

The Grand Dispatch

A brief history of Beckley Beach and the surrounding area

Those sports from Beckley Beach

Reg Wheeler, a Hamilton Tiger, and Wildcat!

Recently, I read an article in the Hamilton Spectator titled "Reg Wheeler brags about his rowing crew in rhyme." The gist of the article was a rhyme that Reg wrote about his team mates in the Leander Boat Club Heavy Eights rowing team. I do a bit of volunteer work at the Canadian Football Hall of Fame and Museum. One day, while filing, I found scattering references to people from Beckley Beach. With Reg's story of poetry fame and my finding this information, I decided what to write about in this issue of the Grand Dispatch. It would be people connected to sports and to Beckley Beach. Many have made considerable contributions to the sporting world, most particularly to the Hamilton Football scene.

Reg Wheeler (lot 44-A) Reg was a valuable asset to the Hamilton Tiger football team in 1937, through 1940. With the arrival of World War Two, football took a back seat for a few years. Various teams continued but Reg did not return to the game until 1944 when he joined the Hamilton Wildcats, as a middle wing. Reg remained with the Wildcats until 1948. In 1944, Reg had a brief and fleeting taste of victory when the Wildcats played for the Dominion Championship (now known as the Grey Cup) and was defeated by the Donnacona Navy team from Montreal. (To add a bit of personal irony to this, my father-in-law Steve Levantis, was a player and line coach for that Navy team that took away Reg's one chance at a Grey Cup victory.) Before the game the clearly over confident Hamilton coach Sam Manson told Reg, "This will be an easy win, don't run the score up, the game is being broadcast throughout the world to the troops and this would be bad for morale." Hamilton learned never to underestimate an opponent. The Navy team won an astonishing 7 to 6 victory!

Reg's involvement in football and in sports did not end with the cessation of his playing days. Even today at eighty,

Reg remains involved with the Canadian Football Hall of Fame and Museum as Deputy Chairman of the Management Committee and Chairman of the Inductee Dinner Committee. In another Dispatch, I will bring you back to Reg and tell you about his rowing accomplishments.



George Curtis wins University of Western Ontario Sporting Blanket!

George Curtis, (lot 32) George won the "Blanket" at the University of Western Ontario, in London. The Blanket is a rarely given award, earned by excelling in varsity football, basketball and baseball. Few athletes dominate all three varsity sports at one time as George did. The only other locally known athlete to win the blanket was Frank Constantino of the Hamilton Tiger Cat fame.

Prior to university George played baseball in Hamilton in the newly formed Big Four Senior Baseball League (18 years and over) that played most of their games at Victoria Park. George held the batting average in the Big Four. Even though George was only 5' 7", he nevertheless was an excellent basketball player. In spite of his short stature, he was a high scorer. In order to score against opposing players much taller than himself, George developed a method of using his right arm and reaching from behind his head. He would lob the ball up and over the heads of the much taller rival players. This prevented even the tallest challenger from blocking the basket.

Playing as quarterback George went on to play for the Hamilton Tigers in 1948, a fairly successful year for the Tigers. George then went to the Sarnia Imperials for approximately ten years. George worked for a number of years with Imperial Oil in Sarnia. George passed away in 1971 at forty-seven years of age while playing tennis.



A bit of Hamilton Football History

It may be time to offer a very brief history on the Canadian Football League (CFL) and the Hamilton Tiger Cats. Prior to 1950, Hamilton had two football organizations. One of these organizations the Tigers had two teams, both named the Tigers. While one Tiger team played in the Ontario Rugby Football Union (ORFU) which included teams such as the Windsor Rockets, Toronto Indians and Balmy Beach, Ottawa Trojans and the Sarnia Imperials. The other Tiger team played in the Interprovincial Rugby Football Union (IRFU) otherwise also known as the Big Four Eastern

against the well known Hamilton fastball pitcher Russ Johnson.

Football League with teams such as the Toronto Argonauts, the Montreal Alouettes and the Ottawa Rough Riders. With the onset of WW II both Tiger teams disbanded. In 1941, Sam Manson, Eddie McLean and others felt that the boys overseas needed to hear football games from home and formed the other football organization. They established the "Flying" Wildcats (1941-1943) consisting of players mainly from the Hagersville Air Force Base. Games were played at Scott Park in Hamilton. By 1943 the nucleus of players had dried up at Hagersville and the team became known as the "Hamilton" Wildcats, and played in the ORFU. By 1945 the Tigers returned to the Hamilton football scene with only one team which played in the IRFU. 1950 saw the Wildcats and the Tigers amalgamated to thereafter be known as the Tiger Cats. In 1958, the CFL as we now know it was formed and the now combined Hamilton team became a member. That is all the history you are going to get on this subject in the Dispatch! If you want to learn more about the CFL, you might visit the Canadian Football Hall of Fame and Museum in Hamilton.

Dorothy Hurst, Best-known and the most loved Hamilton Tiger Cat!

Dorothy Hurst/Wilkins, (lot 46) Dorothy Hurst is likely the best known Tiger Cat, Hamilton ever produced. She never played as a linebacker or halfback, not even as quarterback. Dorothy never even made the team as water girl! Dorothy played an even more important role for the Tiger Cats than that of a mere player. (No slight intended toward the players!) Dorothy established the Hamilton Tiger Cat Majorettes, Baton and Dance Cheerleading team and the Tiger-ettes. These groups, more than any other off field activity built the Tiger Cat name and reputation during the 1950s and 1960s.

