



The Detroit Curling Club A History

1885-2010

In Four Chapters

- **Curling In Detroit and Vicinity**
by Thomas Williamson 1926
- **An Early History of Curling in the Detroit Area**
by John Taylor 1956
- **A Contemporary History of Curling
at the Detroit Curling Club**
by Bill MacLachlan 1983
- **The Detroit Curling Club into the 21st Century**
by David Nelsen and Frederick R. Zosel 2011

Preface

The 125th anniversary of the Detroit Curling Club in 2010 is a timely occasion to update the club's recorded history. Three histories, by former presidents, cover the period from the club's founding in 1885 until 1983, shortly after the club moved into the Drake Road location. A new chapter, "The Detroit Curling Club into the 21st Century" by Dave Nelsen and Fred Zosel, picks up the story from 1983 to the close of the 2010-2011 season and includes histories of Rockettes and Sinners.

This book includes all four chapters of the club's history in a single volume. Each chapter appears in its original form.

The first history of the Detroit Curling Club, "Curling in Detroit and Vicinity," was written in 1926 by Thomas Williamson, who served five terms as club president (1888-92, 1909-10). His volume covers the earliest days of curling in Southeastern Michigan, including discussion of predecessor clubs in Orchard Lake and Detroit, incorporation of the club in 1885, bonspielsing, and the club's first artificial ice.

John W. Taylor, president for the 1942-43 season, brought the club history up to date through 1956 with "An Early History of Curling in the Detroit Area." John's history revisits halcyon days during the Roaring Twenties, the distress of the Great Depression in the 1930s, how the club "wets" prevailed in 1934, and curling rocks sent to Davey Jones's locker during World War II.

Bill MacLachlan, another former president (1978-79), wrote a history of the club for the years 1957-1983, "A Contemporary History of Curling at the Detroit Curling Club," that includes description of protracted events leading to the club's move in 1979 from Forest Avenue near Wayne State University's campus in Detroit to the new location on Drake Road in West Bloomfield Township.

The four separate histories tell the club's story through the individual perspectives of five past presidents. In doing so, they not only provide chronology and commentary, they celebrate the joy of curling and indomitable perseverance of club members in sustaining this organization for so many years.

The Club is its Members. The Game is its soul.

Fred Zosel

Curling In Detroit and Vicinity

by Thomas Williamson 1926

This record has been prepared for those who enjoy
This fascinating pastime and in enduring
Remembrance of those who contributed
Their time, energy and financial
Support in establishing the

DETROIT CURLING CLUB

For the encouragement and perpetuation of the game.

Curling in Detroit and Vicinity

Any authentic record of the introduction of that grand old Scottish game of curling in Detroit and its vicinity, must start with the activities of the Orchard Lake Curling Club, which was organized in the winter of 1831-1832 by a group of loyal-hearted, sport-loving Scotchman from Fyfe and Ayrshire, Scotland, who had located on the banks of the beautiful lakes adjacent to the present city of Pontiac, some thirty odd miles northwest of Detroit. Among these enthusiastic lovers of the game were Peter Dow, George Dow, William Gilmore, James Miller, William Walls, James Burns, D. Fillans, John P. Wilson, William Thomson and O. Robinson. To these hearty and robust pioneers belong the credit of introducing, and for many years maintaining enthusiastic interest in the game in this locality. It has often been asserted, on good authority, that these same men were the first to introduce the game of curling in America.

For several years these enthusiasts curled with wooden blocks sawed from hickory trees and shaped with axe and chisel to resemble a curling stone, with handles made from small limbs of the same material. Some of these blocks, bearing evidence of hard fought battles, are still in existence.

The earliest record of curling in Detroit dates back to the winter of 1836-1837 when a number of enthusiastic Scotch lovers of the game, began with friendly contests among themselves, and later in the season journeyed to Orchard Lake, for a match game with the more experienced players of that neighborhood. They were warmly received by these big hearted pioneers of the game and though defeated in the contest, they returned home with an experience and enthusiasm that contributed largely to their success in later years. In the early forties the first Detroit Curling Club was organized, when the city contained about 35,000 inhabitants. Among the active players at this time were William Barclay, Michael Young, Andrew Young, Robert Linn, Andrew Stewart, John Moore, C. Paton and John Bell, all of whom have passed from their early pleasures. This organization continued in existence for many years. Another organization of curlers was later formed by the employees of the Detroit and Milwaukee Railway Co. and still later the Thistle Curling Club came into a lively existence. These three clubs finally disbanded or were merged into the Granite Curling Club, which was organized in 1867. Prior to the organization of the Granite

Curling Club, all the curling of the older clubs was done on the Detroit River or elsewhere on outdoor rinks. It was on such sheets of ice that they met and entertained their curling friends from Orchard Lake, Chatham, Thamesville, London and Sarnia, and many visits were made to these places for return matches in perpetuation of the friendly rivalry encouraged by such contests.

Among the active members of the Granite Curling Club were Hon. James McMillan, afterwards United States Senator; W. K. Muir, President of the Great Western Railway, George Sidney D. Miller, James McGregor, George C. Codd, J. N. Dean, Nicol Mitchell, Capt. W. V. James, Hugh McGaw, Thomas McGregor, Robert Common, James McAdam, John McAdam, John McGregor, Thomas Fairbairn, Fred Bamford and Peter Young, one of the most expert and best loved curlers that ever played the game.

A great many of these men were prominently identified with the large business interests of the city and their love of curling induced them to erect the first covered rink in this locality, where they might enjoy the game by artificial light, when time would permit. The enthusiasms of its members developed many fine curlers, and during its existence of ten or twelve years, they were visited in the winter season by curlers from near and far, who greatly enjoyed the keen competitions on the ice and the generous hospitality of the club.

The present Detroit Curling Club originated with a handful of enthusiasts in the winter of 1885, among whom were Thomas Williamson, John Williamson, Jr., Robert Williamson, A. W. Baxter, J. S. Keen, John J. Dodds, Peter Young, James McAdam, W. H. Studer, Hugh McGaw, George Begg, Charles Doty, Frank B. Preston, Frank Ingils and C. B. Cole. They did more of their curling at night, by the light of four or five big lanterns and a large arc electric light at the southwest corner of the grounds occupied by the Detroit Athletic Club, on Woodward Avenue, opposite Garfield. After three winters in the open, it was decided to build a covered rink and combine skating with curling, to help defray the expenses. The financing of this project was made possible through love of the game and the desire to encourage and perpetuate it, by such men as Senator James McMillin, W. K. Muir, George Hendrie, James McGregor, Sidney D. Miller, George C. Codd, Wm. C. Colburn, J. D. Hawks, J. N. Dean, Thomas McGregor and Thomas Fairbairn, whose liberal Contributions materially assisted in the erection of a building,

combining these features, at the corner of Fourth Avenue and Gold Street, during the summer of 1888. This building was thrown open to its members in December of that year and proved a source of great enjoyment to them, while it materially assisted in popularizing these winter sports. Early in October, 1888, the club was incorporated with the following members:

Thos. Williamson	John J. Dodds
Jos. S. Keen	J. D. Hawks
James Harrison	Robert Hutton
Lafayette Owen	David Wallace
John Williamson	Thomas McGregor
John Williamson, Jr.	Geo. W. Morgan
Robert Williamson	H. E. McGaw
A. W. Baxter	Chas. Doty
John Kay	W. S. Waugh
F. B. Preston	Benj. Douglas
D. K. McNaughton	John B. Price
A. E. Otttley	James. M. Young
John Walker	H. Bonninghausen

Its initial officers were Jos. S. Keen, President; Thomas Williamson, Vice-President; James Harrison, Treasurer; and Lafayette Owen, Secretary. In those days friendly competitions were held with the clubs of London, Sarnia, Chatham and Thamesville of Ontario, Canada, and invariably the Detroit Curling Club suffered defeat. This enthusiasm, however, never abated and the membership began to increase. In 1895 the club had grown and prospered sufficiently to permit the purchase of enough land on Forest Avenue, near Sixth Street (its present location) to provide six sheets of ice. This land was bought and club building was removed and rebuilt on this property.

In 1906 this old building was replaced by the present substantial and commodious quarters. It required several seasons of experimenting with different materials to demonstrate that a cement floor was necessary to ensure proper ice facilities. This floor was laid in 1906 and besides providing a proper foundation for ice, the investment has annually paid from fifty to one hundred per cent, by renting the building for storage purposes during the summer months.

The club joined the Ontario Curling Association in 1889 and has continued its membership therein, up to the present time. It has annually participated in the Tankard and other competitions of this

Association, and while it has failed to win any of these events, its hospitality and good fellowship has been definitely acknowledged, by winning the Russell cup, a trophy given to the club entertaining the largest number of curlers annually, for a period of three years. In 1897 the club inaugurated an annual Bonspiel at which three valuable trophies were offered for competition and the first year saw twelve clubs from Canada and the United States participating in the games, which required two days to determine the winners. Detroit succeeded in winning the first prize, the Walker Cup. The second prize, the Cadillac Cup, was won by Sarnia, and Ridgetown carried off the Russell House single rink trophy. The inauguration of this Bonspiel was celebrated by a banquet at the Cadillac Hotel, which was participated in by all the visiting players.

It is due to the kindly interest and influence of this organization that Curling Clubs were formed in Grand Rapids, Bay City and Pontiac, Michigan; Toledo, Ohio; and Windsor, Ontario. The close proximity of these organizations resulted in a great many friendly matches here and in the cities mentioned.

The uncertainty attending the weather conditions for several winters, brought forward the proposition of installing an artificial ice plant and at the annual meeting of the club in March, 1924, it was decided to go ahead with the project. The results attending this installation have been more than gratifying. Its success has enabled the members to curl at any time they may desire to do so, from early in November until the middle of March, or when the thermometer is not above forty-five degrees outside. The success attending this undertaking has undoubtedly ensure the continued prosperity of the club for many years to come.

Among the valued belongings of the club are many costly trophies that have been won in local and outside competitions, together with its highly treasurer Frames, containing photographs of all the Presidents since its organization and which is annually contributed to by a picture of the retiring president. It also has a Memorial Tablet recording an accurate and up-to-date list of all members who have ceased their early journey.

Since the organization of the club it has annually elected a Board of seven Directors, who choose their own officers, and it is due to their enthusiasm and enduring interest, backed by large contingent of loyal and influential members, that the club has carried on successfully for nearly forty years and attained its present high standing in the curling fraternity of the country.

Its outstanding features, of which the members are justly proud, are its ability to provide ice at all times during the winter season for its members and visiting friends and its loyal and friendly membership of over two hundred and fifty, the largest of any curling club in America. A true and lasting democracy which has ever characterized its membership, is best described in a very able and interesting article on curling in "Detroit Saturday Night," which follows:

REAL DEMOCRACY

"The Detroit Curling Club has achieved what many clubs seek but few find, a perfect democracy. The membership list includes the names of many millionaires; perhaps a dozen. It also includes men in very modest circumstances. In its parking space one finds the most expensive motor cars side by side with flivvers of an ancient brass radiator vintage. But on the ice a man is measured by his skill with the stones and his ability to play a sportsman's game in a sportsman's way.

"In spite of the startling changes that have come over the social and industrial life of Detroit since the Curling Club was organized nearly 40 years ago, the club has remained just what it started out to be, an organization for the promotion of a sport and not for the promotion of social ambitions. It includes men who were rich when it started and are still rich; men who were poor when it started and are now rich; men who were poor when it started and are still poor, yet its atmosphere has never changed. The only way to become a skip is to become a great curler. Nobody is the least interested in what Bradstreet's says about a fellow. The question is, can he use his head in an emergency?"

This record of curling activities in and about Detroit can best be closed by quoting the inspiring words of that loyal and highly esteemed fellow member, Thomas Davies Sr: "Curling has added to the gaiety, good fellowship and physical and moral health of hundreds of men in Detroit and its vicinity during the past century. Long may the noble game flourish, to promote and perpetuate good feeling and genial hospitality among individuals and between peoples."

PAST PRESIDENTS

Jos S. Keen, 1887-88
Thos. Williamson, 1888-89, 1889-90, 1890-91,
1891-92, 1909-10
John Williamson, 1892-93
Fred'k Bamford, 1893-94, 1900-01
Robt. Hutton, 1894-95
J. D. Hawks, 1895-96
A. W. Baxter, 1896-97
John A. Bucknell, 1897-98
Thomas Davies, Sr., 1898-99
Robt. Williamson, , 1899-1900
John Kay, 1901-02
John Stevenson, 1902-03
B. W. Yates, 1903-04
A. B. Atwater, 1904-05
George P. Codd, 1905-06
Edward Telfer, 1906-07
James Craig, Jr., 1907-08
F. W. Robbins, 1908-09
Benj. F. Guiney, 1910-11
Theo. L. Backus, 1911-12
W. A. McWhinney, 1912-13
A.B.D. Van Zandt, 1913-14
Thos. J. Bosquette, 1914-15
Fred C. Burden, 1915-16
Alex M. Kerr, 1916-17
Divie B. Duffield, 1917-18
Robert Kerr, 1918-19
Robert Shiell, 1919-20
Frank B. Tibbals, 1920-21
Ervin R. Palmer, 1921-22
Steve Bowling, 1922-23
Fred W. Kerr, 1923-24
Richard M. Watson, 1924-25
Harry Slater, 1925-26

An Early History of Curling in the Detroit Area

by John Taylor 1956



1982

Dear Member:

Another curling season has just been completed and the memories will linger well into the summer. There were some near disasters this year with ice problems, tight financial flow, broken water pipes, etc., but there were also many happy events such as the very successful bonspiels and special events and, most of all, plenty of good curling. All of these happenings will be added to our memories along with those of bygone seasons. I hope that for all of our members it was a pleasurable season.

Although our present “rookery” here on Drake Road is only three seasons old, the continuation of a heritage is beginning to evolve. A significant number of our members have joined the ranks since the Club’s move to Drake Road and are not aware of the real heritage and history behind the 97 years that the Detroit Curling Club has been in existence. Perhaps in our effort to relocate, the older members were so busy working to make this facility the wonderful place that it is today, they have forgotten to pass on the history or spirit of the old “rookery” to the new members. I must say, however, the older members never lacked the spirit in converting this building, in a marvelous, fast growing community, into a fine curling establishment where the old traditions can be carried on, and to them we owe an enormous thanks.

In a recent exploration of some boxes of material brought with us from the old “rookery”, the chronology which follows this letter was discovered. When reading it, you will see that many similarities to our present trials and tribulations preceded us at the old Club and those adversities were always weathered and, because of them, the Club became a stronger organization. As you will note, the uniqueness of curlers, their persistent spirit and camaraderie, have been the threads which when woven together always binds us into a compelling force to work out our problems. When our newer members read these historical reflections about the Detroit Curling Club, we believe they will also begin to understand that although the Drake road facility is only brick, mortar, and an ice arena, it is the new “rookery” for D.C.C.; an extension of all of our traditions and curling spirit which will lead to our survival for many years to come.

