

A History of the O'Grady Challenge Trophy

In 1908 Colonel J.W. deCourey O'Grady, who was President of the Manitoba Curling Association, presented a trophy to encourage good will and promote curling matches between affiliated clubs in the Association, which at that time included clubs from North Western Ontario and parts of Saskatchewan. The official name is the O'Grady but is also affectionately known and called "The Old Buffalo", the latter being taken from a figure of a bison standing in a defiant attitude on the trophy. This large beautiful trophy, which is still in competition today, can be seen at the Curling Hall of Fame in the Hudson Bay Company Department Store in downtown Winnipeg. Colonel O'Grady also served as President in 1911.

The first Trustees appointed were Messrs R.D. Waugh and Isaac Pitblado along with Col. O'Grady. Upon the death of Col. O'Grady on Nov. 2, 1914, Mr. Magnus Peterson, who had been induced to act as Secretary for the O'Grady, was appointed a Trustee and the secretarial work was taken over by the Secretary of the M.C.A. There has been a number of Trustees since the early days whose names have not been recorded. The most recent from the 1950's were Bill Lumsden and Bob O'Dowda of Elmwood, Ross Wright of Grain Exchange, Tom Bell of Valour Road, Eric Mitchell of Rossmere, Lou Henry of Charleswood, Paul Pelletier of Fort Rouge, and presently Ron Lloyd of Fort Garry, Jim Sproule of Thistle, and Don Stewart of Manitou. The secretarial work is looked after by the M.C.A. Office.

The Trophy was put into play in the Annual M.C.A. Bonspiel of 1908. Any club affiliated with the Association was eligible to enter a double rink (two teams) in the competition, the winner to be declared by the highest total number of points accumulated in a round robin competition. Two Granite teams skipped by W.P. McDougall and Dr. A.B. Alexander were the winners, defeating double teams from Glenboro, Birtle, Napinka, Dauphin and Regina, Saskatchewan Clubs.

Rules provided that the club in possession of the Trophy was called upon to defend it once a week during the season until it was won by a challenger. All challenges had to be made to the Trustees.

The first challenge match was played on March 2, 1908 between the Granite Club in Winnipeg and the Kenora Ontario Curling Club. The Granite Curling Club was successful in its first defence.

Record books were provided in duplicate, one to travel with the trophy and one to be kept by the Trustees. In the books is recorded the date and Place of games, personnel of the four competing teams in each game, scores in detail, temperature, weather conditions, condition of ice, and "remarks". Under remarks are many interesting curling stories of driving miles through blizzards with teams and sleighs. Of latter years a drive of a hundred to two hundred kilometres by Trophy holders is a common occurrence.

The most distant challenge has come from Thompson, Manitoba in 1990.

Interesting comments in GAME #193 – Sperling curlers arrived in Oakville by train at 11:20 p.m. Games were curled soon after they arrived in the early hours of the morning so a sociable hour or two could be enjoyed with the visitors before they caught the train for home at 6:25 a.m. GAME #194 – Same arrival and departure time (by Treherne) but included the comment “a large gallery watched the games which were closely contested and did not seem to mind the lateness of the hour”. GAME #195 - The Fort Garry Club arrived by train at Fortier, Manitoba and were met by a horse drawn uncovered wagon and conveyed in state to Oakville arriving at 5:30 p.m. after a thrilling drive! But all accounts of matches seem to have the same ending! The visiting club was fed and entertained after the games and an enjoyable time was had by all.

The record book contains stories of many great battles, one of the most famous being a seventeen end match between Thistle and Civic Curling Clubs in GAME #6. The score was tied after the regulation 14 ends. In the fifteenth and sixteenth ends each club scored one point. In the seventeenth end Civic scored three but the Thistle club scored four to win the match and retain the Trophy. It is not recorded how long it took to play the match. In GAME #46 on January 17th, 1914 at Thistle, the match ended in a tie at 12:00 Midnight. As the saying used to be “They rolled up the sidewalks at midnight”. Everything closed down, except bootleggers which were unlawful at any time. However, on the following Saturday, Elmwood returned to Thistle to complete the match and break the tie. Thistle won the game by a score of one to nothing – they played one end only.

It is also interesting to note the remarks of GAME #1010 played on January 16th, 1920. It appears that in those early days O’Grady records were only obtained by the M.C.A. or Trustees from what was reported in the newspapers. The remark in the O’Grady record book read “Match won by Heather Club. Unable to obtain detailed reports as Newspapers were not printed on January 17th due to shortage of Newsprint”.

Some lesser known clubs that competed in the early years were Union Terminal, St. Johns C.P.R, Civic and Caledonian.

Up to GAME #375 on March 8th, 1946 all matches were 14 ends duration. On December 11, 1946 in GAME #376 the matches were reduced to 12 ends and on March 13th, 1965 in GAME #550 all matches were reduced to 10 ends.

Another major change took place on December 9th, 1967 in GAME #570 when the Challenger rather than the Holder became the Host Club for all games. This was a very beneficial and economical change as it meant that any club would only host once during a season.

From the beginning until the 1950’s there were only 9 or 10 matches scheduled because of natural ice. From the 1950’s to 1960’s there were approximately 12 or 13 games; from the 1960’s to 1970’s Approximately 17 or 18 games and beginning in 1974 there were up to 20 or 21 matches as we have it today.

As the 1998 season was approaching, the Trustees felt that they should consider recognizing ninety years of continuous matches of this great competition. So, on March 1st, 1998 – 90 years less one day, a 90th Anniversary of the O’Grady Challenge Trophy was celebrated.

