

Club History

The club has weathered decades of changing fortunes and it is only through the dedication, energy, and passion of previous generations of members that we are now the privileged beneficiaries. The club is still run and staffed by volunteer members. We take great pride in showing off our beautiful facilities... the courts, clubhouse, and our lovely herbaceous gardens nestled in the shade of two majestic maple trees. Our club is a wonderful legacy left to us by those who went before and one we in turn cherish for those who follow.

It all started with three men, two courts, and one passion...

In the mid to late 1880s three men, George Treffry Corfield, Frederick Maitland-Dougall and Augustus Pimbury arrived in the Cowichan Valley. Like many British moneyed settlers around the world they brought with them their customs, traditions, and above all, their love of favorite recreations and sports. Augustus Pimbury was the first to arrive with his wife and four sons in 1853. A number of years later, Mr. Pimbury purchased a dairy farm at the mouth of the Koksilah river. Frederick Maitland-Dougall, his wife Bessie, and daughter Edith (age four) also came to live on the Cowichan Flats, close to the current location of the club in 1886.

In 1887, Mr. Pimbury sent to England for racquets, nets, fuzzy white balls, and rule books. Two courts were laid out in a fenced area on his farm and on May 9th, 1887 he invited a few friends to pop over and “knock” a few. The South Cowichan Lawn Tennis Club was born. Such was the appeal of the game that, soon after, Saturday was the day that friends and neighbors walked on over to play. Others from further afield came by horseback or by horse and buggy, and some rowed over from Saltspring Island, tying up in the Cowichan River adjacent to the farm.

MAY WE HAVE NEW COURTS PLEASE?

By 1905, the popularity of the club was such that one morning Mr. Maitland-Dougall, the president of the club, said to his daughter Edie, (now seventeen); “When you go for the mail ask Mr. Corfield if he will allow the tennis club to use the corner of his 321 acre farm as a new location.” She did. Mr. Corfield gave his consent and offered the club two acres of his farmland and in 1906, some 35 members built an open pavilion and six courts were laid out and seeded. On 8th June 1907, play commenced on the courts at the new and present-day location.

THE WAR YEARS

The club managed to survive the toll the Great War wrought as nearly every able-bodied member joined the armed services and few returned. In peace-time the membership slowly rebuilt, but the Second World War once more decimated the ranks of members. By the late 1940s, the membership consisted of juniors, a few “little old ladies” and a “smattering of elderly men”. The enthusiasm for tennis in earlier decades had been so great there were many private and public courts in the area. Duncan Lawn Tennis Club at one time had 12, but when it closed in 1954, South Cowichan was left as the only game in town, but barely. By 1956, membership was down to 18, including social non-playing members. Of the now eight grass courts, two were being used as a dump for grass cuttings, and those others, not in use, were covered in daisies. Fences were shabby. The clubhouse was in dismal repair and the club was teetering on the edge of oblivion.

BETTER TIMES TO BE HAD

Fast forward a few years. By the time of the club's 75th Jubilee in 1962, fortunes had taken a dramatic turn for the better, thanks to the efforts of the club's dedicated and hard-working executive. The celebrations were planned in style. In addition to the 75th Championships, there were historical displays, costumed matches, the annual dinner/dance, attendance by past winners of the Gentlemen's Singles Cup, and a new event, the Fishing Derby - referred to by one member as "lawn fishing and water tennis" - with a special prize awarded for the largest salmon caught by a player or member of their family. Unfortunately, the weather was not kind. The day scheduled for the ceremonial visit by Lt. Governor Pearkes and his wife saw torrential rain, so the official visit (and club group photo) was rescheduled, and duly happened the following year.

In the early 1970's the club benefitted from an informal union with the cricket and rugby club. The cricket club purchased the lot adjacent to the tennis club, created a pitch and erected goal posts for rugby. When there were games, the rugby club had the use of the clubhouse. In return, they built the caretaker's suite... plus extra brawn was always available to haul the lawn roller across the courts! But in 1973, after extensive flooding, the cricket club decided to sell the land. Bev Cooper, tennis club president at that time (as well as a realtor), was sorely aware of the lack of parking, and realised the situation could be solved by buying the parcel and reselling it. The purchase took place during the "International", with nine American International Club members and Bev guaranteeing the loan so the purchase could be made. During the period of holding title, an easement was registered, and then the land was resold... for a tidy profit no less.

