

## 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,



1964: Toronto Optimists Colour Pres (Racine, WI)

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.

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

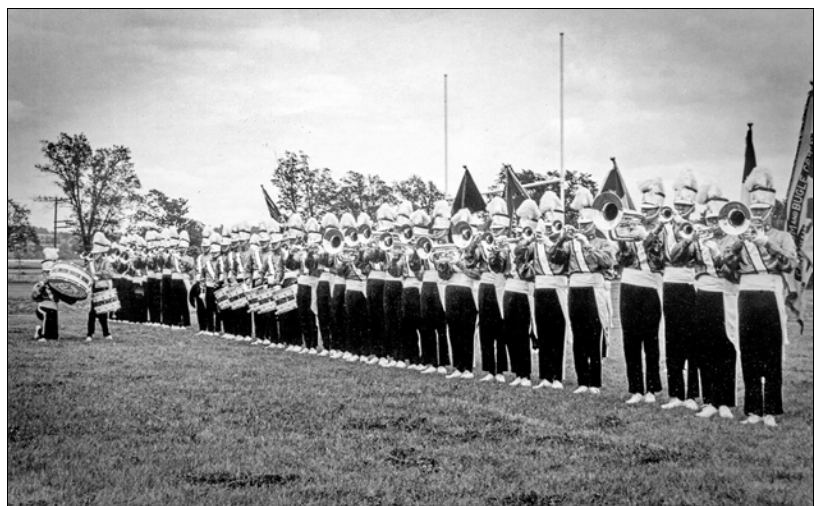
As of the month of November 1963, Al Baggs was still the Chief Judge of the Canadian Judges Association. After the ruckus at the 1961 Nationals, his durability in this position had to say something about his competence. On the other hand, the fact that he was no longer the Director of the Optimists may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

**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

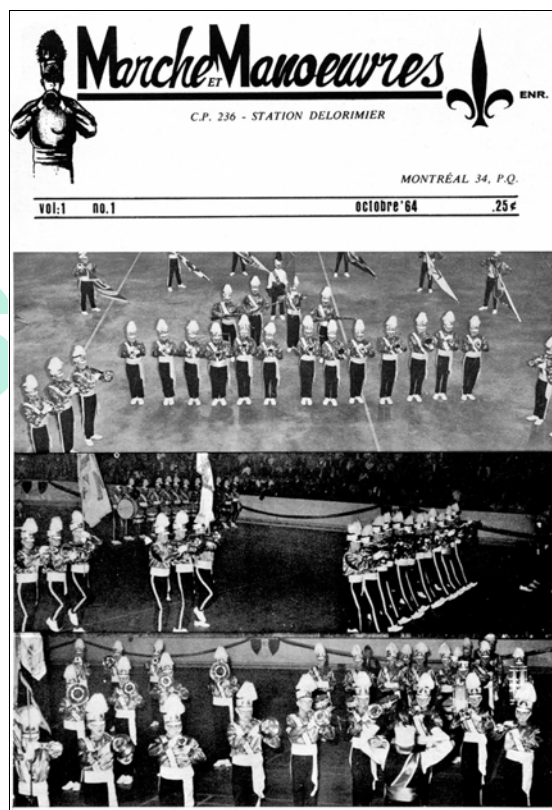
Now, it was back again to the field of broken dreams, Highland Park, Illinois deep in the Midwest.

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



1965: Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation

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

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