This marvelous chronology on the history of curling in Detroit and about the Detroit Curling Club was prepared in 1974 by a fine gentleman, an avid curler when he was younger (currently he is the second oldest life member), and a past-president of the D.C.C., John W. Taylor. John graciously gave permission to reproduce and distribute this history to

the Membership so that all of us can be better informed about our background and traditions. Hopefully, it will inspire us to keep a “house build of stones” alive. Our “forefathers” of the D.C.C. worked diligently through the hard times to maintain the Club, and with the help of all members, our Club will survive.

Good Reading!

John A. Backoff

President

Preface

At the annual meeting of the newly incorporated Detroit Curling Club, held in the spring of 1888, Mr. Thomas Williamson was elected president, an office which he held for the next four years. He again became president in the 1909-10 season, and so it seems that altogether he guided the destiny of this venerable club for a total of five years, longer than any man, either dead or alive.

In addition to his years of service to the club, he did something else for which we should all be thankful. Back in 1926 he took pen in hand and wrote a history of curling, which he entitled “The History of Curling in Detroit and Vicinity.” This little book is well printed and I presume it was distributed to members and friends of curling when it came off the presses. Through a descendant of Tom Williamson a copy came to me some years ago, and it has been carefully preserved.

If you would stop and ask the average man on the street about the origin of baseball, the chances are that he would tell you that Abner Doubleday invented the game in Cooperstown, New York around 1839. That was some twenty-odd years before General Doubleday found himself at Fort Sumter, where he was credited with firing the first shot in the Civil War. But if you ask this same man on the street where, when and by whom the first stone was cast on frozen water, you will get no answer at all, because practically nothing was written about curling during its early years.

The origin of curling has always been subject to question. Did the game come to us from the Low Countries on the continent or was it Scottish in origin? The first written history of the game was published in 1811 by the well-known Scottish divine, the Reverend John Ramsey. Brother Ramsey is convinced that the game originated in Holland because of the many Dutch names which are so much a part of the game, such as “bonspiel”, “wick”, “curl”, and “rink.” Some seventy-nine years

after the Ramsey book the Reverend John Kerr wrote his "History of Curling", and a copy of this book is carefully preserved in the Detroit Public Library, where it can be read but not removed from the premises. Brother Kerr tells us that after years of exhausting research of all available records, he finds nothing to indicate the game originated any place other than Scotland. In my reading of the Kerr book, I find a hint once or twice, but no direct admission, that the idea of curling might have been imported to Scotland by some of the Flemish artisans who came to Scotland in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when their skills were needed in rebuilding the country. Kerr further admits that although his countrymen did not invent all the good things in life, they have always been smart enough to know good things when they see them. This is what they did with curling, and they kept it as their own.

All available evidence points to the fact that there has been curling in Scotland for the past four hundred years or longer. The McFarlane Museum in Stirling has a stone dated 1511 which just has to be authentic. At the general assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1638, the Bishop of Orkney was charged with curling on the Sabbath, but there is no mention of his punishment. It is interesting to note that most of the history of curling was written by men of the cloth. I cannot help wondering how these worthies would feel about the current Sunday Sinners' games, which were started by our own Percy Power and which have proved to be so popular.

This is enough about the ancient history of curling. But before getting started on the update of curling in this vicinity, I ask your indulgence for a little personal history. In the peaceful summer of 1893 in the quiet little town of Pontiac, Michigan, I first saw the light of day in an upstairs bedroom in Mrs. Stanton's rooming and boarding house, located on the corner of Williams Street and Orchard Lake Avenue. Next door on Orchard Lake Avenue resided Dr. John P. Wilson, one of the charter members of the Orchard Lake Curling Club, who served as club secretary from 1831 through 1876. Dr. Wilson was a native born Scot, as was my mother, whose maiden name was Margaret Wilson. The two were not related but, because of the well-known Scottish clannishness, the good doctor was very fond of my mother, although he was her senior by many years. When I was baptized in old Zion Church in Pontiac, he was one of my sponsors, and for the next eight years or until he died in 1901 he kept close watch over me. He must have seen the makings of a curler in his favorite godson because at the time of his death his curling stones, written records, and medals came to me by inheritance.

At the suggestion of Ray C. Meddaugh, President of U.S. Men's Curling Association in 1971, those old stones were given to the Curling History Museum in Chicago, where I hope they are being cared for. The material from Dr. Wilson has been helpful in completing this update on curling.

An Update on Curling in Detroit and Vicinity

As every curler should know, it all began in the 1831-32 season in a small sheltered bay on Orchard Lake, just east of the present Orchard Lake County Club, when the first curling club in the good old U.S.A. was born. The charter members are listed as Peter, George and John Dow, William Gilmore, James Miller, William Walls, James Burns, D. Fillans, Dr. John P. Wilson, William Thomson and O. Robinson. The records indicate that most of these worthies had left their native heaths in Fyfe and Ayrshire the previous year, and we can only guess as to how they reached the promised land, but it must have been a long and arduous journey. They eventually reached Detroit, but tarried there only briefly when they discovered that all of the good river property was occupied by the French. And so they moved on in a northerly direction until they reached the shore of Orchard Lake and they stopped because this was the place they had sought; it was almost like being home again, if you didn't worry too much about the friendly Indians, who were the only other settlers at that time. In 1933, Willis Ward, who was born at Orchard Lake in 1861 and who lived there for eighty years, published privately a small book of memories, including many tales about the early Scottish curlers that he knew as a youth.

Ward tells us that charter member James Burns was a first cousin of the immortal Bobby Burns and that the senior Dow had been a tenant farmer at Abbotsford, the estate of Sir Walter Scott. Although the early records of Orchard Lake Club are sketchy, they do indicate that the first rocks were thrown in the 1831-32 season, which just happens to be six years before Michigan was admitted to the Union. Most of who know the lakes of this area know that Orchard Lake is just about twenty-five miles from Detroit and a short five miles from Pontiac. Some years after curling started, the trip from Pontiac was made much easier when a graveled toll road was built, straight out Orchard Lake Avenue to the lake. From its inception the O.L.C. was active and viable for the next fifty some years when it seemed to have passed out of existence. In checking the club roster for 1876 we find the club had twelve members, one more than the original eleven members, but only five of the

original members were left, which must be attributed to the hand of the grim reaper. A further review of the 1876 roster indicates that all members were of Scottish ancestry. When Reverend John Knox said that the Scots knew a good thing when they see it and are apt to keep it, he should perhaps have added that they tend to keep the good things to themselves.

The earliest record of curling in Detroit dates back to the winter of 1836-37 when a number of enthusiastic Scottish lovers of the game began some friendly games. It is generally believed that they played on a sheltered spot on the Detroit river, possibly at the foot of Jos. Campau Avenue or some flat piece of ground suitable for flooding. During that season one rink made the arduous trip to Orchard Lake, where they lost to the host club but returned with great enthusiasm for inter-club play. Six years later members of the above Detroit group, plus a few more recruits, began to play as an unorganized Detroit Curling Club. Two years later another group, most of whom were employees of the old Detroit and Mackinac Railway, started to play, probably at what is now known as Milwaukee Junction.

And so at this "point in time" (which will surely date this report as being made in 1974 during the second year of "Watergate") we know there were three groups of curlers in the Detroit area; one organized club at Orchard Lake and two unorganized clubs in the city of Detroit. Little is known about the Detroit groups during the next twenty-five years except that they continued to play. However, we do know that during this same period, Orchard Lake curlers were regularly playing inter-club matches with Chatham, Thamesville, London and Sarnia.

The year 1867 marked the birth of The Grand National Curling Club of America, which of course was affiliated with the Royal Caledonian Curling Club of Scotland, whose patron was none other than his royal highness, the Prince of Wales. During this same year, the two unorganized groups in Detroit were merged into one group, which became the Granite Curling Club of Detroit, which promptly became a member of the Grand National. The Granite Club listed among its members men such as James McMillan, who later became a U.S. Senator, W.K. Muir, president of the Great Western Railroad, and others prominent in the business and social life of Detroit, such as George Hendrie, Sidney Miller, Nicol Mitchell, Capt. W. V. James, Hugh McCaw and James McAdam. Then too there were J.N. Dean of the old Pittman and Dean Co.; John and James McGregor of McGregor Institute fame; George C. Codd, father of George P. Codd who became

Mayor of Detroit at the turn of the century; and finally there was Fred Banford, who became president of the present Detroit Curling Club in the 1900-01 season and later became the first member of D.C.C. to head the Ontario Curling Association.

Sometimes during the next ten years another Detroit club was formed and it became known as the Thistle Club. The roster of the Thistle Club lists the following charter members: George Sparks, M.V. James, Hubbard Smith, W.H. Witherspoon, Wm. Matson, John Stewart, Philip Uridge, Eugene Robinson, Edward Johnson, John McGregor, Walter Coots and C.P. James. A little cross—referencing indicates that some of these men also belonged to the Granite, so perhaps we should classify them as just plain joiners.

According to the annual report of the Grand National for the 1876-77 season, which is nicely printed hard bound volume, this area was represented by three clubs: Orchard Lake, The Thistle and The Granite of Detroit. The book contains rosters of all clubs, the winners of all inter-club games, and a great deal of information, including the fact that curling was not good during most of that season because of adverse weather conditions. Member clubs of the Grand National for 1876-77 are:

- Caledonia Curling Club, New York, New York
- New York Curling Club, New York, New York
- Jersey City Curling Club, Jersey city, New Jersey
- Burns Curling Club, Cleveland, Ohio
- Milwaukee Curling Club, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Chicago Curling Club, Chicago, Illinois
- St. Andrews Curling Club, New York, New York
- Albany Curling Club, Albany, New York
- Newark Curling Club, Newark, New Jersey
- Orchard Lake Curling Club, Orchard Lake, Michigan
- Paterson Curling Club, Paterson, New Jersey
- Yonkers Curling Club, Yonkers, New York
- Thistle Curling Club, Detroit, Michigan
- Utica Curling Club, Utica, New York
- Granite Curling Club, Detroit, Michigan
- Thistle Curling Club, New York, New York
- Empire City Curling Club, New York, New York
- Caledonia Curling Club, Brooklyn, New York
- Ivanhoe Curling Club, Paterson, New Jersey
- Burns Curling Club, New York, New York

- Manhattan Curling Club, New York, New York
- Thistle Curling Club, Chicago, Illinois
- Burns Curling Club, Toledo, Ohio
- Troy City Curling Club, Troy, New York
- Ogdensburg Curling Club, Ogdensburg, New York
- Portage Curling Club, Portage, Wisconsin
- Thistle Curling Club, Brooklyn, New York

The above record tells us that there were a lot of men throwing rocks in 1876-77, and it is sad to know that so many of these groups have passed out of the picture, including the three clubs in this area. What happened to the local groups we shall never know but, according to Tom Williamson's history, the present Detroit Curling Club took form and shape on an unorganized basis in 1885, and for the next three years they curled on the old Detroit Athletic club grounds, which were bounded by Woodward, Canfield, Cass and Forest Avenues. The club house was on Woodward, about opposite Garfield. West of the club house were baseball and football fields, tennis courts, and plenty of room for other activities. Some years later when the D.A.C. became a social and business oriented club, they moved to their new location on Madison Avenue and the old property became the site of the rambling convention hall, owned and operated by the Grindley family, for many years. It is presently marked as the site of the Vernor's Ginger Ale complex.

One might wonder why the men were permitted to curl on D.A.C. property. Because of the prominence of many of the curlers we would assume that they were also members of the D.A.C. and so this would pose no problem. The rink area was located at the southwest corner of the property, which means it was at the intersection of Canfield and Cass. The game was played mostly at night and the rink was lighted with four large lanterns, mounted on poles, with great assistance from a large electric arc light at the corner which, of course, was part of the city lighting system. This proves you can't beat a canny Scot for taking advantage of a situation.

After three years of play in the open at the D.A.C. the members finally incorporated and they also decided it was time to have a home of their own. So in 1889 they purchased a small plot of ground at the corner of 4th and Gold Street. (Through the help of John R. McKinley, a city assessor's map was located showing Gold Street in 1888, not far from our present address, but Gold Street has long since disappeared from city maps.) As soon as the land was purchased a covered rink was

erected, which added to the comfort and enjoyment of the game. The cost of this move seemed to present no financial problems because of the generosity of such members as Messrs. McMillan, Muir, Hendrie, McGregor, Codd, Dean and some others.

The first officers of the newly incorporated club were Joseph S. Keen, President; Thomas Williamson, Vice-President; James Harrison, Treasurer; Lafayette Owens, Secretary. During the next seven years the club grew and prospered at 4th and Gold Street but in 1895, with membership increasing, it was decided that better facilities were needed, and so our present property at 1236 West Forest was acquired. Although we now owned property on West Forest, play continued at 4th and Gold for another two years, but in 1897 the building at Gold Street was moved to the new location, where curling has continued to the present time. As a matter of record we sponsored our first International Bonspiel in 1897. By simple arithmetic this seems to contradict the 1974 Bonspiel program which refers to the 1974 spiel as, our 88th Annual, but what's wrong with a little poetic license?

We know nothing about the size of the rink structure which was moved from Gold Street to West Forest Avenue in 1897, but we doubt that it was large enough for six sheets. We do know, however, that in 1906 the old building was replaced with our present six sheet facility plus the second floor lounge and main floor draw rooms. These areas of the club house are much the same today as they were in 1906. All play, of course, was on natural ice, which meant that we had some good seasons and some bad ones. The amount of curling was dependent on weather conditions and the ability of the ice committee to get quickly on the job, when the temperature dropped. The north and south walls of the rink were lined with large windows which could be opened when flooding began.

During the first few years in the new building the ice was made on a plain dirt floor with the help of several types of binders, none of which worked very well. In 1908 a cement floor was laid which proved to be a great improvement. In addition to giving us better ice, this hard surface was the source of some pretty good income during the summer months when the rink area was leased for the storage of warehouse products at first, and later for the storage of surplus automobiles. Today if you look at the northwest corner of the rink you will note it has been cut at an angle instead of being square. This was done to permit the building of a ramp so autos could be driven in and out from the alley.

As we have mentioned, curling started at 1236 W. Forest in

the 1897-98 season and that year also marked the beginning of the Detroit International Bonspiel, in which twelve teams competed for three cups in a two day affair. A Detroit rink won the Walker Cup and first prize; Sarnia won the Cadillac cup and second prize; Ridgeway won the Russell House Cup and third prize. All participants were entertained at a grand banquet at the Cadillac Hotel, which claimed to be Detroit's finest but which statement would probably provoke a pretty good argument from the Russell House.

At the turn of the century the life of a traveling bonspieler was a little rugged. If you were invited to play at Chatham or London, for instance, your rink would assemble at our club house, where the four pairs of rocks would be loaded on a dray which would convey them to the Brush Street depot. There they would be loaded on the passenger coach platform, ferried across the river where the coach would then be attached to the eastbound Canadian National train. At Chatham this procedure would be more or less reversed. Playing was always questionable because of weather conditions, but a good curler learned to adjust.