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

This week long event was planned to coincide with the running of the 100th Vancouver Island Championships and the 125th anniversary of settlers arriving in Cowichan Bay. Competitors arrived from a few continents to take part. A huge marquee was installed on the lawn, and in memory of times past, a large anniversary tea was held on the last day of the tournament. Special guests included Mr. James Cochrane, former president of the British Lawn Tennis Association, to whom the informality of the club was a surprise when he wondered if the dress code for the banquet dinner called for "dinner jacket and medals". When asked to compare SCLTC with his own club he commented, "... Wimbledon is a multi-million dollar business, but look for the heart of amateur tennis - the game that's played for love rather than money - then I'd gladly come back to Cowichan".

WIMBLEDON WEST & HERITAGE DESIGNATION

In 1991, CP Airlines used the club as a "set" to replicate Wimbledon. They were making a commercial to promote flights to London and to Paris for the French Open. The commercial was shot in March and Courts #3 and #4 had to be prepared and mowed to look "just like Wimbledon". A bank of bleachers was installed in front of Court #3, and a flight of stairs to "nowhere", emblazoned with Wimbledon, was built at the back of Court #7. Extras were hired to supplement the members (and their families) who willingly played the role of spectators. Much to the amusement of the crowd the actor, who was playing the part of a tennis player, had obviously never played tennis. A member finally took pity on him and ran down to show him how to hold the racquet. It took five days, the club made \$3,500 and the event was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

The cairn at the entrance to the club grounds contains a 'time capsule', created when the club received its B.C. Heritage Site designation in 1992. The cairn was moved from its original location beside Court #1 after the 2006 - 2007 flood.

THE GREAT FLOOD

The club's location on the flood plain has made it vulnerable to flooding many times, but nothing has come close to the winter of 2006 - 2007. The extent and power of the flood waters was the worst in the club's history - although in 1990, the elderly caretaker and his wife were marooned at the club and had to call "search and rescue" to escape from the waist-high waters. Over the course of a few months, the grounds were flooded on no less than four separate occasions and in places resembled a gravelly river bottom, rather than the bucolic green surroundings where tennis is enjoyed every summer. The clubhouse was twice inundated to a depth of three feet and layered with river silt. Due to the herculean efforts of club members, supported by the local business community, when tournament players returned the following summer, the only visible change was the greatly improved view of the tennis courts and the Cowichan delta beyond. As a safeguard against a future deluge, the club had been lifted some four feet above the flood plain onto new foundations, and it remains as you see it today.

Tales of tea and harder stuff...

Tennis teas were the mainstay of the club's social life from its earliest days on the Pimbury Farm through until the early 1950's. Kathleen Wilkinson wrote in "Memories Never Lost", "...Tea at the club was a very social event on Saturday afternoons, with a damask tablecloth, silver teapots and cake trays, plates of dainty cucumber sandwiches, small scones and scrumptious cakes." The ladies were expected to prepare the tea even on rainy days, just in case someone arrived. Kathleen told how her mother would harness the temperamental pony to the "Democrat" and drive from their house at Somenos, pick up her friend at Quamichan and, loaded up with their silver tea services, just pressed "... tablecloths and freshly baked cakes, they would drive along Tzouhalem Road to the tennis club. Apparently no one missed Mrs. Bevin's teas as her meringues, filled with whipped cream from the "Happy Hollows" cows, were the piece de resistance".

The "facilities" of the original pavilion were, in retrospect, delightfully primitive and in distinct contrast to the calibre of the teas prepared and served. Tea water was boiled on a wood stove. The unisex shower was cold water from a stand pipe. And no toilets of course, just an outhouse which was sometimes toppled over by flood water from the nearby river when it overflowed its banks. One player, who had apparently never before left the big city, after being told the location of the privy, was observed scrutinising it; "Does it flush?" he asked in a whisper upon his return. In later years there was a shower in the ladies room, the water supply coming from a 45 gallon drum located in the attic, but it was not hooked up, possibly because there was no method of heating the water. But tea was now brewed with much less effort, the water boiled on a Coleman stove fueled by naphtha gas.

Juniors playing at the club in the forties remember the Saturday teas with relish. One mentioned that thanks to one certain gentleman at the club, there was also a large amount of beer consumed. The parking area in those days was immediately adjacent to the club under the shade of the ancient maples and, in the absence of a bar, drinks were served from the trunks of cars in cups and mugs. Jimmy Longbourne, a remittance man whose brother had inherited the family estate in England, invariably showed up with a nice cake and also kept a bottle or two of liquor in the "boot" of his car. As an elderly

man, when Lt. Governor George Pearkes and his wife were attending the 75th celebrations, he led them out to the parking lot, produced a bottle of Scotch from his car and poured it into two slightly, grubby glasses. The libations were apparently drunk with great relish.

