and wonderful precision drills, primarily in exhibition. For example, when performing *Rhapsody in Blue*, their legs would swing to the rhythm of the number.

Parade of the Wooden Soldiers brought a stiff-legged walk step, followed by a rock step resembling a hobby horse.

They performed most of the time in the United States, largely because that is where they were able to command higher fees. The exhibitions could be as long as two hours. Scout House performed at the Canadian National Exhibition against senior groups and they were Canadian National Champions in 1955, 1956 and 1957. There were 63 marchers -- 15 drums, four glocks, 32 brass and 12 color guard.

The Toronto Optimists were formed in 1952 as a Boy Scout Troop. They won their first title in the novice category in 1956 and were second in 1957 at the junior level. The same year they adopted the uniform most of us remember -- black pants, green satin blouse with white stripe and cummerbund, with white shako and plume. The occasion for this change was absorbing the Danforth Crusaders and moving up another class.

In May, 1958, Scout House beat the Toronto Optimists handily, but the margin got progressively smaller and, in September, 1958, the Optimists won their first Canadian National Championship title.

Setting a record that still stands world wide,

they won 10 consecutive national titles.

Like most corps, the Toronto Optimists had up and down years, winning their last title in 1972. Along the way, they were given the nickname of "The Green Machine" as were their United States counterparts, the Chicago Cavaliers. At that point in time, these two corps were tough to tell apart.

In 1976, the Optimists merged with the Seneca Princemen and competed as the Seneca Optimists.

Just to name a few of the famed of history in Canada: Jolly Jesters, St. Johns/Brantford Girls, Flying Dutchmen, Kawartha Cavaliers, Hamilton Conqueror, Les Diplomates, Guelph Royales, Les Metropolitans, St. Mary's of Toronto, Sarnia Lions, Midlanders, Commanders, Cardinals and Sarnia Marching Angels.

The corps of Canada share with the United States and most of the drum corps world all of the experiences -- mergers, management failures, sponsor rifts, recruitment and monetary nightmares and the inevitable results.

Occasionally, a simple name change took corps off in a new direction. Take the Michael Power Knights. A quality corps that changed their name to Etobicoke Crusaders and, shortly thereafter, merged with De La Salle Oaklands in 1975. This group became the most successful in DCI of all of Canada's drum corps to date, when they captured sixth place at the 1976 DCI Finals in Philadelphia.

De La Salle Oaklands had taken seventh

place at the 1974 DCI Finals in Ithaca, NY.

The 1976 DCI Finals had two Toronto corps -- Oakland Crusaders in eighth place and the Seneca Optimists in tenth. This is the first and only time DCI has had two finalists from the same city.

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s there have been additional Ontario junior and senior corps that have gained various degrees of success -- the all-girl Ventures, Dutch Boy, Emerald Knights, Blue Saints, Kinsmen, Canadian Knights, Guelph Royales, Jolly Jesters, Canada's Marching Ambassadors, all-girl St. John's, Durham Girls, Windsor Guardsmen, Northstars, Cadets of Dutch Boy, Ambassadors, St. Andrew's, Oshawa Rebels, Northwind/Northwind Rebels, Cardinals, all-girl Bandettes, Bluewater Buccaneers, Conqueror II, Kiwanis Cavaliers and Ridge Raiders.

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SENECA OPTIMISTS, Toronto, ONT (1977).
Photo from the collection of Drum Corps World.



DRUM CORPS ALUMNI TORONTO CHORUS, Toronto, ONT (1997).
Photo by Harry Heidelberg from the collection of Drum Corps World.



DURHAM GIRLS, Durham, ONT (approx. 1974).
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