At our club all members who considered themselves regular curlers owned their own stones. The precious playthings were usually acquired by inheritance or by abandonment from a deceased member and, when not in play, were stashed in wooden boxes arranged along the north and south walls, all under padlock. In addition to the private stones there was a good supply of club stones which were stored on racks along the west wall. All stones, both club and privately owned, were in various weights ranging from Fred Lawton's fifty-five pounders down to Percy Power's thirty-five pounders, but the variation in weights didn't seem to have any effect on the game. Before starting a game the stones for each rink were identified by a red or white tassel, slipped over the handle. By 1920, when most clubs in the area had enough stones on hand to take care of visiting curlers, the custom of carrying your own came to a welcome end. Then a club hosting a bonspiel would place on the ice four sets on each side of the hack, as carefully matched as possible and each set marked red or white. The reds would be further marked as ones, two, threes, and fours and the whites in the same way, and that is the way they were to be played.

The 1923-24 season at D.C.C. was a particularly bad one for curling. It would have to be described as an open winter, with a long January thaw, followed by a mild February and so at the annual meeting in March of 1924 it was decided to install an ice machine. When it was recalled that the ice machine industry was very much in its infancy

at the time, this was a very bold move. Most of the modest homes on West Forest in the early twenties contained a good wooden ice box in the kitchen, and many of these boxes were supplied with ice by a Pittman and Dean ice wagon. Any one over sixty will remember that ice for the domestic market was always cut in January and February from surrounding waters and then stored for summer use in ice houses, well packed with sawdust. When the club made its decision to go mechanical there were a few commercial ice machines in Detroit, but they were mostly used in cold storage plants. There were also two other ice making plants getting started for the production of ice for the domestic trade, one of which was Pittman and Dean. It should be recalled that J.N. Dean was a member of the old Granite Club and so we are assuming that his experience may have influenced the other members to take the action they did.

Anyhow, at the beginning of the 1924-25 season we were playing on artificial ice and in checking all available records – there is no evidence to dispute that fact that this was the first artificial curling ice, anywhere.

Much of the historical data contained in this report, including the action taken on the ice machine, has been gleaned from Tom Williamson's history, published in 1926, and we should all be thankful for what he did. But like many amateur and professional writers, including this one, he sometimes omits important details. For instance, he tells us that we left the friendly lot on the old D.A.C. grounds in 1888, the year we incorporated, and moved to Fourth and Gold, where we purchased land on which we erected a building for curling and skating. There is no mention of the cost. Then Tom tells of the purchase of our present land at 1236 W. Forest in 1895 and that the Gold Street building was moved thereon in 1897. He further states that our present club house – without the present dining room and locker room – was built in 1906, but again he fails to tell us how these things were financed.

Because there are no cost figures available we will just have to assume that the property on Gold Street was acquired by passing the hat to some of the more affluent members. When we purchased the property on Forest in 1895 we would guess that it was probably not an expensive piece of land and again the hat was passed for what money was needed, less the amount received from the sale of the Gold Street lot. One more assumption leads us to believe that when the Forest land was purchased it included the entire piece from the street to the alley. During the next eleven years this property was increasing in value and

so in 1906, when the club house was built, good business would dictate that the frontage on Forest be sold, less the easement to the front door of the club, for perhaps enough money to build the club house. There is a considerable amount of speculation in this, but it seems to make sense.

Following the decision to install ice-making equipment in 1924 it was necessary to build an addition to the 1906 club house so that the machines could be properly housed. What is now used as the men's locker room was added on the first floor and the present dining room was added to the second floor. The equipment purchased consisted of two belt-driven compressors: one large for general use and a smaller one as standby in the event of a breakdown. Just outside the East wall and built up from the ground was a large capacity brine tank from which brine was pumped through many feet of cast iron pipe laid in cement on the rink floor. This same pipe is still in service after fifty years of wear and tear, which speaks well for cast iron.

The summer of 1924 was one of great activity at 1236 West Forest. The additions to the club house were completed, the new machines were installed, and the new season opened with the first artificial ice known to curlers anywhere. The colorful Richard M. Watson was president and he must have spent more time at the club that summer than he did at City Hall (Dick was councilman for many years) in order to get everything done. We were not only in business but the equipment and improvements to the plant were financed by the sale of thirty thousand dollars worth of low interest first mortgage bonds to the membership. These bonds were in denominations of one hundred, five hundred and one thousand dollar pieces. Anyone old enough to remember the early twenties will remember that after the short depression of 1921, the next eight years was a period of great prosperity and that everyone was in the market and that even the shoe shine boys were making money in a run-away stock market, which came to an abrupt halt in 1929.

From 1924 to 1929, everything was just great at the curling club. The ice was wonderful, the season was extended, the membership was growing, and the interest and principal payments on the bonds were being made when due. But then came the stock market crash of 1929 which triggered the depression of the early thirties. People saw their life savings going down the drain, many were out of work, and there were those who could no longer pay their dues at D.C.C., modest though they were at \$40.00.

In spite of everything the club survived the 1929-30 season fairly well, but at the next annual meeting things were getting really tough.

The club treasurer reported that we owed the bank \$2,000.00 on a note; some \$800.00 to the Detroit Edison Company, and taxes, insurance, and water bills in various amounts. The bond account principal had been reduced to \$22,800.00, but the current interest would have to go in default. There was plenty of precedent for letting this interest go in default because first mortgage bonds were in trouble all over the map. This meeting was a long drawn out affair, and the only action taken was to adjourn and to think about the problem and to call a special meeting later in the summer.

The summer meeting was held at the Cadillac Athletic Club (formerly the old Masonic Temple on West Lafayette), and it was well attended and produced many and varied suggestions as to how to save the sinking ship. One vocal group thought that perhaps the best way out was to simply fold our tent and go our way without rejoicing. But calmer heads prevailed, and it was decided that this should not be allowed to happen and that money would be found for a short season to start on January 1st and run through March 15th. This is what happened in the next two curling seasons. The records do not tell us how these two seasons were financed, but money was raised in some manner and curling continued without interruption.

By the end of the 1933 season our membership was showing a healthy growth, our finances were improving, and things were really perking up at the old establishment. But before the skies were completely clear, we were faced with another problem when Detroit's two great financial institutions, the Guardian—Detroit Bank Complex and the Detroit Bankers Group were found to be in such trouble that Governor William Comstock, ably assisted by Ferris H. Fitch, his legal advisor, closed all Michigan banks for eight days. Soon after the Michigan bank closings, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt took a page from Bill Comstock's book and ordered all national banks closed. This forced the economy to operate on various types of scrip as legal tender.

In spite of all the problems, nationally and locally, the good ship Curling stayed on course -- with conditions soon showing an optimistic trend. Except for the club bonds which were still in default, our current finances were in such good shape that we were able to open the 1934-35 season on December 15th, two weeks earlier than in the previous two years. At the annual meeting on March 15, 1935, it was decided that something should be done about the bonded indebtedness and the plan approved was simple and to the point. A letter was drafted and mailed

to all bond holders, mostly club members, asking them to kindly surrender their paper for cancellation, and to no one's surprise, many of them did just that. To those not so motivated, membership extensions were offered: a \$100.00 bond was good for two years; a \$200.00 bond was good for four years; and for a \$500.00 bond life membership would be granted. At the next annual meeting in March of 1936 our bonded debt had been reduced from \$22,800.00 to a net of \$4,900.00.

Although many of the bonds were surrendered for cancellation, and number of others were exchanged for extended memberships, there were a few holders that demanded money. From some of those who were so inclined, the club was able to buy back bonds at prices ranging from ten to twenty-five cents on the dollar, which prices were pretty much in line with defaulted real estate issues at this time. At this same meeting everyone was pleased with the progress that had been made, but it was felt that now was the time to make an all-out effort to get the rest of the outstanding bonds. To carry on this work, R.L. Thomson, a member of the board whose membership had been extended by virtue of a bond owned by his father, A.R. Thomson, agreed to do what he could. At this time Dick Thomson was serving the Rotary Club as its paid secretary with an office in the Statler Hotel and during the next few years he was successful in acquiring most of the remaining bonds. In 1940 Dick decided to run for the Michigan House of Representatives and he was elected to serve his district, which included Highland Park. With his entry into politics he could no longer work on the bonds and so into this breach came Ward Peck, a former president of the club and a highly respected lawyer.

The club was fortunate in securing the services of Ward Peck at this time because we were soon involved in some very tricky legal matters. By the end of 1941 all bonds had been cancelled except for one \$500.00 piece which became known as the Clark bond. Mr. Clark demanded his pound of flesh and went as far as taking the matter to the Circuit Court which ruled in his favor. But Ward Peck was not intimidated by this decision. The case was immediately appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court, the highest court in the state ruled in our favor, and we were now free of all bonded debt. This writer has little knowledge of the law and its many ramifications, but we do know that it costs time and money to appeal a case of this kind. In a recent conversation with Ward, who has to be our oldest member in terms of membership, we were told that this appeal cost him some \$2,200.00 in out-of-pocket expense, with no consideration for his time, but this was done for the old club as another of his many contributions.

But let's leave the bond situation and go back a few years to December 5, 1933. On that important date in history the 18th amendment to the U.S. Constitution was rescinded, which has meant a great deal in the operation of the club in succeeding years. No action was taken at D.C.C. until November 30, 1934 when the board appointed Harry Slater to serve as chairman of the bar committee and to proceed at once with securing a club liquor license. There were a number of members who opposed this action but the wets prevailed, and there can be no doubt in anyone's mind that this source of revenue has been most helpful in the years that followed.

During the summer of 1934 the board was having trouble lining up a staff for the forthcoming season, which was not an unusual event. The operation of the old ice machines required the presence of a licensed stationary engineer to be present whenever the machines were running. After several futile attempts to find someone, Don McCree, a member of the board at that time, agreed to take the job himself, and he further agreed to manage the club, run the dining room, make the ice, and tend bar at a weekly salary of \$40.00. Don McCree was a close personal friend of this writer and was largely responsible for introducing us to the grand and roarin' game. This was probably the best deal the club ever made because we had great ice for the next three years, and the operation of the club was no problem to anyone. In addition to his many duties, Don also served as club secretary until he was defeated for re-election after three years because some members felt he was helping himself to too many potions at the bar.

So far in this Update we have been helped by Tom Williamson's history and the minute book covering the period from 1930-1941, which book was found and has been preserved by Bob Davidson. The only other minutes Bob has been able to find cover the years from 1949-1955. For what happened in the forties we shall rely pretty much on memory.

Before leaving the decade of the thirties, we made a few notes which we hope are worth recording;

1. During the 1935-1936 season our membership was 242 in all classes.
2. During the summer of 1935 plans for a merger with Detroit Tennis Club were discussed, but they did not materialize.
3. In October of 1935 a re-roofing contract was awarded to Trowell Construction Company with payment to be made by a 6% promissory note to be dated upon completion. Walter Trowell was a longtime active member of the club.

4. At the annual meeting in March of 1936 yearly dues were increased from \$20.00 to \$24.00. By keeping the dues under \$25.00 federal taxes were avoided. At this same meeting the price of dinners was increased from 55 cents to 65 cents, but not without considerable opposition.
5. The 1935-1936 season marked the advent of "Scots Wha Hae" with Arch McColl serving as the editor, "Angus McTavish." In the next season the duties of old Angus were handled by Charlie Boyle and then for the next seven years the job was probably poorly handled by this writer. One thing we early editors did was to hold the contents to one closely typed mimeographed sheet, which was mailed every Monday at a postage rate of 1 1/2 cents per copy.

Since this writer closed his typewriter some thirty odd years ago there have been many editors, all of whom chose to write under names other than Angus McTavish, which was their privilege, but to us they were wrong because we always liked the name of Angus. Some of the later writers we remember were Merritt Knowlson, Garnet Smith, Ted Fitch, Bob Morris, Bob Rosekranz, Bill Caswell, and Joe McGlynn, but not necessarily in that order.

A special membership meeting was held on May 21, 1941 at the Birmingham Golf Club at which gathering it was decided to proceed with the purchase of 50 sets of matched stones. A purchasing committee consisting of Pierce, Power and Cornall placed an order at \$40.00 per set with delivery promised in time for the new season. Although we were not involved in World War II until December of that year, the British were already at war and a lousy Boche sub sank the ship carrying our stones. Somewhere in the deep Atlantic lie fifty sets of beautiful Ailsa Craigs. The shipment was well insured but we had to wait until the following season for the replacements before we could curl with our new matched stones. The minutes of the meeting at Birmingham where the new stones were authorized fail to say anything about how they were to be financed. However, our memory tells us that the bite was put on some fifty of us to the tune of \$40.00, which was not difficult at that time.

To backtrack just a little, the minutes of a December 1940 board meeting tell us that the International Bonspiel, scheduled for January 1941 will have to be cancelled due to immigration regulations which will eliminate all Canadian entries. We also know from memory that there was no International Bonspiel in January of 1943. We remember that year all too well because we were trying to operate the club as president just a year after Pearl Harbor and our entry into World War II. We not

only had gas rationing, but power, meat, sugar and some other essentials were strictly controlled. For a while it appeared that we would not be able to operate that season because of a shortage of power, but somehow we managed to do so. Many of our younger members went away to fight their country's war, and this writer was in office only briefly when word was received of the battlefield death of Capt. Edward Howell. Eddie was one of our better skips, a real gentleman, and a close personal friend. It was certainly a difficult year to operate a club but we managed to get through the season and we ended with a small surplus in the treasury.

The annual meeting in March 1943 marked the end of seven years of active participation in the affairs of the club and there was a feeling of relief in turning the controls over to our successor, Al Green. At the same time there was some trepidation that the new team couldn't possibly operate without our advice and council. But operate they have and very well, too, and just to set the record straight, no one has sought our opinion or help on anything since that March night some 32 years ago.

One of the first things that Herb Morley did when he became president in 1944 was to cover the glass windows which extended all along the north and south walls, with a heavy grade of wall board. Herb figures that these panels could be installed for \$50.00 each. Herb gladly paid for the first panel and then quickly pressured enough other members at \$50.00 to completely enclose the rink. A few years later Rudy Speerschneider, in tearing down an automobile exhibit which his firm had built for one of the national shows, found he had on hand enough good ceiling material to cover the rink and so the present rink ceiling was completed at a total cost to the club of \$200.00.

A rather important event occurred at D.C.C. while the International Bonspiel was in progress during January, 1945. At this time Detroit was a member of The Grand National and the Ontario Curling Association but there was no organization in this part of the country which could hold the clubs together. This situation had been troubling Ewart Watson, one of our active members, and with curlers on hand from Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota a meeting was called and the Midwest Curling Association was born. The Midwest continued to function until the present U.S. Curling Association was organized during the 1955-56 season.

As long as twenty-five years ago, inflation was beginning to be felt. Before the 1950-51 season began the club dues were increased to

\$61.00 per year with a \$20.00 initiation fee to be paid by new members. This yearly \$61.00 included federal taxes, a locker fee, and a subscription to Curling News. Before the 1953-54 season began, the dues were again increased to \$94.00 with initiation raised to \$36.00. But this latest increase paled in comparison to a much more important event of that particular season. A special meeting of members was called by President Merritt Knowlson to be held on May 20, 1953. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possibility and feasibility of buying new ice-making equipment to replace the 1924 units. The consensus of the meeting was to proceed, providing the equipment could be financed. A planning committee under the chairmanship of Paul Moreland was appointed, with instructions to proceed if a feasible plan of financing could be developed. Paul's committee found a way and we were curling on new ice during the 1954-1955 season.