To our American tournament visitors, used to the luxuries of well-appointed country clubs, it was like summer camp. Year after year they returned. "Sure the clubhouse was a bit ramshackle," recalled Henry Eaton when he first played in 1953, "but the courts were lovely, very nice ladies served us tea and cucumber sandwiches, and we all had great fun." By the late 1950's the clubhouse had deteriorated to the point it was described as a "rat-infested shed". Over the next few years funds were gathered, local businesses persuaded to contribute materials and by 1962, a new clubhouse had been built, with a fireplace, modern kitchen, shower-equipped changing rooms and indoor plumbing. As Jeff Hunter, club president at that time, announced at a major tennis meeting in Oregon, "... finally, Cowichan has a flush toilet". But, with the ousting of the privy, so went the tradition of Saturday tea and tennis at the club.

Passionate members, outstanding players, enthusiastic visitors...

The club has been managed and run by generations of passionate and dedicated volunteers. Because of their endeavours many outstanding players have come to "the Cowichan" as the club and its tournaments became affectionately known. Before the Great War, Ossie Ryall, probably Canada's greatest player, played here. Between the two world wars, two members, Frank Kingston and Norman Corfield, achieved national prominence. Following World War II many outstanding American players came here who achieved US national ranking; among them Bradshaw Harrison, Doris Popple, Tom Gorman, Dodo (Bundy) Cheney, Sam Lee and Emery Neale. Many top flight Canadians played the Cowichan such as Phil Person, Paul Willey, Jean Bardsley and Ron Sidaway.

GEORGE TREFFRY CORFIELD (1856 - 1928)

George Corfield arrived in the Cowichan Valley from the West Indies in 1883 with his wife and three young sons. He established a general store and post office and also managed many of the Cowichan Flats' farms including the one where the club was originally located. In 1906, needing more space, the club accepted his offer of the use of his land and moved to a new and its current location. Two more sons were subsequently added to the family, with four of them becoming top-flight players. One of them, Norman, surpassed his siblings by becoming a nationally ranked player. Mr. Corfield continued to be a true benefactor of the game and the club throughout his life. When he died, his will stipulated that the club could use the property in perpetuity, on one condition - "so long as the club shall exist" and that lawn tennis continues to be played - an unusual arrangement, but one that has ensured the club is still here today.

ROBERT WILLIAM SERVICE (1874 - 1958) - The Bard of the Yukon

Robert Service, world-famous for his ballads of the North, arrived in Canada in 1896. He worked his way west and ended up working for a year as a farmhand in Chemainus. He returned to the area in 1899 after a stint of hoboing through the American SW and was hired as the store clerk at Corfield's General Store on the bank of the Koksilah River. He was an active tennis playing member of the club and a popular fixture at Mrs. Corfield's Saturday tennis teas.

Charles H. Gibbons, editor of the Victoria Daily Colonist at the time, recalls how he coaxed Service to submit some of his verse for publication. "It was my good fortune to make G. T. Corfield's store my

headquarters one happy week-end when the trout were leaping. . . . Service had shamefacedly confessed that to beguile the dead monotony of his days, he amused himself by writing verse stuff. Said stuff he produced for inspection, under pressure. "Give me this, Bob, for the Sunday paper," I said to him. "Oh, it isn't worth printing in a newspaper," he demurred. His objections were overborne and "The Christmas Card" duly appeared in the "Colonist"—the first work from Service's pen that was ever printed. In "Lyrics of a Lowbrow", Service wrote a three verse poem called "Fallen Leaves". Conjecture is that he was referring to one of the mammoth maples that stand sentinel in our grounds.

MRS. G. G. (EDITH) SHARE (1882 - 1969)

Edie was a member of the club for 82 years. The daughter of Mr. Frederick Maitland-Dougall, one of the three founders of the club, she was five when the club was formed. Edie lived in the family home close to the club almost all her life. She was a longtime benefactor and patroness and honorary vice-chairman for the last 30 years of her life. She entertained extensively and, in her later years, took the place of honour behind the silver tea service at special club events. As a young woman, Robert Service was often on her guest list and her famous "pig book", which she started when she was 14 years old, included a contribution by the famous poet. She was easily recognised in town with her penchant for yellow and green dresses, her wide brimmed and floppy hats, and her large paste beads, brooches and bracelets and her distinctive, tinkling laughter. The garden and grounds of her home were beautiful, she was known to love gardening and maintained them herself until shortly before she died. She was beloved by all who knew her, including her native neighbours down on the Cowichan Flats.

For the 75th Anniversary party Mrs G.G. (Edie) Share arrived at the club wearing her usual large hat, in a vintage car. She sat at the tea table, presiding over the silver tea urn. With her great charm and ready wit she had an endless supply of humorous anecdotes and with a downward flick of her lacy hanky after each story she would laughingly add "don't you love it".