After a number of planning meetings, the date of March 1st, 1998 was set in conjunction with a match scheduled between Fort Rouge – the challenger and Morden – the present holder of the Trophy.

This event took place at the Fort Rouge Curling Club. Invitations were sent out to all clubs in the M.C.A. that had participated in this competition over the 90 years, as well as dignitaries from the province of Manitoba, The City of Winnipeg, The curling Foundation, The President of the Curling Hall of Fame and members of the Manitoba Curling Association Executive. Replies were received back indicating that approximately 60-70 people would be attending. Unfortunately, a province wide storm happened on our day and many guests were unable to make the trip from the country points, thus we ended up with only about 50 in attendance.

On display was the beautiful O'Grady Trophy, along with all the record books containing all the information of each match, as well as statistic sheets for all matches up to the end of the 1997 season.

After the game, refreshments and fellowship were enjoyed by the curlers and guests prior to some serious time.

Trustee Jim Sproule then introduced our Honoured Guests and dignitaries who extended their greetings and spoke briefly.

Trustee Ron Lloyd gave a brief history of this great competition stating these matches in the old days were very important and always very well publicized in the Sports Pages of the 2 Newspapers. There were usually many spectators and dignitaries in attendance such as the M.C.A. President, Provincial and Civic Reps and the Media (quite often SCOTTY HARPER). Scotty not only attended City matches but many Rural matches as well.

Ron also wanted all to know that the purpose was not to showcase the best and most well known curlers from one club, but to include any curler who wished to participate and enjoy the game; fostering good-will, camaraderie, fun and great fellowship.

A lovely lunch followed.

The next ten years of competition had a few highlights as follows:

GRAND MARAIS and WINKLER participated for the first time ever. Winkler in 1999/2000 season and Grand Marais in 2007/2008 season. ST. VITAL was back in 2000 after being absent since 1915, SELKIRK was back for the first time since 1924 and RESTON returned after an absence of 37 years.

100th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The 07-08 season was a very busy but exciting one as 100 years in this great competition was fast approaching. Planning for a 100th Anniversary Celebration was taking place.

Invitations were sent out to all clubs who had participated within the last 15 years, inviting a representative from each club. Many clubs attended.

Colonel J.W. DeCourcy O'Grady's competition, completed 100 years to the day on March 2, 1908, when MATCH #1375 was played at the 100th Anniversary Celebration at The Fort Garry Curling Club.

ROLAND played FORT GARRY in the regular scheduled 07-08 match as well as two other special matches to help celebrate the 100 years of competition.

GLENBORO played against PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE, they being the two clubs who challenged the most and also had the most curlers take part over the 100 years.

GRANITE played THISTLE, these being two of the first clubs to compete in the competition.

Following the curling, and prior to a delicious buffet, invited guests from the province and the City brought greetings and favourable compliments to the celebration. M.C.A. President, Dale Brooks spoke Briefly.

Hall of Fame President, FRED SUTTON attended and the Trustees thanked Fred for having the beautiful O'Grady Trophy on display, which drew much attention. The program was emceed by BOB PICKEN, in which he gave a brief history of the O'Grady Challenge competition. The Trustees had the help of Mr. Keith Forbes in the designing of a beautiful 100th Anniversary pin. All curlers who took part in the 07-08 schedule and all anniversary curling participants and guests received a pin.

We believe Colonel O'Grady would be happy and pleased how well his dream has been accepted over 100 years of competition. Thank you to all clubs and curlers who have participated and kept this great competition going for 100 years and we hope that the clubs and young, up and coming curlers will carry this competition on for years to come.

The following comments in a club match as up-dated from the 50th annual bonspiel booklet of 1938 reads as follows:

“During 30 years (now 100) in competition the trophy has more than fulfilled the wishes of Colonel O'Grady for the promotion of Inter-Club matches. It is hoped “The Buffalo” will continue to roam the prairies, sponsoring good sportsmanship and fellowship among present and succeeding generation of curlers”.

“Senator” O'Dowda, Secretary of the Elmwood Curling Club summed it up best with his comments in MATCH #344 in 1943 – “We, the members of the Elmwood Club were very sorry to lose the O'Grady Trophy because it was the means of bringing together not only the members of our club, but also offered us the chance to meet and enjoy the company of our fellow curlers from out of town”.

One of Jim Sproule's ambitions as Trustee was to compile statistics from 100 years of competition and approximately 1400 match sheets. After endless hours of work, his accomplishments are as follows:

SOME OF THE MORE INTERESTING STATISTICS FOLLOW

Most challenges by 1 Club	69	Glenboro Curling Club
Most Number of Games Played	161	Glenboro Curling Club
	111	Portage Curling Club
Most Number of Wins	97	Glenboro Curling Club
Most Consecutive Wins 03/12/12 to 01/07/15	21	Thistle Curling Club
Most Curlers from 1 Club curled in O'Grady	325	Portage Curling Club
Most Number of games by a member	36	Lyle Dickenson – Roland C.C.
	33	John Bartley – Roland C.C.
	33	E. Lyall – Glenboro Curling Club
	33	N.S. Smith – Portage Curling Club
Number of Affiliated Clubs in Competition	122	
Total Number of actual games played	2591	
Total number of defaults	209	
Total Number of Members who curled	7744	
Total matches as shown in record books	1400	
Number of matches played in first 12 years	100	
Now 20 to 22 matches per year		

These statistics are complete and up to date as of April 2009.