How this major task of buying, installing, and financing this new equipment is best explained in Paul Moreland's report which follows:

REPORT OF PLANNING COMMITTEE 1953-1954

The chief duty of the committee was to provide icemaking equipment and to devise a way of paying for same. After many meetings during the summer and after examination of some second hand equipment and with the help of Bob Dakin and Rudy Speerschneider from the Board of Directors, it was decided that the Belztemp Ice Maker should be purchased. The original cost estimates were as follows:

Bid price of equipment, plus sales tax	\$17,367.50
Estimated Other Costs	2,932.50
<hr/> Total cost	<hr/> \$20,300.00
Less scrap value of old machines	400.00
<hr/> Net cost	<hr/> \$19,900.00
Less amount from Trustees' Building Fund	\$3,900.00
<hr/> Net amount to be financed	<hr/> \$16,000.00

The Committee decided to ask the membership to lend the club \$100.00 each, which would require the participation of 160 members. The notes would be paid from a sinking fund and would draw interest at 4% per annum. The Planning Committee consisting of Percy Power, John McKinley, Melvin Huffaker, Ted Sackett, Coleburke Lyons, John Taylor, Elvin Berry, Ray Danol, James Sexton and myself set forth to collect the dough. The first \$10,000 was easy because in any organiza-

tion there are those who will cooperate in every way. The balance took a little more time, but we made it as the following breakdown reveals:

1 member @	\$1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00
10 members @	300.00	3,000.00
20 members @	200.00	4,000.00
78 members @	100.00	7,800.00
4 members @	50.00	200.00
113		<hr/> \$16,000.00

The equipment was ordered and installed in time for the new season, but it was a tight squeak.

Respectfully submitted
 Paul I. Moreland
 Chairman

And so we had our new equipment which has served us very well during the succeeding years. It is also nice to report that all the notes were paid in full and with interest by March of 1958. Of course, we didn't have to pay Bob Shield's note for \$1,000.00. Bob returned his note marked "Paid" which was just another indication of his financial support to his favorite club, which support continued over so many years.

With the installation of the new ice machine, the old engine room was converted into the men's locker room. Of course, this involved a new floor and new lockers, which work was done as quickly as possible.

Further improvements to the premises were made in the summer of 1955 when a contract was given to Rudy Speerschneider to rebuild and revitalize the downstairs bar, the old draw room, and the ladies' locker room at a cost of \$8,500.00. This work was financed by a loan of \$2,500 from eight anonymous members, plus \$4,200 from the previous year's surplus, plus \$1,800 from anticipated receipts from the next year's operation. The old place really began to take on an attractive appearance.

On November 3, 1956 a special meeting was held at the club house to consider the purchase of three lots on Forest Court, directly east of the club. It was voted that we go ahead with the purchase including two existing houses at a total cost of \$12,000. Once again money for this acquisition was raised by the 4% note route, with the notes to

be helped along the way by a \$20.00 per year assessment per member. The trustee under this indenture was Ken McLeod who hadn't wasted his life in the banking business. All notes were paid in full with interest in March of 1963.

So far in this review nothing has been said about skating, which is certainly an oversight. Ever since the installation of the first ice machine in 1924 there has been skating at 1236 West Forest. Even today you will find old-timers in the city who will tell you about skating at the club although they never curled. During several seasons the ice was rented on Sunday afternoon to the Detroit Skating Club at a price which ranged from \$25.00 to \$50.00.

We also note that mixed curling has not been mentioned. That omission will be corrected right now by stating that mixed curling got underway rather slowly in the 1954-55 season under the inspiration of Frank Andrus. But in recent years it has been growing by leaps and bounds. It is probably safe to say that mixed curling has really saved the game, in both Canada and the U.S., and each year is growing in popularity.

During the 1955-56 season a program of youth curling was started under the direction of Horace Decker and George Barton. If this program isn't being continued it should be because anyone watching curling today will note that it is no longer an old man's game – the designation it carried for so many years.

The U.S. Men's Curling Association was born during the 1955-56 season, which, of course, marked the end of the Midwest Curling Association. The first U.S. Men's Bonspiel was held in Chicago that year, sponsored by Marshall—Field & Co, and Hughston McBain, and money was no object.

So far in this Update we have drawn on Tom Williamson's history, the two minute books which Bob Davidson found for us, and the rest is mostly from memory. Alas, there is no more written word for us to use and inasmuch as have not been too close to the scene in the last few years, this seems a good place to stop. Some may wonder why we have done what has been done. The answer probably is that we waited for someone else to do it, but when no one came forth, we felt that something should be done while there was still time. A number of proper names were used in the preceding and this is always dangerous because of the names that were omitted. There will be some who will find errors of commission and omission and for this we are sorry. To them we might paraphrase the words of my old Limey friend Bill of World War I to his foxhole pal Alfie, "If you can write a better history, go do it."

EPILOGUE

In preparing this review we are indebted to many people including Tom Williamson, Ward Peck, Percy Power, Stan McKenzie, Hap L'Heureux, John McKinley and Bob Davidson. There are some stalwarts with more seniority within the club than I have had and I am thinking of Alex Murray and a few of the others mentioned above. But none of them can claim familiarity with the address 1236 West Forest before I knew it.

It was in 1916 that I arrived in dynamic Detroit to start my climb to the top of the General Motors ladder. I found an inexpensive room in one of the four flats located at 1236 West Forest, which building stood there proudly until just a year or two ago. The area was a most pleasant place at that time. My climb up the G.M. ladder was abruptly stalled soon after April the following year when Uncle Sam asked me to come and help save the world for democracy. When I returned to these parts some two and half years later, I took up residence elsewhere and it was fifteen years later before I found myself on the ice at D.C.C. This brief biographical bit has no historical value but I couldn't resist including it.

Our very own Adam Strom, longtime member of the D.C.C. and also longtime head of the Detroit Public Library, managed to collect a number of valuable books on curling which are still available at the main branch. A few of these books we would recommend are:

History of Curling by John Kerr (Call No. R-796.83 K No. 6)

This book cannot be taken out of the library

Curling the Ancient Scottish Game (Call No. 796.83 T-21)

By James Taylor

Curling, Past and Present (Call No. 796.83 C 86 C)

By W. A. Creelman

Scottish Curlers in Canada (Call No. 796.83 M 35)

By M. H. Marshall

John W. Taylor
November 1974

A Contemporary History of Curling at the Detroit Curling Club

by Bill MacLachlan 1983



1983

Dear Member:

John Taylor's review of curling which was published last year as "An Early History of Curling in the Detroit Area 1885-1956" has given the members of the Detroit Curling Club, and many other curlers around the country, an insight into our curling background. However, much of the contemporary history has not been preserved for posterity. We are fortunate in having another gifted member to prepare the following discourse. He has devoted much time and effort sifting through the available information, and relying on his over 35-year membership in D.C.C. for facts. This new history begins in 1957, where John Taylor's review ended. A tale of the more current history of our club is woven with little tidbits of curling trivia into the modern chronology.

The author of this second volume is Bill MacLachlan. Like John Taylor, Bill is a life member and past-president of the D.C.C. When asked to participate in this project he gave an enthusiastic "yes." His enthusiasm is felt in the written words that follow. As a matter of fact, Bill's association with the construction industry can be detected in several areas of the discourse when he describes buildings, etc.

Bill notes near the end of his review that we are close to 100 years old and the span of two volumes actually covers 97 years. It is our hope, that as the club extends its longevity into the 21st century, some member will undertake to develop subsequent volumes of our history to preserve the expanding traditions and heritage for future generations of curlers at the D.C.C.

May the diligence and resourcefulness of the past and the enthusiasm as shown these last few years at Drake Road persevere into the future to assure that the Detroit Curling Club's good curling and friendliness will be available for our children's children.

Good Reading!
John A. Backoff
President

The Ongoing Story of the Detroit Curling Club

PROLOGUE

John Taylor has authored a very interesting study entitled “An Early History of Curling in the Detroit Area, 1885-1956”. This discourse is meant to supplement his study and hopefully to be as interesting. Much of the information was obtained from reviewing the minutes of the Board of Directors’ meetings.

At this state in this treatise it might be appropriate to explain that the Detroit Rockettes, the women’s division of the Detroit Curling Club, was organized in 1952 through the efforts of Mrs. Nelson Brown, Mrs. Douglas Fisk, Mrs. James Hile, and Mrs. Les Wilder, wives of club members. The Rockettes are still actively curling and are responsible for many donations to the club and for the popularity of mixed curling. These ladies have done a very fine job during the bonspiels and the national championships by answering the telephone, serving food, and assisting with the scoring and publicity.

During the period 1957-1983 several attempts were made to establish curling at other locations than the Detroit Curling Club. These sites were the Birmingham Ice Arena and the Detroit Skating Club. The curling lasted for a few years at Birmingham, and the curling at the Detroit Skating Club continues on a limited basis. In 1976, for a very short period, the Oliver family was instrumental in promoting curling at the Beechwood Ice Arena in Southfield. However, due to the fact that curling was only allowed from 10:00 P.M. to midnight, only a few prospective curlers showed interest, and the experiment was abandoned.

The rest of this review will deal exclusively with the history of the Detroit Curling Club, mostly at its location at 1236 West Forest, Detroit, and more recently at its new site at 5600 Drake Road, West Bloomfield.

Contemporary Curling in Detroit

At the Forest Avenue location parking was a problem. There was a very small lot adjacent to the club, so most members, guests, and bonspiel participants were forced to park on the streets, with the attendant dangers and inconvenience. However, in the 1956-1957 season the club bought another small piece of property next to the existing parking lot. This eased the problem somewhat, but did not solve it.

Roofing problems seem always to be the bete-noire for curling arenas. The Detroit Curling Club is no exception (even to this day).

So in this same season, 1956-1957, a new roof was installed, which helped solve another of our problems.

The interior of the arena at the club was constructed of a row of exposed wooden columns with three sheets of ice on each side. Wooden trusses spanned the entire six sheets, with each truss being supported by the side walls at the ends of the trusses and the columns at the center of the trusses. This construction was unpainted (except for the columns) and was somewhat unsightly, so in the season of 1956-1957 a ceiling of blue cloth was suspended just below the bottom chord of the trusses. This ceiling did much to brighten the ice area and to conceal the construction above. It is believed that member Rudy Speerschneider donated the entire ceiling; if not, he certainly was instrumental in having it installed.

In February of 1957 the Detroit Rockettes hosted the ninth annual U.S. Women's Curling Association National Bonspiel, with Mrs. Nelson Brown as chairperson. Thirty-six teams participated. On January 26 and 27, 1958, the Rockettes entertained 24 touring Scotswomen.

Curling was improving in quality at the Detroit Club, and it was on April 12, 1958, that a team composed of Doug Fisk, Mike Slyziuk, Ernie Slyziuk, and Merritt Knowlson won the U.S. Men's Championship at the arena in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This was quite a triumph, since the Wisconsin-Illinois-Minnesota area was the hot-bed of curling.

The newly-acquired property mentioned above was paved during the warm weather in the summer of 1958 to be ready for the next curling season. The total amount paid for this lot was \$12,320.35. This includes the purchase price, demolition of the houses on the lot, paving, and miscellaneous expenses. (One of the structures on the lot was reputed to be a "blind pig" and a house of ill-repute, a situation that encouraged some wags to proclaim this was the only curling club in the world to provide such embellishments!) The financing of this project was made possible by interest-bearing loans from club members. This method of financing was used several times to improve the club or for specific emergencies or large expenditures.

In 1960 the first mention of what was to become a long and frustrating series of events was presented to the Detroit Curling Club. At a special meeting of the general membership on November 29, 1960, it was learned that a project known as "University City" was to be developed and that the curling club was within the boundaries of the development and thus subject to condemnation. This project was presented as a future development. Upon further investigation it was

learned the development was five to seven years in the future. Needless to say, many curlers were worried and apprehensive about the future of curling in Detroit.

Although women as a group known as the Detroit Rockettes had been curling at the club since 1952, it was decided in 1960 that each male member who had a women curler in his family was to be assessed \$15.00 per year for the woman curler. This was the forerunner of the family membership as it is known today, quite a step in encouraging women's and mixed curling, since not too long prior to this action the women curlers had no access to the downstairs bar or draw room except for special parties and events. They were required to use a separate stairway from the upstairs lounge to their locker room and the ice area.

In spite of the news of possible condemnation, certain maintenance and enhancement of the clubhouse was necessary, so the summer of 1960 the south side of the club facing Forest Avenue was covered with gray vertical metal siding. This was an improvement over the old and deteriorating wood siding, and it cost the grand sum of \$864.00.

Curling in Windsor, Ontario, which, incidentally was started in 1954 by Detroit curlers (and Windsor residents) Nate Cornwall and Nick Burnett, had achieved such popularity that the Windsor club could take no more members. A group of Canadian curlers formed a club known as "Ford Motor Curling Club" and approached the Detroit club to ask if they could rent the club for one night a week. This proposition was approved by the Detroit Board of Directors, and a long and friendly relationship was established, with the Windsor group (later known as the "Windsor Granite Curling Club") curling at the D.C.C. every Monday night.

Curling being the international sport that it is, it was only fitting that in November, 1961, the Detroit Curling Club was host to a group of 25 curlers from Switzerland. The Detroit Club provided six teams to compete against the Swiss. Who won is not known and not important. What is important is that the games provided an opportunity for us to promote international curling.

March 6-11 of 1962 saw the Detroit club host the first of two U.S. Men's Championships to be held in Detroit. The competition was held at the club, and special seats were set up on both sides of the arena to accommodate spectators. The competition lasted for five days, and the national champion was the Fran Kleffman rink from Hibbing, Minnesota. The winner was nearly disqualified when it was discovered that one of the curlers on the Kleffman rink had neglected to procure

a passport and therefore could not make the trip to Scotland for the world championship “Scotch cup” competition. However, due to some “string-pulling” by some influential members of the Detroit club, a passport was procured in time for the team to make its trip.

Although no action on condemnation was taking place, the club was already preparing for the future. It was announced at the annual meeting of March, 1962, that to acquire an acceptable piece of property in Detroit would cost about \$3.50 per square foot.

1963 saw another triumph for the Detroit club in the U.S. Men’s National Championship when a team composed of Mike Slyziuk, Nelson Brown, Ernie Slyziuk, and Walter Hubchik, with an almost impossible shot made by Mike in the last end of the final game, won the championship. Mike Slyziuk, Nelson Brown, and Walter Hubchik are currently enshrined in the Michigan Amateur Sports Hall of Fame for their contributions to curling.

In 1963 a senior member’s dues were \$143.00.

In 1964 the City of Detroit made a presentation to bring the 1968 Olympic games to Detroit. If this bid were successful, then the land where the curling club was located would be immediately condemned for housing and sports facilities to be built for the Olympic athletes. The club would be immediately “under the gun” and be forced to move at once. If the proposal were not accepted (as was the case) then it was reported that we would be required to move in 1966 or 1967.

The Midwest Curling Association, of which Detroit was a member, was disbanded in 1964. In order to compete in events sponsored by the United States Men’s Curling Association it was necessary to form a Michigan Curling Association. This was done, and many of the Detroit curlers were instrumental in forming this association and became officers and directors.

