

The Continuing Saga of Ice Hockey's Origins

A.J. "Sandy" Young

Dalhousie University

"Shinty", "bandy", "shinny", "wicket" and "hurling" are all forms of early hockey games. Early hockey sticks were called "hockies" and early hurling sticks were called "hurlies". With this in mind, new corroborative evidence has been found, which once again names Windsor, Nova Scotia as the birthplace of Canadian Hockey. While types of hockey were probably being played all over the Province in the early 1800s, written proof has been lacking.

The official 1942 report on hockey in Canada, states that the game was played in Kingston and Halifax as early as 1855. The game that this report selects as the first hockey game anywhere was played by the Royal Canadian Rifles who were stationed at the British Garrison in Kingston and Halifax. The Kingston contest was one between two sides of fifty players each. This of course means that the game was not as much hockey as it was shinny. Subsequent to this decision, similar games in Kingston have been traced to 1834.

In order to support a claim that Nova Scotia is the home of Canadian hockey, evidence must be provided that a game similar to the one named as Canada's first, was played at an earlier date in Nova Scotia. The truth is that proof is plentiful. There are many examples of newspaper and diary accounts which pre-date the Kingston claim. The earliest of these appears to be games played on Long Pond in Windsor, Nova Scotia.

Thomas Chandler Haliburton, famed author of *Sam Slick*, wrote about his days at King's Collegiate, in an 1844 London, England periodical called *Attaché*. Haliburton, who was born in 1796 and who graduated from King's College School in 1810, said that:

...the boys let out racin', yellin', hollerin' and whoopin' like mad with pleasure, and the playground, and the game at bass in the fields, or hurley on the long pond on the ice, or campin' out at night at Chester lakes to fish. . .

The "hurley" to which he referred obviously took place in the very early 1800s. It's interesting to note that when these young boys went home after these games, they could read about Napoleon who was just beginning to make history by invading Russia.

The "Long Pond" which appears to have been the venue of the first substantiated hockey in Canada, can still be seen on Howard Dill's property just off the campus of what is now Kings-Edgehill School. For some reason, after WWI it has been called Steel Pond. Artist/Historian Leslie S. Loomer has recently uncovered another reference to early hockey on the pond. In 1876 the *Windsor Mail* included a series called "Early Sketches of Windsor" [to be found in a scrapbook in the PANS (Akins Collection), MG9, vol.28, p. 8]. The anonymous writer described what King's Collegiate student-life was like during his stay from 1816-1818. He said:

The Devil's Punch Bowl and Long Pond, back of the College, were favorite resorts, and we used to skate in winter, on moonlight nights, on the ponds.

'I recollect John Cunard (brother of Sir Samuel of steamship fame) having his front teeth knocked out with a burley by Pete Delancey of Annapolis. Cunard was studying navigation and mathematics. . . . Captain John Cunard died in London some years since; he was for many years engaged in the W. India trade in Halifax. . . .

The combination of verified sources gives historical credence to Nova Scotia's claim to being the

birthplace of Canadian hockey. While there are a number of claims made by other provinces, it would appear that the earliest hockey games to be verified in writing, are those played by King's Collegiate students on Long Pond in Windsor, Nova Scotia.