

The O'Grady Challenge Trophy

"The Old Buffalo"

In continuous play since 1908... open to every affiliated curling club in the Province. **Colonel J.W. deCourcy O'Grady**, president of the Manitoba Curling Association introduced a trophy to encourage good will and comradery and promote curling matches between clubs.

The O'Grady Trophy was put into play at the annual MCA Bonspiel of 1908 – any affiliated club could enter a double team into a round robin competition, and the Granite were declared the winners with the highest accumulated points over teams from Glenboro, Birtle, Napinka, Dauphin and Regina. First place club also awarded 8 gold pendants (\$100 ea) and second place received 8 sets of 18k gold cuff links (\$60 ea) from the T. Eaton Company.

The O'Grady Challenge competition commenced on March 2nd, 1908 when the Kenora Curling Club, who was the first challenger, played a 14 end match against the Granite Curling Club in Winnipeg who successfully defended the trophy by a combined score of 24-18 in a 14 end game.

The "**OLD BUFFALO**" Trophy, as it is fondly called, traveled throughout Manitoba, until it was badly damaged one year, repaired, and preserved in the Hall of Fame, while **The O'Grady Challenge Shield** was created. The **Shield** is auxiliary to the O'Grady Buffalo Trophy and this plaque now travels in a briefcase from club to club and town to town or city, together with a register (log book) to record all of the participants and results, and maintain the legacy of The O'Grady Challenge.

There have been well over 1,500 matches and many thousands of Manitoba curlers have participated over the years in dozens of curling clubs across the province. Since inception, the O'Grady Trustees have kept a log of every single game, recording not only the players and results, but often some fascinating stories:

Current Rules:

- Holder of the trophy to accept challenges not more than once per week, as arranged by the Trustees; clubs may only challenge once per season.
- Each challenge consists of a double rink (8 curlers) with the winner declared by the highest combined points of two games on adjacent sheets. The home players switch sheets halfway through the match to offset local ice advantage, and everybody plays against all players from the opposite side.
- Originally games lasted 14 ends (longest went 17), shortened to 12 (1946), 10 (1965) and to accommodate ice availability and travel time decreased to 8 ends a few years ago.
- Until 1935, members owned their own rocks (some skinny, some wide) and carted them to every match.
- Prior to 1966/67 the trophy holders hosted the matches, however following a run of 12 consecutive victories by Roland, rule was changed such that the challenging club now hosts the match, to ease the financial burden so no club would have to incur hospitality costs more than one match/year (host club provides a meal and libations to all 16 participating curlers).
- The advent of artificial ice has lengthened the season, and increased the number of challenges each year from as few as 8 up to as many as 20 matches (lately we've averaged ~15 matches per year, of which approx. 2/3 come from rural clubs and 1/3 come from Winnipeg clubs).
- In 2018 the 5 rock free guard zone came into play.

Select Highlights:

- Game #46 in 1914 ended in a tie at midnight "sidewalks rolled up and everything closed except the bootleggers" – following week Elmwood returned to Thistle to break the tie – they played just one end.
- Game #101 played in 1920 – well before faxes, emails or texting... the Trustees only obtained O'Grady records from what was reported in the newspapers. Remarks in the log book read "match won by Heather Club. Unable to obtain detailed reports as newspapers not printed Jan 17th due to shortage of newsprint".

- In its first 100 years 7,744 curlers, near curlers and would-be curlers, journeyed forth for possession of the “Old Buffalo”, bucking sub-zero temperatures, snow, blizzards and sometimes rain; from 122 affiliated curling clubs playing 1,375 matches.
- March 2, 2008, special 100th year anniversary matches were held at Fort Garry Club, featuring Granite v Thistle (the two oldest clubs) and Portage v Glenboro (two clubs with the most members having curled in O’Grady).
- February 9, 2020 – the Pembina v Charleswood match was played on “arena ice” (an O’Grady first) just prior to the Viterra provincial mens championship final – hosted by Charleswood Curling Club at the Eric Coy Arena in Winnipeg

Transportation comments in the log books (not all politically correct):

- “Visitors took the train from Oak Lake to Brandon, then taxi to Neepawa”
- “Ride up was hell – no washrooms in the van”
- “Visitors arrived late as the bus went into the ditch”
- “Treherne arrived at 11:20 pm, after game were entertained to dinner, then left for the 6:25 a.m. train”
- “Team from Ft Garry were met by a horse drawn un-covered wagon and conveyed in state, arriving after a thrilling drive”
- “Visitors drove down in a van and snowmobiles”
- “St. Pierre defaulted due to lack of curlers – trophy came shipped collect” (Hartney)
- “turned the ice-plant back on for us” (mid-April @ CFB Gimli)
- “Granite rinks overcame transportation difficulties by driving from Bradwardine to Norman at 3 a.m. Sunday to catch the regular train to Winnipeg. Enroute, two friendly games were played with Wheat City Club at Brandon.” in 1928
- “Manitou came up in their mortuary’s stretch limo... and drove home in the hearse” (2018 vs Charleswood)
- “Everybody pooped after marathon” (Glenboro scored 1 on each sheet in 14th end to win 24-22 over Roland who then drove home through a blizzard)
- “Hartney Club flew 2 planes to Altona, picked up by Emerson curlers... must be an O’Grady first! Still no washrooms in route” (February 1991)

Hospitality has been wonderfully varied:

- “Afterwards a banquet taxed the capacity of the Alhambra Hotel – at which eloquence, interspersed with spicy stories was the order of the day”
- “Treated to Chinese supper @ Bluebird café” in Treherne
- “Luncheon catered by Legion Auxiliary” in Gilbert Plains
- “Buffalo Meat Sandwiches”; “Fish & Chips & Ale”; “Fresh baked sausage rolls & Mrs. Duguid’s coffee”; Pizza, Garlic sausage, Roast beef, BBQ steaks, Chili, Fried Chicken, and “Turkey Dinner with all the Trimmings” (probably the most common), Chicken Wings, and many references to “One hell of a meal – thanks ladies”
- “Winkler had a tough time keeping up with the stiff drinks” (Elmwood)
- “Nice to have some good country food” (Ft Garry @ Elm Creek)
- “Approx 100 spectators” (Glenboro @ Mather – January 1960)
- “Visitors entertained at a smoker and lunch, songs and speeches punctuated the evening”
- “The Buffalo and a bale of hay were presented to the winners”.

These days the beautiful “Old Buffalo” trophy is on display in the **Curling Hall of Fame** in the **Sport Manitoba Building**, and only the auxiliary plaque & log book travel to each match.

Every curler receives a **customized O’Grady Challenge pin** which features a raised image of the “Old Buffalo” along with the year of participation, courtesy of CurlManitoba.

O'Grady Trustees currently include Ron Margolis from Charleswood, Rod Mackay from Fort Garry, Don Stewart from Manitou, and honorary trustee Ron Lloyd from Fort Garry. In addition to scheduling matches, the Trustees maintain records of every individual curler, organized by club, including results of each match going back well over 100+ years to inception.

Many first-time participants are excited to discover the name(s) of an uncle, cousin or grandfather who has also curled in the O'Grady Challenge.

Each year the Trustees receive challenge applications and create a schedule for upcoming matches. The Trophy holder at season's end defends in the first match the following season, thus perpetuating the continuous challenge event.

www.curlmanitoba.org/ogradey-challenge