Due to the club’s location and its vulnerability in the summer months when unoccupied, many break-ins occurred. One such burglary took place in August of 1964. The entry was accomplished by the removal of some of the wood siding from the exterior wall facing Forest Avenue and walking in. Stolen goods amounted to \$750.00, which included a new food freezer and a new stereo, both of which had been given to the club only recently by the Rockettes.

The club received an unofficial notification during the summer of 1964 that condemnation of the club property would probably take place some in time in 1966 or 1967, which again created a feeling of unrest and uncertainty among the Board of Directors and the membership.

An extensive sports facility on Berg Road near Eight Mile was being proposed by a developer. This complex was to have had facilities for many sports and included an ice arena. The possibility of renting ice time for the Detroit Curling Club was presented as an option when the club eventually had to move. However, this scheme never got off the ground, probably because of lack of financing.

Serious discussions were held in 1966 with the Detroit Skating Club to explore a possible merger of the two clubs. These talks never resulted in anything firm, mainly because the

Detroit Curling Club could give no definite commitment, since the compensation to be received upon condemnation and the actual date of condemnation were unknown. These two unknowns were to plague the club for many years.

Another promoter was trying to sell the D.C.C. on a pay-as-you-go arrangement, using facilities he was to provide. As far as is known, this facility was never built, and therefore no action was taken by the club. Meanwhile, volunteer members installed new rolled roofing on the building, necessary at that time because of the poor quality of the previous professional roofing job.

On March 11 and 12, 1966, a group of touring Swedish curlers was entertained with games and dinner at the club. The D.C.C. also hosted a group of Scots curlers for four days during January, 1967. There was a reception, curling, a visit to Hiram Walker in Windsor, a visit to Ford Motor Company, lunch at the Dearborn Inn, and a dinner at the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club.

More bad news came to the club in March of 1967. The City of Detroit informed the club that the tentative date for condemnation would be in the spring of 1968, approximately one year later. The city also reaffirmed its stand that the club property would not be exempted from the parcels of land to be taken, so therefore the club must abandon its location. Undaunted by this, more property adjacent to the club was acquired for badly needed future parking; this consisted of a house and lot.

The curling stones which had been in use for many years and which had badly-worn running surfaces were reconditioned and sharpened in 1968 at a cost of \$375.00.

The search for land upon which to build a new curling club continued, with the consensus being that, at best, the final season at the club on Forest Avenue would be the 1969-70 season.

The Detroit Skating Club, anxious to get more members, again

approached the club and offered a joint-venture proposition for study. However, it was clear that skating would hold an unduly large priority over curling, and therefore the proposition was declined.

Early in 1968 the club was looking for some definite information on the condemnation proceedings; however, none was forthcoming. The reason given for this lack of positive action was the fact that the City of Detroit really did not have the money to buy the land. It was speculated that the club might remain in its present location for many years – a speculation that proved later to have been very prophetic. The city indicated that it had two pieces of land which it would be willing to sell to us. One of these was located near Tiger Stadium and other at 12th St and Lafayette. Since the club had no money to buy land, and since the consensus of the members was that the city was not a desirable place to locate, these lots were not considered to be acceptable.

Throughout the 1968 and 1969 seasons much work was done by various planning committees in preparation for the day when a new club would become a reality. A scale-model of a new facility was constructed and shown to the membership. This model depicted a very large and sophisticated building and provided for year-round use. It was also a very expensive project.

The Club's night watchman at this time felt that it was necessary for him to get a permit for a gun because of the deteriorating neighborhood and the rash of burglaries in the area. The permit was obtained and a gun purchased. Fortunately it was never necessary to use the gun.

The old handles for the stones were becoming loose and bent, so an investigation was made as to the cost of new handles. It was learned that new handles would cost \$1,600.00. This was too much money to spend at that time, so the club continued to use the old handles. This decision proved wise, as will be shown later on.

In the summer of 1969 a major step was taken in remodeling the club. The original bar on the ground floor was abandoned, and a new bar was constructed in the upstairs lounge area. This resulted in a much better ambience and seemed to unite the men and women curlers into a more congenial group. This bar was designed and constructed by Robert Davison, whose efforts in the project were endless, and volunteers from the club membership. At the same time six round tables (one for each ice) and forty-eight chairs (eight for each table) were purchased for the lounge area through the efforts of Lon O'Connor. The cost of these individual tables and chairs was underwritten by various members, and the chairs and tables still bear plaques indicating the donors.

Later a mosaic facade depicting the curling rink was installed above the bar. This mosaic was designed, constructed, installed, and donated by Dr. James Lammy, a club member.

The next year more land adjacent to the club was acquired for the purpose of parking and a firmer position in negotiating with the city when the condemnation proceedings began. This lot cost approximately \$4,000.00 and an additional \$1,000.00 was spent to fence the lot for security.

In 1970 during the curling season two members were held up at gunpoint in the club parking lot.

In July 1970 the club was anticipating a firm offer for the property in two or three months. Again, this proved to be only one of the many rumors that were continually disturbing to all concerned.

In order to enhance the value of the club for condemnation purposes and because of the necessity to preserve the building, new metal siding was installed on the exterior of the club and a metal awning built over the entrance door in 1972. The cost of these improvements amounted to approximately \$9,000.00. The parking lot was surfaced with crushed limestone at this time.

CITY PURCHASE OF D.C.C. STARTED

In 1972 the City of Detroit formally advised the Detroit Curling Club that a development known as "University City No. 2" would be acquiring the property around 1236 W. Forest and that the club was within this area. The acquisition of the properties by condemnation was started, and the city made an offer to the D.C.C. of \$285,590.00 for the building, property and furnishings. Although this development project had been anticipated, any move to allow the city to procure the club's property was vigorously opposed by the membership. Many members devoted time and energy and some of their own money in attending meetings and luncheons with city councilmen and lesser officials. The negotiations with the city were unending until August 1977. There are still a few minor loose ends that have not yet been settled (1983).

As it became apparent that the club would be forced to move, a planning committee chaired by Jerry Polsinelli was formed to handle all aspects of the move. Later this committee was divided into sub-committees as follows: (1) site investigation and acquisition, (2) construction, and (3) finance and merger. The planning committee was also subsequently chaired by Jim Simpson and Jim Ford.

In 1973, the D.C.C. was selected as the host club for the 1975

U.S. Men's Curling Association National Championship, and Jerry Polsinelli was named to head the planning committee for this event.

Senior family dues in 1973 were \$200.00

1974 saw the start of a very active season for the D.C.C. It was this year that Nelson Brown, a member of the club, was inducted into the Michigan Amateur Sports Hall of Fame. The tempo of planning for the eventual condemnation of the club and property increased. In April of 1974 Detroit curlers were saddened by the tragic news of the tornado which virtually destroyed the Windsor Curling Club across the river and killed many of our close friends and acquaintances.

The planning for the U.S.M.C.A. National Championship continued, one facet of which was the acquisition of 96 new one-piece plastic curling stone handles to replace the metal handles in use for many years. This was done at no cost to the club as the Canadian broker offered to exchange his new handles for our old ones, thereby promoting his product at the Championship games.

The Detroit Curling Club hosted the U.S.M.C.A. National Championship competition in March of 1975. Dr. Jerry Polsinelli, with the help of many members who volunteered time and talent, coordinated this important event. The games were held in Cobo arena. Bob Davison was the club member responsible for making curling ice---very different from hockey ice---in the arena and spent many hours instructing the arena workers in ice-making techniques. Unfortunately, they did not follow directions, and the quality of the ice was terrible toward the end of play. Otherwise, the event was a great success, and the competition was won by the Ed Riesling team of Washington State.

On March 2, 1976, a horrendous ice storm struck the region and caused a large tree near the club house to topple and short-circuit the transformer which supplied the club with electricity. The resulting reduced voltage caused a burn-out of the large motor which supplied power for the rink compressor. Because of the relatively mild weather the curling ice faced a crippling thaw. With about one month of the curling season remaining Joseph McGlynn, who was exercising a dual role as president and club manager, desperately sought resources that can usually be found in the curling fraternity. Bill MacLachlan, a director the club and an officer in a construction company, arranged for a crew of workmen to remove a section of the clubhouse wall and to transport the huge motor to a local electrical company where the complete rewinding of the motor could be done on an emergency basis. The entire project was done on a continuing day and night schedule, and as

a matter of fact, the hours involved were never tabulated, nor was a final bill from the construction company ever received, since the workmen had donated their time as a favor to Bill. The enterprise took about one week to complete, and in the interim club member Frank Ritchie, a Ford Motor Company superintendent, surveyed his inventory, located, and had available a duplicate motor in case the repair job was not successful.

The Mixed International Bonspiel had been scheduled for Friday and Saturday of that week. All plans had been completed, entries filled, and fees paid. All the teams were contacted and asked for suggestions. As might be expected from the great confraternity of curlers, the vote was unanimous in favor of a dinner party and dance sans curling.

And so to the annals of the Detroit Curling Club was added the record of the first iceless mixed bonspiel! (the motor was repaired and installed in time to save the ice for the remainder of the season—but not for the bonspiel—so it was not necessary to purchase a new motor.)

In April, 1976 the city of Detroit reaffirmed their offer of \$285,590.00 for the real estate and furnishings. At this time the Board of Directors voted to retain the law firm of Mason & Steinhardt to represent us in condemnation proceedings. This was done on a contingency fee basis and proved to be a very wise move, as will be seen later.

At this stage in this discourse we think it wise to outline the actions taken by the planning committees. Their studies covered at least a three-year span, and each one required much effort on the part of those members involved. The following alternative plans were considered, but not necessarily in the order listed:

1. The possible merger with the Village Athletic Club located in Southfield. This scheme seemed to be viable, but after many meetings and explorations the plan was turned down by Southfield authorities on the basis that zoning restrictions negated construction of a facility large enough for curling.
2. The purchase of the Gordie Howe Ice Arena in St. Clair Shores.
3. The purchase of the U.S.A. Ice Arena in Shelby Twp.
4. Possible merger with the Hunt Club of Grosse Pointe.
5. Possible merger with the Red Run Golf Club, Royal Oak.
6. Possible merger with the Detroit Skating Club located in Bloomfield Hills.
7. The purchase of property and hiring a “design and build” contractor to construct a building housing four sheets of ice with minimal ancillary facilities.
8. Possible relocation on Grosse Ile.

9. Possible merger with the Detroit Golf Club.
10. Possible merger with Western Golf Club.
11. Possible merger with the Recess Club.
12. Possible merger with the Pinebrook Swim Club on Berg Road in Southfield. (they approached us, as they were in financial trouble.)
13. The purchase of Iceland in Troy.
14. Possible use of Beechwood Arena, owned by the city of Southfield, on a lease basis.

As it turned out, none of the above proposals was to be adopted, but we want to emphasize the fact that each scheme had to be thoroughly investigated and that to do this required a tremendous amount of time and energy by the dedicated members who worked so very hard on behalf of the club. One of the stumbling blocks in planning was the fact that the club, because of its non-profit status, found it extremely difficult to borrow money.

The City of Detroit offered a payment, approved by City Council, of \$296,290.00 in November, 1976. This payment was subject to adjustment depending on the final compensation agreed to under condemnation. This was done so that the club could acquire land or make other plans. However, after the payment of the \$296,290.00 the club had to pay rent to the city of Detroit until the premises were vacated.

In February of 1977 the U.S. Junior National Curling Championship competition was held at the Detroit Curling Club. Dick O'Connor was the chairman of this event, and it proved to be outstanding. The winner of the competition was the Donald Barcome team from Grand Forks, N.D.

In order to bolster our case against the city in the condemnation proceedings, two appraisers were hired for the purpose of showing that the city's offer was much too low.

In June of 1977 the sum of \$296,290.00 was received from the city, and in effect the city owned the club property, but was to allow the club use of the premises for at least one year, with the rent to be \$1,481.45 per month starting on June 1, 1977. The condemnation proceedings remained pending to determine if the value of the property exceeded the city's offer.

At this time the club also received \$22,474.35 as a bequest from the estate of the late Percy Power, who had been one of our oldest curlers, a past president of the club and of the Ontario Curling Association, the originator of the "Sunday Sinners" group, and a fine gentleman.

At the July 1977 meeting of the Board of Directors approval was given to pay the appraisers' fees which totaled \$18,912.19. Also, the club's condemnation attorneys indicated that an out-of-court settlement figure of \$622,00.00 would be asked. The Board approved a bottom-line figure of \$575,000.00. If the city's offer were any lower than this, the club would go to court and take its chances on what the court might decide.

In August 1977 a check was received from the city that made the total monies received \$615,000.00, which was promptly invested in certificates of deposit. Also, there was on the market at that time three acres of real estate on Big Beaver near the Rochester Road in Troy. It was agreed by the Board to offer \$33,000.00 per acre for this property. A purchase agreement was later signed for \$108,000.00, and plans were made to hire an architect or engineering firm to prepare a bid package for a new curling club on this property. At one stage one contractor offered to design and build a facility on the Troy property for a figure not to exceed \$600,000.00. Two other contractors were contacted, but indicated that they could not match or better this figure. The Board authorized the first contractor to prepare preliminary site plans.

In 1978 the club received notice that the premises would have to be vacated one year from February 1, 1978. It was later determined that curling would be available through the end of the 1978-79 season; that is, at least to the end of March, 1979. It became apparent that to build a new clubhouse would be impossible from a financial standpoint, and the planning committee redoubled its efforts to find a suitable partner with whom to merge. Since it was not feasible to build on the Troy property, it was decided to attempt to sell the land and invest the money in certificates of deposit.

At a D.C.C. board meeting in July, 1978 it was learned that the Centaur Farms facility in West Bloomfield, which was in receivership, was for sale. This complex, although originally a riding academy, had recently been used as a hockey arena and thus had ice-making capabilities. It also had a dining room with a viewing area, a full kitchen, a bar, and a Class C liquor license. Since time had expired for the construction of a new clubhouse in time for the 1979-80 season, the Centaur Farms move seemed to be the most promising.

At the August 22, 1978 board meeting, Jim Ford was authorized to work out a listing agreement with the Hubbard Realty for the Troy property at a price of \$155,000.00 with 10% commission. After some modifications, the agreement was signed in early October, 1978. No

acceptable offers were received during the listing with Hubbard. Therefore, the property was listed with Ladd Realty and sold on land contract for the asking price in 1979.

At a special meeting on December 14, 1978, the membership voted that the Board of Directors should actively pursue negotiations with Michigan National Bank for the purchase of the Centaur Farms property, without negating any other options.

At a special board meeting on December 20, 1978, two special committees were formed for the express purpose of anticipating a move to Centaur Farms. One was the negotiating committee, chaired by Bill Jamieson, and the second was the relocation committee, chaired by Jack Allingham. These two committees in the weeks to come did a tremendous job, and one cannot say enough in praise of their fine efforts. It was also decided at this same meeting that the D.C.C. could offer up to \$350,000.00 for the Centaur property. This meeting also decided that the negotiations on the merger with the Village Athletic Club were fruitless due to lack of enthusiasm on the part of the Southfield Council members.

In 1979 the Detroit Curling Club's Mike Slyziuk became our second member to be inducted into the Michigan Amateur Sports Hall of Fame.