Just being a member of the Tiger Cat Majorette or the Baton and Cheerleaders or the Tiger-ettes was the dream of many youngsters. Young people from Beckley Beach who were involved with the Dorothy's groups were, her children Ron who played trumpet, Elizabeth was a dancer for the 52 member Majorettes and Rick wrote arrangements for the (also 52 member) Tiger Cat band. Lorraine and Rick Wilson (lot 40), Dorothy's niece Jennifer Blair (lot 46), Mary Lou Wilkes (lot 52 & 52) and Len Wheeler (drums) all played various roles with the Majorettes. There are likely others, but I am not aware of who they are. The Majorettes

took the name of the Hamilton Tiger Cats to Grey Cups as well as to the Junior Orange Bowl in Miami, the Calgary Stampede, the New York World's Fair, Expo 67 in Montreal and repeated trips to the Mardi Gras, as well as the Quebec



Dorothy opened a short lived dance studio in the Dunnville Public School in 1955 offering ballet, baton and tap dance instruction to the young women and men of Dunnville.

In later life, Dorothy gave 15 years of her considerable energy and talent to the Geritol Follies. The Geritol Follies, is a dance and musical group of very remarkable seniors who perform each spring and fall at Hamilton Place.

They also travel considerably during these show periods and entertain folks of all ages. Hamilton is very proud of them, and rightly so. Dorothy passed on recently at 82 years young.

Tom Gallagher Coached Cathedral Boys to Many City Football

Winter Carnival. They shared the sidelines during the game and the field during pre-game and intermission with the often victorious and seldom defeated Tiger Cats of the 1950s and 1960s.

Championships

Tom Gallagher, (Lot 47)

Tom has a long and varied sporting experience. His first love being baseball. At age 17 Bernie Arbour asked Tom to develop a baseball league out of Scott Park. Bernie clearly knew Tom was not only a good athlete, but a superb organizer. Tom played some B and Senior baseball in Hamilton and always thought, or at least dreamed he would someday become third baseman for the New York Giants.



At Cathedral High, under football Coach Larry Sullivan, Tom played both offense and defence. These were good football years for Cathedral, taking the City Championships in 1951, 1952 and 1954. While studying for his Masters degree at McGill University, Tom was hired to coach freshmen football and remained at this for three years. Tom return to Hamilton in 1961, to become the Program Director with the Catholic Youth Organization and began coaching at Cathedral. In 1975, he was appointed head coach. Cathedral has always been the dominate school in Hamilton Separate School Football. Coach Gallagher has a winning record of 156 wins, 20 losses and 1 tie.

Under the leadership of Coach Gallagher, a number of Cathedral's young men went on to play university and professional football. Under Coach Gallagher's administration, Cathedral developed a creditable reputation for producing university and professional athletes. One of the best known of these young men is Peter Giftopoulos. I am not going to tell you Peter's football story. You can read about that elsewhere.



In 1990, Tom Gallagher won the Vanier Cup Coach of the Year for High School Coaches. It was not until putting this article together that I discovered Tom was not a paid coach at Cathedral and had given freely of his time for those many years. Good show Tom! I could write a complete historyletter and more about Tom, but space requires that I severely edit and end my story here with the hope that I have done The Coach as much justice as is possible in so limited a space.

I have run out of room!

There are more Beckley Beach folks who deserve to be written about on these pages but room does not permit. I will get back to this subject soon and tell you more about our sporting famous and near famous. One of those people, my mother swam in the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles.

Who is that Baby?

We had a winner last month. Doreen Stallard (Lot 28A) correctly guessed Sandra Gill (Lot 19&21).

In a future issue I would like to write about the men and



This month's little fellow arrived at Beckley Beach at an early age and has now raised his own family. The cottage where he spent his childhood summers was built elsewhere.

Clearing up a very old matter

In the September 1998 issue of The Grand Dispatch you may have been misled in my final paragraph. It was titled "Story Update." A poor choice of words, but then I'm no journalist! No, no one was shot at Beckley Beach in recent memory! In fact, the person shot died of natural causes in 1904. I received a number of calls after the January issue went in the mail wondering who shot who? I need to check some court records and newspapers, then I will try to put together a story about this dastardly deed. At least I know some of you are reading the Dispatch!

Other than for the satirical story in the January 1999 issue by Father Ron Coté, Re. the Dispatches anniversary (Thanks Fr. Ron.) and the In Memoriam, this is a historyletter generally keep to matters that are old news. Unless, from time to time I exercise editorial discretion and break my own rules!

Special Thanks

Did you know that it is through the generosity of the Beckley Beach Cottagers' Corporation, who permits me to enclose the Dispatch into their mailings free of charge, and the hard work of Sandra Gill that I am able to share the Dispatch with you? A Special Thank You for all the assistance. A thank you also, to Reg Wheeler, Liz Delsey (Wilkins), Tom Gallagher, and Jack Curtis.

Lest we forget

women from Beckley Beach who served their country

during wartime. This of course includes our American friends. Please let me know who they were. I have a list, but am very afraid of leaving someone out.

On the Book Stand

On May 14th a new book will be launched. It is called "Dictionary of Hamilton Biography VOL 4". I was privileged to be asked to submit three biographies. They were for, my grandfather "Wm. J. Warnick, Father Patrick J. Donovan (Pastor at Dunnville for 23 years), and Wm. Henry Lovering. Bill Dermody (lot 55 & 56) submitted a biography on his grandfather, Percival Xavier Dermody founder of the P. X. Dermody Funeral Home.

Financial Support

Thanks again to Paul Dermody, of P. X. Dermody Funeral Homes for your continued financial support of this

historyletter.

In Memoriam

Denman, Harry L.; died February 9, 1999, son of the late Harry and Florence Denman, formerly of Lot 40A, father of Don Denman Lot 36, a brother of Florence Wilson Lot 25 and Norma Jones Lot 34.

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