

Woodstock Badminton Club History

“The Early Years”

Carl Chambers - 2012

The first we know of the Woodstock Badminton Club is a report in a local news paper that stated that in 1924 or thereabouts badminton made its first appearance in Woodstock. Several local people including C.W. Yarker, L.W. Lloyd and Harry Lownsbrough got the game started in the local Armory which had an indoor parade area with lots of height and allowed the proper court markings for badminton. There is no record of how these first players got their training but considering the skill that was shown in the years to follow they had good training from some source.

The following year the game managed to interest W.J. Kirkpatrick and several others, and the growth was slow but steady. Soon Jack and Leonard Coles turned from tennis in the summer to badminton in the winter. Alan Wilmot Sr., Dr. Mackenzie, Ralph Kirk and others promoted the game and it became more popular as the years passed. Badminton's popularity probably spread as it was the only physical activity aside from hockey and skating available in the winter months. There was no curling club or physical training clubs to compete for members.

The membership grew and it become apparent that the limited usage of the Armory was not satisfactory. A new club house and courts were a must if expansion was to continue.

The most important time in the history of the Woodstock Badminton Club was the year 1930. “Limited” was added to the Club title which made it a Company. The stated purposes and objectives of the new organization was *“To acquire and operate a club house for the enrichment of the game of badminton and the social activities usually associated therewith”*. The provisional directors of the new company were Craig McKay, Montalieu Nesbitt, Elma Louise Gibb, Margaret Christine Daves, Charles Oswald Tatham, John Langdon Coles and Annie Norma Ross. The Capital Stock of the new Company was the issuance of four hundred shares at a hundred dollars each. Initially eighty four stocks were sold.

Under one of the new by-laws it required each male member of the new company to hold at least one share. Lady members did not have to meet this requirement, nor did Juniors or Juveniles.

Membership fees were set:

Men - Full Membership - \$30, Social Membership - \$20

Ladies - Full Membership - \$25, Social Membership - \$15

Juniors - Full Membership - \$20

Juveniles - Full Membership - \$10

A rebate of \$5 would be given if dues were paid before the fifteenth of October.

A new executive was voted into office and they were H.F. Lownsbrough, President, B.L. Cope, Secretary, Directors, T.D. Henderson, L.R. Lloyd, W.J. Kirkparrick, J.L. Coles and Elmer Hossack. The group was charged with entering into an agreement with A.J. McKinney (Mckinney Lumber Co.) to purchase land and the original Chalmers church building on the corner of Hunter St. and Delatre St. and the remodeling of the old church into the badminton club we have today.

Most of the old church had to be torn down and new outer walls housing four courts were built using the bricks from the old church. A part of the old church structure was renovated and used for the lounge rooms we have today. The only difference is that the upper room had a large viewing window

over looking the courts. This upper room was to be used for social events.

Things were proceeding at a fast rate, the new executive was elected on Aug. 21st and on Aug. 22nd the agreement was signed with Mr. McKinney. The Badminton Club probably got a good deal as 1930 was the first full year of the Great Depression and Mr. McKinney was undoubtedly looking for projects to keep his men employed. The cost for the land and the completed building was fifteen thousand dollars with a building completion date of three months from signing date.

The committee approved the expenditure of \$1500 for furnishing the new lounge and kitchen. The only major cost for the kitchen was a new electric stove. It was also decided that the upper room could be used by members for social events with no charge to be made by the club.

A custodian was hired for the building, when completed, at \$50 a month. The applicant had asked to be allowed to sleep in the furnace room but the committee didn't like that idea.

The following is taken from the minutes of the Nov. 14th meeting "*The question of intoxicating beverages was discussed and it was moved that signs be put up advising that it is illegal and against the rules of the club to have such on the premises*".

The next big question was what to do for a grand opening. The contractor promised to have everything completed by December the 5th. December the 9th was picked for the grand opening. Four players from Toronto were invited to play exhibition games as part of the opening ceremonies. Three hundred invitations were sent out. The opening night had the highly rated exhibition games followed by a dance with an orchestra for the occasion.

Now that the club was up and running other clubs showed an interest in inter-club competition. The Hamilton Garrison club, the Brantford Dufferin Rifles Badminton Club, Kitchener Granite Club and later the Stratford and Galt Badminton Clubs made inquiries. The new club, with its upstairs social room now had a very active Bridge Club with a set schedule of games played weekly.

The first tournament to be played in the new building was a big one as written up in the committee minutes and the local newspaper. The competition was held March 20th and 21st 1931 and was a big success for our club and its players. This is reported in the minutes and Sentinel-Review (March 1931).

The Club took a great interest in developing a juvenile membership division as this would be the future of the game. The work was sponsored to very great degree by Mrs. John Wallace and T.D. Henderson. Mrs. Wallace gave countless hours of instruction to the fundamentals of the game and this paid off big time in the caliber of young players that were coming up.

One of the biggest events in the Club's history took place in March of 1935. Len Coles and Jack Sibbald won the Canadian men's doubles in Ottawa. Their return to Woodstock was triumphant as report in the Woodstock Sentinel-Review which is attached.

The remainder of the 1930's went along smoothly with inhouse and inter-club matches as well as some major tournaments, while on the social side of things the Club sponsored weekly dances. The bridge Club was active. Service clubs were renting the upstairs lounge for their monthly meetings as well as private social gatherings.

The Club always was on the lookout for new members and committees were formed to find ways to

increase the membership. The Woodstock General Hospital nurses, Ontario Hospital Nurses as well as the High School teachers were encouraged to join.

The Badminton Club season of operation fit in well with the Oxford Golf and Country Club's (6th Ave course and Woodstock's only course) season as when one closed the other opened. A good number of members belonged to both clubs and committees of both clubs had the same hard workers keeping the operations going smoothly. In later years the golf pro (Ed Anderson) finished up closing the golf shop in the Fall and opened badminton club for the season. It was through Ed that a number of golf caddies got to play badminton after school with supplied racquets and used birds.

The war years, 1939-45, were hard on the Club as it was difficult to keep membership up with a number of people joining the armed forces. But the really low point was July 1945. There was a very good chance the Club would close and not reopen. The availability of badminton birds was cut off due to war shortages. The Sea Cadets were looking to take over the facilities for training purposes. The club actually looked into renting the building to Bingham the Mover for a storage facility. Somehow the Club survived and by 1946 things were back to near normal, but still searching for new members.

This pretty well covers the early years. There were changes that would come in the years that followed such as -

A fire in the late 1950s required restoration of part of building and the loss of the upper court viewing window as it was bricked in.

The Woodstock Little Theatre taking over the upper area on a continuing basis and adding an addition for their productions.

The people that were backbone of the Badminton Club over the early years were for the most part the backbone of the 6th Ave Woodstock Golf Club. When the golf people decided to buy land and build a new top of the line 18 hole course north of Woodstock it certainly took a lot of the interest away from the Badminton Club. It was also at the time when the Curling Club was starting up which as a new winter sport was to some extent in competition for members.

Since the Jack Sibbald-Len Coles Canadian championship in 1935 our Club has maintained the highest caliber of play with players like Roy Smith, Bill Parks, James Carnwath, the Parks Sisters and many others producing champions in all levels of play.

The Badminton Club has survived over the years and is now on an up swing with a new roof and a refurbishing of the interior and kitchen. It bodes well for the future. Woodstock is fortunate to have one of the best facilities in Canada and this is the result of the work done by members over the years.