Due to the fact that Michigan National Bank (receiver for Centaur Farms) had received an offer for the property of close to \$350,000.00 from another party, the Board of Directors approved an offer of \$350,000.00. The club's attorney assured the board that if this were done, there would be no further competition for the property, and the sale would be made to the D.C.C. This proved not to be the case.

At a special meeting of the membership in March 1979 all actions taken by the Board of Directors regarding Centaur Farms were approved by the membership.

With the Centaur Farms almost in possession of the D.C.C. and the time for any other offers within hours of expiring, it was learned that another offer of \$365,000.00 had been made by another bidder and would be accepted if the club did not act. Therefore, the club immediately filed with Stanley Bershad, the receiver in bankruptcy, a cashier's check for \$366,000.00, hoping thereby to assure the purchase of the property by the D.C.C. and to shut out any other bidders.

This was not to be the case, however. A bid was entertained by the bankruptcy judge, Harry C. Hackett, long after the period for bidding had expired. Although the D.C.C. considered this to be highly irregular and possibly illegal, it was again forced to increase its offer in

order to secure the property and assure curling continuity. The new offer was for \$400,000.00, with the proviso that the club would sell the Class C liquor license to the other bidder for \$20,000. The final order from Bankruptcy Court authorizing the sale of Centaur to the Detroit Curling Club was dated June 18, 1979. The final closing papers were signed and all monies distributed on July 2, 1979. The final cost was \$410,000.00, which included the retention of the liquor license and the removal of all liens against the property. All of the time and effort of the board and other members had finally paid off, and curling could continue without interruption. (Judge Hackett resigned in June, 1981, after being given notice that he was unqualified to hold office because of "repeated transgressions" of the Code of Judicial Conduct.)

Move to New Facility

A monumental task faced the club in the summer of 1979, that of getting the facilities ready, after a long period of disuse, for the curling season. Since the club had paid more for the real estate than had been anticipated, the budget for rehabilitation was limited. This necessitated using volunteers from the membership for almost 100 percent of the labor. Committees were appointed for grounds, exterior building work, interior building work, ice arena, locker rooms, and mechanical and electrical work. Throughout the summer these committees and volunteer members worked long and hard, putting in thousands of hours of labor. Most of the members, including women and teenagers, responded to the appeal for help, and by November 26 the club was ready for full operation. The willingness and cooperation of all the club members and the amount of work they accomplished made this task possible.

We had started negotiations with the Michigan Liquor Control Commission and with West Bloomfield regarding the transfer of our club liquor license in the first week of July, 1979. The opening party was scheduled for Saturday, November 3, 1979. There was no way to get the Class C license out of escrow by then. We finally got the club license transferred and drove to Lansing to pick it up on Wednesday, October 31, 1979. Otherwise it would have to been a B.Y.O.B. for the opening party!

In May of 1980 two members appeared before the West Bloomfield Tax Appeal Board in an effort to have the assessment on the former Centaur property lowered. Our appeal was successful, which resulted in a very substantial reduction of the taxes.

For those trivia buffs regarding club memorabilia and heritage, there is a continuity between the Forest Avenue and Drake Road facilities. In addition to the previously mentioned curling mosaic over the bar,

which was moved to the new club, a piece of the wooden serving counter from the Forest Avenue kitchen was fashioned into the sign which now hangs over the divider near the bar. Pat Backoff designed and painted the sign the first season we were in the Drake Road facility.

As the new property had previously been a riding academy and later an ice hockey arena, there were many items pertaining to these sports which were purchased with the property.

Some of these items were sold to help the club financially. Many pairs of ice skates and the Zamboni ice resurfacers were sold for \$7,500.00, and the hockey fixtures for \$8,500.00.

It was found that although the new facility was fully paid for, the operational expenses were prohibitive; therefore, many cost-cutting actions were taken, including energy-efficient rink lighting and the elimination of heating in some high-energy-cost areas. To further save money, the board decided not to re-hire the paid bartender and the ice-man, and many member-volunteers filled those positions with excellent results. So that revenue could be increased, a concerted drive for new members was instituted. Senior family dues for this year (1982) were \$450.00.

In February of 1983 the Detroit Curling Club was host to the U.S.C.A. Senior Men's National Bonspiel, with Frank Ritchie as chairman. Thirty-six teams participated in this three-day event, and the winner was Neil Fitzgerald of Albany, New York. Many members volunteered their services to make this event an unqualified success.

EPILOGUE

So this is the history of curling in the Detroit area and, more specifically, at the Detroit Curling Club. As this is written (1983) curling is being enjoyed at the new clubhouse in West Bloomfield. The Detroit Curling Club is believed to be the oldest athletic club in the Detroit area. We would like to point out that in 1985—only two years hence—the club will celebrate its centennial. One hundred years of continuous existence is a feat that few other clubs can equal. With the enthusiasm and dedication that has been shown by all Detroit curlers it seems that curling will survive in this area for many years to come.

Bill MacLachlan
May, 1983

Credit must be given to John Backoff, Tom Bowling, Bill Jamieson, Joe McGlynn, and Alex Murray for their assistance in keeping this writer straight on facts, dates, and events.

DETROIT CURLING CLUB PAST PRESIDENTS

Began playing game in 1885

Organized in 1887

Incorporated in 1888.

1887-88	J. S. Keen	1923-24	Fred W. Kerr
1888-89	Thomas Williamson	1924-25	Richard M. Watson
1889-90	Thomas Williamson	1925-26	Harry Slater
1890-91	Thomas Williamson	1926-27	John R. Shaw
1891-92	Thomas Williamson	1927-28	John M. Kerr
1892-93	John Williamson Jr	1928-29	John M. McIvor
1893-94	Fred Bamford	1929-30	Nate K. Cornwall
1894-95	Robert Hutton	1930-31	Neil W. Murray
1895-96	J. D. Hawks	1931-32	George M. Lawton
1896-97	A. W. Baxter	1932-33	Alfred T. Lerchen
1897-98	J. A. Bucknell	1933-34	Walter I. Mizner
1898-99	Thomas Davies	1934-35	William T. Fisk
1899-1900	Robert Williamson	1935-36	Ward Peck
1900-01	Fred Bamford	1936-37	Percy J. Power
1901-02	John Kay	1937-38	Edward C. Watson
1902-03	John Stevenson	1938-39	Arch B. McColl
1903-04	B. W. Yates	1939-40	Thomas S. Davies
1904-05	A. B. Atwater	1940-41	Douglas C. Fisk
1905-06	George B. Codd	1941-42	Howard B. Holden
1906-07	Edward Telfer	1942-43	John W. Taylor
1907-08	James Craig, Jr.	1943-44	Allen H. Green
1908-09	F. W. Robbins	1944-45	Herbert Morley
1909-10	Thomas Williamson	1945-46	Robert Pierce
1910-11	B. F. Guiney	1946-47	A. J. Dalton
1911-12	Theo. L. Backus	1947-48	Theodore Sackett
1912-13	W. H. McWhinney	1948-49	Richard Bonninghausen
1913-14	A. D. B Van Zandt	1949-50	Marion J. MacGregor
1914-15	T. J. Bosquett	1950-51	John R. McKinlay
1915-16	Fred C. Burden	1951-52	Coleburke Lyons
1916-17	Alex M. Kerr	1952-53	J. Nelson Brown
1917-18	Divie B. Duffield	1953-54	V. Merritt Knowlson
1918-19	Robert Kerr	1954-55	James R. Hile
1919-20	Robert Shiell	1955-56	Paul I. Moreland
1920-21	Frank Burr Tibbals	1956-57	Rudy Speerscheider
1921-22	Ervin R. Palmer	1957-58	Les W. Wilder
1922-23	Steve Bowling	1958-59	Ronald W. Bainbridge

1959-60 Kenneth R. McLeod
1960-61 Don J. Goodrow
1961-62 Ferris H. Fitch
1962-63 Harold G. Phelps
1963-64 Marvin J. Brokaw, Sr.
1964-65 Ray Danol
1965-66 T. Glen Hayes
1966-67 Bryan Melvin
1967-68 Robert C. Mair
1968-69 Walter M. Hubchik
1969-70 Michael Slyziuk
1970-71 Robert N. Davison
1971-72 Lon J. O'Connor
1972-73 Alex Murray
1973-74 Jerry Polsinelli
1974-75 James F. Simpson
1975-76 Joseph M. McGlynn
1976-77 Charles F. Clark
1977-78 Richard W. O'Connor
1978-79 William MacLachlan, Jr.
1979-80 Ernest Slyziuk
1980-81 Ernest Slyziuk
1981-82 Donald Richard
1982-83 John Backoff

The Detroit Curling Club into the 21st Century

by David Nelsen and Frederick R. Zosel 2011

Preface

We have based this history largely on board meeting minutes and personal recollections. It is unfortunate that we cannot do justice, by name, to the countless members who have served as board members, committee chairs, bonspiel chairs, ice makers, project leaders, donors, unsung volunteers, and more, as well as members who competed and won championships, in and out of the club. Thus, we have named presidents, as proxies, for the contributions of untold time and energy of members over the years to the enjoyment, fellowship and promotion of curling at the Detroit Curling Club.

Even as we acknowledge the contributions of several members who helped with this project, we risk overlooking someone and apologize if we do so. With that, we wish to thank Dave Nelsen for getting the project moving, his manuscript, edits and Sinners history, and transcriptions of the three previous histories. And Fred Zosel for his research, writing and editing, as well as finishing up the design and coordinating posting to the club's website. We thank president Duke Grimshaw for his continuing support; Linda Handyside and Troy Eller for their Rockettes histories; Dave Scgriccia for his archive and helpful comments; and Fred's business associate Julie Nyhus for the design.

Dave Nelsen Fred Zosel
April 2011

INTRODUCTION

The move to Drake Road in 1979 created great excitement, and the years there brought great joy, which members of that era fondly recall. Leagues included men's, women's and mixed, with club championships for each. The club regularly sent teams to USCA Nationals, representing the Great Lakes Curling Association. Sinners sinned and Rockettes rocked. Detroit and Kitchener exchanged. The clubhouse was the scene of many convivial gatherings. Bonspiels and club parties provided the unique combination of competition and camaraderie that only curling offers. The large clubhouse and well equipped kitchen provided greater space, comfort and amenities than available in all but a few curling clubs. The fellowship of curling and passion for the game exemplified by DCC members was strong and deep.

However, those reserves of commitment to game and club would be tested severely in the years ahead. Both the successful exit from Drake Road in 1998 and the building of a new facility in Ferndale in 2002 were fraught with great challenges, and the outcomes were a anything but assured.

Overcoming those obstacles and achieving the position the club now enjoys stand as testament to the perseverance, determination and resourcefulness of DCC members who saw to it that the club would live on to reach its 125th anniversary and fulfill its ongoing commitment to the enjoyment, fellowship and promotion of curling.

Good Times; Hard Times

Drake Road began life as an equestrian club, Centaur Farms, with an indoor riding ring and outdoor jumping course. At some point, entrepreneurs took over the place, installed ice-making equipment and rented hockey ice. This enterprise fell into bankruptcy and the club bought the property from the bank.

The facility offered six sheets of ice, but maintaining the club's sprawling 5.3 acres gradually proved to be financially untenable. The main building had several ventilators that pierced the high ceilings... good for evacuating riding ring vapors but not conducive to good curling ice. The arena was much too large, with virtually no insulation and a leaky roof, porous coolant tubes, an obsolete, inefficient compressor and no effective means to manage humidity. Superfluous ancillary structures, such as a small apartment, three large barns and a large, contiguous concourse that ran the length of the arena, all demanded attention, even though they added nothing to curling. The plastic coolant tubes, laid in sand, often leaked glycol, which would put a sheet or two of ice out of commission until repaired.

Though far from ideal, the club facilities nonetheless enabled curling to continue. The warm room, which had been a night club after the hockey facility closed, was commodious, with a long bar and fully equipped kitchen. Its size, along with its amenities, fostered a thriving rental business for the club, which made significant contributions to the club's treasury. Weddings and other private parties filled the clubhouse when curling did not take precedence.

The move from Forest Ave. had disrupted the membership, with a number of members leaving. These included some Eastsiders overwhelmed by the long drive; however, a greater loss occurred among members from Royal Oak. Most new members, naturally, tended to live in the communities of the far northwest suburbs. However, enough curlers from Forest Ave. maintained their memberships, providing continuity and an income stream. These "old" members, along with enthusiastic new members, rejuvenate the club.

By 1984, though, as Joe Livermore came into office as President, the Club's financial condition had deteriorated significantly. The treasurer's report reflected a bank balance of just \$300 with many unpaid bills in the drawer. The board squeezed the budget, including the unpleasant task of ending a long relationship with Opal Diggs, who ran the kitchen concession on Forest Avenue for years and followed the move to Drake Road. The board believed that taking kitchen services inside would generate greater profits. Opal later received Honorary membership in the club.

Other revenue-generators included renting the adjacent concourse for an automated golf range, renting the barns for storage of vehicles, boats and other items, and putting on fund-raising dinners on Fridays and Saturdays. The board also decreed that all bonspiels would make money, replacing a policy that relied only on profits from bar sales.

The most famous, and profitable, of the Saturday night dinners was the Thomas Family Spaghetti Dinner, which began modestly as a fund raiser for sending junior teams to Nationals.

The club had inherited an easement arrangement that favored the property on the south, a tennis facility called Centaur Racquet Club. The easement allowed the tennis club access from Drake Road, as well as use of a number of parking spots. Although the rent for the easement was a paltry \$193 per month, CRC was chronically tardy with payment, establishing what proved to be a contentious relationship with it and its successors for the 19 years DCC owned the property.

Joe presided over the club's celebration of its centenary in 1985, which included a banquet attended by more than 100 members, nine past presidents, and local and state officials. Special club pins were cast with "Centennial" below the crest.

The Annual Meeting of 1986 brought Dale Hargreaves to the presidency. During his term, the club hosted the first U.S. Senior Men's Bonspiel, in 1987, on just six weeks' notice. Successfully pulling off this inaugural event further affirmed the club's excellent reputation in the curling fraternity.

Meanwhile, the club was dealing with a range of challenges, some typical, some not. The club ended the '87-88 season with about \$22,500 on hand. The money didn't go far, though. Unpaid invoices claimed most of that amount including large utility bills, \$9,179 in property insurance and \$5,000 for liquor liability protection. On the revenue side, though, rentals and private parties were virtually sold out, at \$375 hour, plus \$6 per person to curl. The Thomas Family Spaghetti Dinner raised \$800. Bowing to modernity, the club purchased brushes instead of corn brooms for guest and club use.

Actually, this really was a throw-back. Detroit curlers first learned of "push-brooms," or brushes, in 1923 when a contingent of Scots visited DCC (on Forrest Ave.) during their 1922-23 tour to Canada and the United States. North American curlers preferred the big, heavy "New World" corn-straw brooms. These began to fade away as the sweeper of choice in the mid-'70s. Today's brushes represent the latest in a trend that took hold by the early '80s.

Board meeting minutes reveal that there was a 1964 Ford Falcon in excellent condition in one of the barns, ostensibly earning rent, but the owner was unknown. Then, there was a reference to a committee meeting that ended with 28 empty beer bottles mysteriously appearing on the bar, but only \$5 in the till. Perhaps this reflected a desire to sooth dismay in dealing with painful issues.

West Bloomfield Township health inspectors gave the club an 83% rating, requiring prompt attention to the kitchen exhaust fans. Fire suppression throughout the building also drew the interest of Township authorities. The roof continued to leak, the sand base in the arena was deteriorating, and concerns arose about maintaining the 30 year-old HVAC system.

It was around this time that discussions about the club's future on Drake Road began to intensify.

The following season (1988-89), with Dave Nelsen as president, was largely taken up with the club's hosting the 1989 Men's and Women's National Championships, the first such joint championship by the United States Curling Association. The club put on a first class event. President Nelsen opened the competition by throwing a ceremonial first rock, with long-term members Alex Murray and Will Oliver sweeping it right onto the four-foot ring. With this as harbinger, the event proved to be a great success. By unflagging effort by DCC members, the event netted about \$18,000.

The 1989 Annual Meeting included discussion of allowing women to become Class A members and reports on kitchen profit (\$8,000), membership (180 active curlers, including 66 Rockettes), and Guest Nights/Attendance (16/663).

Ominously, the club learned that the state had increased the assessed value of the property by \$90,000.

Running on Empty

As fiscal storm clouds darkened, the 1989-90 Board of Directors was facing an increasingly dire future. It estimated that an investment of \$136,000 would fix up the old rookery, funding for which could come from a mortgage, credit line, or some other source. The Board raised Senior Family dues to \$590, Senior to \$525, Junior Family to \$390 and Social to \$150.

Amid mounting concerns about the club's solvency and viability, the Board continued to address the club's strategic future. On the positive side, the tennis club next door wanted to expand and requested funds to beautify the parking lot. (However, they complained about pot holes in the lot.) An entrepreneur wanted to put up a building on the property for a child care center.

The Board established a Property Sale Action Task Force to explore options for sale of the club's property. The Task Force determined that it would be possible to subdivide two parcels for sale. At Special Meeting in August, members authorized the Board to offer the bits for sale.

As the new year turned, the arena got two new heaters, courtesy of an anonymous benefactor. However, condensation drips continued to plague the ice, resulting in poor playing conditions. An \$8,000 roof leak repair was underway. Sinners marked their 40th anniversary while lamenting waning interest and attendance. Friday night parties contributed \$7,300 and the Trustee account was earning 7.5 percent interest. Alas, the club ended the year with a \$20,000 operating loss.

In August, 1990, new President Jim Oliver presided over a Special Meeting where members ratified Bylaw changes that included a new definition of Class A membership eligibility. Twenty women promptly became Class A members.

As the 1990-91 season opened, with difficulties continuing to arise, Jim and the new Board pushed to maintain good curling, while keeping the wolf from the door. The newly repaired roof resumed leaking and the air conditioner broke down, again. Members learned that the Windsor Curling Club, a club companion for nearly 40 years, would close. It could not meet its tax obligations, an omen that did not escape notice.

On the brighter side, the club was fully booked for private parties. The 1964 Ford Falcon in the barn, whose ownership somehow was resolved, sold for \$400. The Board of Directors Open Curling Night raised \$2,619 and the Thomas Family Dinner contributed \$2,500. A new rule allowed smoking in the arena, but not on the ice. The Board established a new award in honor of Will J. Oliver, to recognize contributions of members who represent the “spirit of the Detroit Curling Club.”

By the end of that season, the club’s operating deficit jumped to nearly \$35,000, the largest contributor being unpaid property taxes. A \$100 assessment to Life, Honorary, Class A and B members raised \$14,600, enough to cover ordinary payables, except property taxes of \$21,000. The Board looked at a range of revenue-raising and cost-saving measures including selling parts or all of the property, renting the barns, charging for pay-to-play, making greater use of volunteers, and shortening the season.

Class A dues were \$350 and total dues amounted to \$48,000. Facility rentals and the kitchen raised \$45,000. On the expense side, utilities, alone, were \$53,000 and property taxes were \$21,600.

The 1991-92 season kicked off with another Community Education program, which had its beginnings about a decade earlier. The first clinic was in March, 1983. This initiative quickly became a mainstay of new member recruitment and continues to this day.

The 50 year-old curling rocks were turned for the fourth time.

One Step Ahead of the Sheriff

By December 1991, things were getting grim, with township officials threatening to shut the club if deficient taxes were not paid. The club managed to buy time with a payment of \$5,000. Meanwhile, next-door neighbor ITC (owners of the tennis club), having converted its tennis facility into something called Whirlyball, constructed an additional entrance to its facility on DCC property, in violation of the easement agreement. The compressor failed (again), the Ice King got two new tires and 24 new members joined the club.

Around this time, an announcement came that curling would be a demonstration medal sport at the 1994 Nagano Olympics. The club benefitted from favorable associated publicity, a marketing boost that has repeated quadrennially.

At the Annual Meeting in April, 1992, new President Lon Lowen assumed leadership of the Board. Members approved revised Bylaws that streamlined membership classifications. The season ended with 215 members, who learned of a 10 percent dues increase to \$385 for Class A. The Board also presented a proposal to sell a parcel for \$250,000 to

ITC. During the season, the roof and the glycol tubes leaked, and the kitchen required a new hood and fire suppressant equipment.

Sometime during the summer of 1992, ITC again reinvented itself, this time into a roller blading dome. The following October ITC signed a lease for 160 parking spots in the club's lot, generating additional revenue.

In January 1993, with the club's deteriorating financial condition in mind, the Board called a General Membership meeting to consider the club's purpose and mission, along with suggestions for increasing revenue and improving the member experience.

By the end of the season, members' equity had shrunk to \$243,000, a reduction of \$28,000 since the previous season, and the property tax liability had grown to \$60,000. Members pledged \$19,195 in bonds to pay 1990 property tax, including penalty and interest.

In June, 1993, President Lowen resigned because of conflict of interest regarding from his duties as Fire Chief for West Bloomfield Township and the continuing issues of the club in meeting Township requirements for occupancy, including fire, electrical and other regulations. Vice president Fred Zosel succeeded Lon. In the meantime, while the IRS audited the club's financial records, efforts intensified to find solutions to relieve the club's parlous financial state. Ideas included refinancing the club's debt, selling the liquor license, converting the club house to a sports bar, investigating opportunities in Farmington Hills and Southfield and taking advantage of offers of help from West Bloomfield Township.

In June 1993, with very limited prospects and perhaps grasping at straws, members approved a proposal to lease the entire clubhouse to a restaurateur. He failed. By the following January, he was out and members reclaimed their clubhouse. During the several months in this limbo, curling continued. However, with no club room, members had to hang out in the ladies locker room in the lower level, with no view of the ice.

One outcome of this dispiriting episode was redoubled effort to sell the property. Meanwhile, amid growing angst and turmoil, day-to-day necessities were suffering neglect. Other issues, annoying enough as they would be under normal circumstances, continued to aggravate. The board discovered that the roller blade facility next door was somehow tapping our electricity to illuminate its sign. Property tax arrears grew to \$75,000.

Another Special Membership meeting was held in February 1994 to inform members of the club's status and ongoing efforts of the board and numerous committees. The club sued ITC/Roller Blades to bring its rent and reimbursements up to date and managed to collect \$8,800. The

board began to meet weekly to assess interest in the property and explore alternate sites for the club, which ranged from an amateur soccer club and the Detroit Skating Club, to municipalities including Waterford, Troy, Southfield, Canton, Plymouth and West Bloomfield, among others.

The most promising of these led to a Letter of Intent to pursue due diligence for a possible sale of the property. The other party was a well established ice arena complex in Detroit, which offered to purchase the property for \$1,100,000 and build two new hockey arenas and a four-sheet curling facility.

At the 1994 Annual Meeting members learned that the club's total debt exceeded \$104,000.

Events during the following season, 1994-95, the deal with the ice arena enterprise fell through because the prospective buyer decided that moving forward was economically unfeasible. Members' effort, time and hopes came to naught as promising expectations dissolved.

However, through persistent effort of the relocation committee and others, another potential purchaser came forward to sign a new purchase agreement. Hopes soared anew, albeit this time more circumspectly. The club received a \$30,000 deposit, with July 14, 1995 as the closing date.

Alas, this also came to nothing.

Great anxiety continued through the next season, 1995-96. In January 1996, a Special Membership Meeting considered a Letter of Intent from yet another buyer, but this next vanished, as well. By now, it would seem, members were becoming inured to the emotional roller coaster driven by nervous would-be purchasers.

By April 1996, still another prospective buyer came forward and Class A members again approved a purchase agreement. Efforts intensified to find a place to curl for the season, should the offer come to fruition.

At the Annual Meeting, Linda Handyside became the club's first woman president. Other items of business included announcement that Ernie Slyziuk was inducted into the USCA Hall of Fame, joining fellow members Nels Brown and Mike Slyziuk. This trio, along with Merritt Knowlson, won the U.S. Men's Curling Championship in 1959, and in 1963, with Walter Hubchik, won the title a second time.

The club paid its 1992 property taxes, with interest and penalty, but remained \$9,000 short of cash to meet current obligations. A hat-passing among members raised only about half of what the club needed, but it managed to borrow \$5,000 at 12% interest to cover part of the shortfall. The club ended the season with 131 active curlers.

Shortly thereafter, good news arrived in the form of a two-thirds reduction in taxable value. Once again, however, this bright spot dimmed with the announcement that the latest purchaser declined to complete his offer, citing expensive repairs, stringent codes and uncertain life

expectancy of the ice plant. At least, the issue of where to curl during the next season was resolved. The club would remain in place, at least one more season. Time was growing short.

As the new 1996-97 season approached, still more challenges emerged. Tax liability was growing at \$700 per month, fire code violations threatened a November 1 opening, and the danger of someone picking up the property for back taxes was all too real. Class A dues rose to \$450. And, as if the tenuous financial condition of the club facility were not enough to shake the foundations of the club itself, the Board endorsed women's participation in the annual Toast to the Club!

The club managed to open on time. The fire inspector was happy, but not the electrical inspector. The search for a buyer continued. Around this time, fear became reality when the club learned that someone had paid the 1993 tax liability of \$28,300, putting the club in jeopardy of losing the entire property. The club had to find a way to cover that payment, plus about \$4,300 in penalty and interest by May, 1997 to prevent a calamity.

The club booked about 600 people for rental parties; 175 people attended the Thomas Family spaghetti dinner; unpaid taxes reached \$91,000 and member debt was up to \$77,000. The club closed early in 1997 to save money.

The depth of despair members felt by now was reflected at the April, 1997 Annual Meeting in a call for a moment of silence for the club and its continuation. Such introspection seemed well founded. The club was \$18,000 short of cash to redeem the property tax sale, due in May. Fortunately, the club again found a way – a benefactor – to obtain the money and pay the tax bill.

Club membership increased to 183 and President Handyside became an esteemed member of the Sinners.

The Darkest Hour Is Just Before Dawn

The summer of 1997 could hardly have been more gloomy. Total liabilities were up to \$165,000 and the club would be out of money by July, with fast diminishing hope for rescue. Members were tapped out and a series of limited, short-term loans was tenuous.

August brought yet another promise of redemption with a purchase agreement for \$800,000. This time, though, discussion centered not on mere acceptance, but rather would the net proceeds be sufficient to ensure continuation of the Detroit Curling Club. While selling was surely a risk, remaining in place was abjectly untenable.

With the closing set for mid-October, the club scrambled to prepare for the imminent season without a building. Rentals, parties, dues, storage of the club's private property, GLCA, where to curl – all were up

in the air. In early October, members began packing up club trophies, artifacts and other treasures.

The closing was delayed until late November, even as DCC curlers began their season at Roseland Curling Club in Windsor, at a cost of \$5,500 for ice time on Sunday nights and Tuesday afternoons. Reflecting the loss of a facility, Interim Class A dues dropped to \$95, and the club paid USCA dues for 129 members.

As November merged into December, the Board became alarmed at a lack of communication from the purchasers, as well as their realtors and attorney. Was this another cruel reprise?

Happily, a \$47,000 check arrived December 11 from the realtor's escrow account, bringing a great sigh of relief and a genuine sense of confidence in the outcome. A week later another \$8,000 check landed. The closing again was pushed back, this time to late January. However, the escrow checks continued, providing further assurance of the ultimate result. Using the money so far received, the club paid delinquent taxes for 1994 and 1995, substantially reducing that liability.

With growing confidence in a favorable conclusion of a long, difficult travail, the club held its 1998 Toast to the Club at the Livermore home. In a testament to the spirit of curling and value of long-term relationships, the Men's International Bonsel took place at Beachgrove Golf & Curling Club across the river in St. Clair Beach, Ontario. With something of a DCC diaspora underway, the club took pains to keep everyone in touch through email and a new website, using those burgeoning technologies for the first time.

As escrow checks continued to flow into DCC coffers and in the absence of need, the club ceased paying insurance, sales tax, liquor tax and other operational necessities. The liquor license was put into escrow and most of the remaining delinquent property taxes were paid.

Finally, on March 12, 1998, the club completed its sale of the West Bloomfield Township property on Drake Road for \$800,000. From that sum, the club netted \$644,328, after paying commissions, fees, property taxes, short-term loans, and other miscellaneous expenses.

Finding Ferndale

Now that the Drake Road property had been disposed, a movement, rooted in years of discouragement, arose. Enumerating considerable difficulties in finding and fulfilling a new site, some Class A members doubted the club's ongoing viability and proposed dissolving the club and distributing the cash and other assets. This episode mirrored another one in 1930, as John Taylor describes it in his history, when a "vocal group" voiced its preference for dissolution. Like

then, more visionary and determined members prevailed and the club renewed the search for its next home.

With research and counsel of the USCA, the Board reviewed facility designs and proposed a budget of \$1.2 million to construct a new building, not including land. The research turned up several clubs in Minnesota and Wisconsin that had entered into lease agreements with municipalities. The agreement between the Superior (Wisconsin) Curling Club and the City of Superior, which the club obtained for review, demonstrated that shifts in political winds need not ruin a legitimate, legal deal. This knowledge would prove highly valuable.

Voting at the 1998 Annual Meeting made Joe Livermore president for the second time, 12 years since he last held the office.

During the next three seasons (1998-2001), the number of active curlers dwindled and only a handful were curling at Roseland. The Men's International was held at Tilbury Curling Club (1999, 2000) and Roseland (2001). The annual Kitchener Exchange, or at least one-half of it, continued, also, with Detroiters trekking in early spring to Ontario.

President Dave Nelsen assumed leadership at the 2000 Annual Meeting, the fourth president to return to office after a hiatus. Dave last served in 1990.

Meanwhile, the search for a suitable site continued. A promising lead turned up in Ferndale, which offered the great benefit of a central location within the Metro Detroit area. Using the Superior club's lease as a model, a DCC delegation met with city officials. What was to be a 30-minute meeting turned into a 90-minute discussion of great possibilities. It looked like the break the club needed.

Although negotiations dragged on for nearly two frustrating years, they successfully ended with an agreement to cooperate in the building of a facility in the southwest corner of the city's Martin Road Park. In exchange for tax-free use of a parcel of the park's land for six months per year and payment of \$1 per year rent, the club agreed to erect a building that the city would use during the other six months of the year. The term would be 99 years.

The Ferndale City Council endorsed the arrangement by a 4-1 vote. The Council also had to vote to allow an exemption to a city ordinance against alcoholic beverages on city property. With the Council deadlocked at 2-2, the mayor cast his decisive vote in the club's favor. Through a brilliant stratagem, club members previously had taken the mayor to Roseland to show him curling. Naturally, this included introducing the mayor to the enduring tradition of fellowship that follows every match.

With this crucial milestone behind it, the board tackled the design, construction and financing a new curling facility that would

be the sixth home of the Detroit Curling Club. The club held about \$700,000 in cash, including the Alex Murray Fund, seeded by a \$12,000 donation from Alex's estate following his death a few years earlier. (Alex was a member for 62 years and served as president in 1972-73. He became a member the club in 1932 when his father, Neil Murray, another former president (1930-31), insisted he join because the club needed the money. Dues were \$25.)

Construction began with a groundbreaking in May, 2001. As part of efforts to minimize construction costs, the club happened upon an unusual opportunity. Through a chance encounter and the intercession of a member who was a retired Marine colonel, the club was able to enlist a construction battalion of U.S. Marine Reservists stationed at Selfridge Air National Guard Base. The Marines agreed to pour footings and erect the steel superstructure as a training mission at no cost to the club, a savings of about \$80,000.

As steel went up, and the building quickly took shape, it became clear that the project was careening over budget. With modifications demanded by the city, such as increasing the ceiling height from 12 to 24 feet to accommodate indoor sports, inevitable construction vagaries and other changes, the club did not have enough funds to complete the facility. The club somehow would have to secure significant additional funding, and fast.

Bank loans are difficult for clubs to get, but DCC managed to buck the odds. The club obtained a loan for \$315,000, with Joe Livermore pledging a chunk of property as collateral.

In addition, President Nelsen led a member bond drive. Despite a roster that had fallen to fewer than 100, he raised \$77,000 in bonds from members, which included substantial contributions of his personal funds. A key element of this strategy was obtaining a new federal tax status as a 501(c)3 entity, which allowed donations to be tax exempt.

The loan, member bonds and a promissory note to the building contractor were enough to get construction back on track. The Board estimated that it would take 10-15 years to pay off the approximately \$425,000 in debt the club had taken on.

Moving into a New Home

As construction moved into its final stages, the Board dealt with issues such as certificate of occupancy, liquor license, relations with Ferndale city officials, as well as preparing for the start of curling early in 2002. The opening party and ribbon cutting were set for December and Community Education classes were to begin as soon as ice was ready. So ambitious and confident was the Board that it agreed to host the Great Lakes Curling Association mixed playdowns in February.

The club held two Open Houses in January, 2002, for city officials, VIPs, the Marines, and the general public. These events showcased a state-of-the-art facility, with highly efficient refrigeration equipment, excellent viewing, cozy bar, kitchen, locker rooms and ample parking. Old photos, trophies and other mementos were being refurbished and slowly finding suitable locations in the new club house and arena.

Community Ed, Open Houses, publicity and, most important of all, TV coverage of the 2002 Winter Olympics, contributed to swelling membership to 240 by the season's end.

Despite a healthy cash position, though, the club ended the fiscal year with a \$14,000 operating loss. The deficit, however, would turn out to be the last such outcome for the club. As the club came into its own in a new facility, membership grew and curling, once again, flourished in Detroit.

The 2002 Annual Meeting led to election of Fred Zosel as president, who returned to office after a gap of six years. Owing to a balance sheet lopsided with the bank loan, member bonds and promissory note, but with a an encouraging income statement, this board aggressively focused on paying down the debt. It is a great credit to this and subsequent boards that by 2011, just nine years on, the club has repaid the bank loan, the promissory note and member bonds in full, virtually erasing the club's debt.

Amid these happy developments, one of the crucial challenges facing the club in those early days in Ferndale was assimilating a large influx of new members, nearly all of whom were new to curling and who substantially outnumbered longer-term members. The game itself they could learn. But with so relatively few established members to pass along the traditions, norms and culture of the game, it would take time for newer members to discover, and embrace, the game's greater, transcendent virtues. Before long, though, the spirit of curling – both on and off the ice – was manifest throughout the club.

Another related challenge stemmed from the depleted ranks of experienced curlers. There simply were not enough senior curlers to fill skip and vice skip ranks, leading to numerous rinks fully filled with novice curlers. Again, over time, this shortcoming resolved itself as new curlers became veterans.

In early 2004, Fred Zosel resigned because of an international relocation, and vice president Mike Grudzinski became president. During his three years in office, the assimilation of new curlers accelerated, new leagues evolved and social events returned to the calendar, much to the delight of all. And, all the while, the board maintained its commitment to paying off the debt.

Leroy Blevin was elected president following the 2007 Annual

Meeting. Debt reduction continued as dues revenue grew with new members arriving and former Class B Intro members moving to Class A status.

In 2009 Duke Grimshaw assumed the presidency. During that season, the club dedicated the “Joe Livermore Arena” in recognition of Joe’s essential contributions to the continuance of the Detroit Curling Club. Joe is the latest among a small group of members over 125 years who altered the club’s fate through generous financial support. Without this high level of devotion, the club would not exist today.

Prior to the start of the 2009-10 season, at a Special Meeting, members endorsed a new league on Sunday afternoons, which encouraged participation by gay, lesbian bi- and transsexual curlers. In 2010, members approved an expenditure of about \$30,000 for new rocks, retiring the venerable set of 50 matched pairs of Ailsa Craigs purchased in the early 1940s.

Into the 21st Century

As the club celebrates its quasiquintennial in 2010, the overall condition and prospects for the club have never been better. The club sits in a prime location, near the beginning of a 99-year lease. Debt is gone. Membership is strong and diverse. Leagues and competitions are thriving. New stones promise better curling experiences for new and veteran curlers, alike. Olympic medal status for curling provides an excellent marketing tool. The club facilities are modern and comfortable.

The club has persevered always, and often flourished, throughout the period of America’s global ascendancy, and, sadly, the rise and decline of Detroit itself. As the club histories show, during many of these 125 years, the club struggled for viability, more than once arriving at the brink of dissolution. The narrow escape from Drake Road and the rescue of the Ferndale facility from insolvency are reminders of the fragile nature of most organizations. The histories also note the existential contributions of a few wealthy members over the years. The club is fortunate for that, but its future financial security cannot depend on moneyed patrons. The continuing vitality of the Detroit Curling Club will require energy, leadership and prudence regarding both near- and long-term challenges. Reaching a milestone as rare as 125 years is a great achievement, of which members are duly proud. Our members’ passion for the game and their commitment to preserving and passing on the club’s heritage and traditions have brought the club to an unprecedented apex.

Looking to the future, the Detroit Curling Club seeks to maintain its status as the premier curling club in the region, while

enhancing members' experiences on and off the ice. The club's fundamental strengths, including financial security, will enable members to promote the club as a leading attraction in the Detroit Metro community, foster membership continuity and growth, preserve its history, and enrich its future.



Detroit Sinners

The Detroit Sinners meet Sunday mornings throughout the season. Our best information tells us Sinners was formed in 1951. In the mid-1930s when the Club was not used on Sunday mornings, a half dozen members led by Percy Power, acquired a key to the building and, armed with ham & eggs and other breakfast fixin's, made their own Sunday morning breakfast and then curled a game. As the weeks went by more and more members heard about the conclave and questioned if this was a private group or open to all the Club's members. Percy, being an innovative type, permitted the others to attend, but by his rules. To become a Sinner, one must attend three consecutive meetings and bring a "jug." The donated jugs are raffled off to help raise funds. Guests were encouraged, but it was discovered that the number of hogged rocks increased. So a life-sized replica of a Berkshire Hog was built with a bank on top and bell nearby. If a curler had a lapse in skill and hogged a rock, he must approach the hog, ring the bell, deposit two bits and vow never to hog a rock again. By November, 1953 Sunday morning gatherings were firmly established in the Detroit Curling Club's calendar.

Will Oliver brought his young son Jim to Sinners in 1963 and he heard Percy Power's sermons. He was a lawyer and had great eloquence, but his Bible quotes were fantastic including the immortal, "He who hath been wounded in the stones or had his privy member cut off – shall not enter into the kingdom of the Lord." Pete Sweeney prepared libations and took the leftovers home. As the curlers imbibed, a musical quartet entertained the curlers – Lon O'Connor on the violin, Harry Roark on the guitar, Charlie Guilin on the Concertina and Mike McDonald on the gut-bucket.

Local police would often join us for breakfast (but no alcoholic beverages as they were on duty) since it was the only spot in the area serving breakfast. Their presence ensured good protection for our folks during stressful times.

The highest “honor” is appointment to the kitchen crew. Each member is a specialist. This elite group fixes a breakfast fit for a healthy appetite. Scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, potatoes, mushrooms, toast and coffee, an unchanging menu for years. No one goes away hungry. The Sinners provide a sermon, penalties for the wicked, rewards for the pure in heart and a choir to sing the Sinners hymn: “Softly and Tenderly.”

At the conclusion of the services, the men disperse – some to curl, some to cards and some to chat and view the games. The Sinners are a great display of pure friendship that our game encourages. The proceeds from the breakfast and the raffles sustain the organization and monies are used for club improvements.

A highlight of the Sinners’ year is the annual Detroit—Kitchener Waterloo curling exchange, which started in 1917. Each November the KW curlers come to Detroit and Detroiters visit Kitchener the following March. In the early days this was a two week trip by way of horse, train and boat. Today, it is an easy weekend trip. The winner of the curling competition is the club that accumulates the greatest number of points in the four games played – two in Detroit and two in KW.

History of the Detroit Rockettes

While the Detroit Curling Club is 125 years old, the history of women curling at the DCC is notably shorter. From the time of the Detroit Curling Club’s founding in 1885 to 1943, women were not allowed on the ice. They attended social functions as early as 1890, however they were not allowed in the taproom, or main bar, when the club was located in Downtown Detroit. Instead, women gathered in the Club’s “basement” on Thursday nights, chatting and playing cards while their husbands curled. Drinks from the taproom were sent down to the ladies via a dumbwaiter, a practice which continued until the late 1960s or early 1970s.

On December 6, 1941 Ruth Brown approached the DCC Board of Directors to institute a ladies curling night. The earliest record of women curling at the DCC is February 10, 1943. Board meeting minutes from April of that year mention a ladies’ curling committee. It consisted of four men.

In 1952 Ruth Brown, Eleanore Fisk, Gladis Hile and Grace Wilder founded an organization called the Detroit Rockettes, with the stated mission to promote good fellowship through curling. Since its early days, the Rockettes have provided a social network for the DCC’s female curlers, organized women’s bonspiels and have raised funds to

support Detroit Curling Club events, building repairs and improvements, and other Club needs. The Rockettes also worked to represent the interests of women curlers in the DCC, who were not considered full voting members until 1991.

One of the Detroit Rockettes early achievements was to host the 1957 Ladies National Bonspiel. That same year, the Rockettes began an annual bonspiel which attracted American and Canadian teams from throughout the region. Ultimately becoming a 2-day event, the Rockettes hosted the event until 1997. The following year, in 1958, women joined men on the DCC ice for a Mixed International Bonspiel.

In 1985 the Rockettes began an annual Ladies One Day bonspiel, an event which draws American and Canadian teams from throughout the region to this day. In the 1980s and early 1990s the Rockettes took turns hosting the Friendly Bonspiel with the ladies of Bowling Green Curling Club and the Kitchener Exchange with the women from Kitchener, Ontario.

In 1988 the Detroit Rockettes amended its bylaws to allow the Rockettes Board of Directors to appoint a representative to serve on the Detroit Curling Club Board of Directors. This gave women more franchise in the Club than they had previously, although the Rockettes representative did not have full voting privileges on the DCC Board until Nina Sgriccia served in that position during the 1990-1991 season, when women were admitted as full members of the Club. Women achieved another first in the Club in 1997 when active Rockettes member Linda Handyside was elected President of the Club.

The Rockettes remain active, hosting the Ladies One Day Bonspiel, social activities year-round, and holding fundraisers to support the club in such varied ways as purchasing new furniture, hosting Scottish women in the decennial Scot Tour, and supporting club members traveling to national competitions.

-Troy Eller

The Detroit Rockettes were one of the first Curling Clubs to join the United States Women's Curling Association in 1954. The Rockettes have represented the Detroit Curling Club in National Event through the United States Curling association and the United States Women's Curling Association and the OCA

Some of the events that we have participated in are the USWCA National Bonspiel, the Five Year and Under, Senior National

Bonspiel, USCA Women's Senior World Championships and the Women's Olympic Playdowns .

During the early years of the club and through the 1970 the ladies of the club Curled on Thursdays and curled mixed on Friday nights.

The Rockettes would travel to several of the clubs in the Windsor area and they would have one and two day Bonspiels. The clubs they would play at were Windsor CC, Kingsville CC, Leamington CC, Wallaceburg CC, Sarnia CC, and Chatham CC .

The Rockettes always had a Rating Committee. This Committee of four members would evaluate all of the lady curlers during the season. They would have a meeting and then post their findings and the lady curlers would know what position they would play during leagues for the next season. If you were invited to go out of town to a Bonspiel the skip would decide what position you would play for that event.

The Rockettes have always had Fund Raisers for the club one of our largest ones was the sale of the Rockettes Cookbook. We ordered 500 cookbooks that were the recopies of the Rockettes and the art work was done by one of our members.

With the money raised by fund raisers were always able to give money to the club at the end of the year for the Curling Club Board to use as needed for Club improvements.

For several years we had a group of Red Wing wives who curled with us in West Bloomfield. They were a spirited group and were fun to have on the league. However, there husbands would be traded and they would have to move.

Now that we are in our new facility in Ferndale we have continued to increase the number of active Rockettes. We are very pleased to have 75 active Rockettes during the 2010-2011 curling season.

-Linda Handyside

PRESIDENTS SINCE 1983

1983 – 84	John Backoff
1984 – 85	Joe Livermore
1985 – 86	Joe Livermore
1986 – 87	Dale Hargreaves
1987 – 88	Dale Hargreaves
1988 – 89	Dave Nelsen
1989 – 90	Dave Nelsen
1990 – 91	Jim Oliver
1991 – 92	Jim Oliver
1992 – 93	Lon Lowen
1993 – 94	Fred Zosel
1994 – 95	Fred Zosel
1995 – 96	Fred Zosel
1996 – 97	Linda Handyside
1997 – 98	Linda Handyside
1998 – 99	Joe Livermore
1999 – 2000	Joe Livermore
2000 – 01	Dave Nelsen
2001 – 02	Dave Nelsen
2002 – 03	Fred Zosel
2003 – 04	Fred Zosel
2004 – 05	Mike Grudzinski
2005 – 06	Mike Grudzinski
2006 – 07	Mike Grudzinski
2007 – 08	Leroy Bliven
2008 – 09	Leroy Bliven
2009 – 10	Duke Grimshaw
2010 – 11	Duke Grimshaw



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