Two stories she enjoyed telling: "On a very hot day, she and her partner, while playing tennis, unbuttoned the top button of their blouses" and once "got into trouble for showing a little too much ankle". Photographs of her still grace our clubhouse.

KAY WILSON (1920 - 2008)

Kay Wilson was a top junior player, capturing a record four successive U18 National titles between 1934 and 1937. She went on to win national titles in women's doubles and singles in 1939 and doubles again in 1940. Her remarkable career included leading the University of Toronto to four consecutive Canadian University championships in both singles and doubles. Kay had a true passion for the game. She not only loved to play, but she loved to introduce others to the game, assist those who didn't know how to play, and volunteered countless hours to the sport. The club was privileged to have her as a member. She continued to play well into her 80's. In 2002, Kay received the Distinguished Service Award from Tennis Canada for her contributions and lifetime achievements.

SENATOR DON WILNER (1926 - 2012)

Don started playing in the "International" in 1955. He has played every year since then and even had his hotel reservation made for this years tournament. He would have been 86. But playing in his 58th consecutive tournament was not to be, as he died on March 27th at his home in Trout Lake, Washington. His wife Marjorie said he died with a tennis ball in his hand and he was buried in his tennis

whites. Don was a graduate of Harvard Law School and a State Senator of Oregon. His practice focused on labor, civil rights, and environmental issues. Tennis played a large part in his life; he not only played at Cowichan, but was nationally ranked in men's singles and doubles in the US. We will miss him and his annual request that we find him a "decent" player to partner with.

LAURA BAPTY WILLIAMS and DAVID RICARDO WILLIAMS QC

David was a keen historian, a gifted storyteller, and devoted to the preservation of the club's traditions. He took pleasure in researching and writing the history of the club, which became one of the documents buried in the cairn "time capsule" at the front entrance to the club. As an eminent lawyer, the club benefitted from his legal expertise as it negotiated real-estate transactions and the formation of the 2nd Century Fund. One of Laura's biggest challenges was expanding the Centenary celebrations, spearheaded by David, to include a "bang-up" one day festival that marked the 125th year of the arrival of HMS Hecate to Cowichan Bay with the first 100 settlers. Laura and David's involvement in the club was a full family affair. Every Sunday afternoon during the winter of 1961 - 1962 when the new clubhouse was under construction, even the kids were packed off to do their bit.

SPENCER KERN

Many members who have participated in the International Tournament will remember Spencer. He drove up each year from San Francisco and camped or lived in his old Cadillac. He was a devout Christian man, a character of note and a devotee of the club. He kept coming even when it was becoming physically difficult for him to play. He had been missed for several years, but we did not know of Spencer's passing until the spring of 2011, when the club received a letter from his estate. Most of his considerable wealth was left to his church, but the club had a special place in his life which was exhibited in a generous bequest of \$5,000.

JEFFREY HUNTER and BEV COOPER

In 1956, membership was down to a dozen playing members. The clubhouse and grounds were in a terrible state of repair and no-one wanted to take on the job of club president. Enter Jeff Hunter with his boundless energy, enthusiasm, passion and get-it-done attitude. Less than a decade later, under his stewardship and that of other like-minded members, the club had a new pavilion, better courts and burgeoning membership. Jeff also nurtured the club's relationship with the Pacific Northwest Tennis Association, was instrumental in the creation of the International Division and 2nd Century Fund and part of the group that worked so hard to rebuild after the 2006 -2007 flood. Jeff

During her tenure as President, Bev was responsible for master-minding the real estate transaction that secured the extensive parking area the club now has use of in perpetuity.

The International Club

During the 1950's, visiting players to the South Cowichan Lawn Tennis Club, who fell in love with the ambiance of this charming little club, realized the need to support it. Survival of grass courts in the face of changing times, not the least of which was pressure to convert to asphalt surfaces, necessitated a new helping group. Thus, the International Division was born.

Past International Division president, Jeffrey Hunter, has been a local member and dedicated advocate for more than forty years. Membership fees to join the International are as low as \$25.00 or as high as

one can happily contribute. Hunter says, "The social camaraderie is, for some, of equal importance to the matches. Many who attend the Grass Court Championships each July think of it as a return to their favorite adult summer camp."

Current International Division President, Dr. Michael Taylor, also encourages Americans, Canadians and overseas players, whether they are members or not, to join the International Club, and support this treasure of a club. Where else can you play in a grass court tournament with such history?

When the SCLTC celebrated 100 years of operation in 1987, a Trust was set up called the Second Century Fund; to give the Club added financial security. The income from this trust is paid to the Club every year. The capital which has increased substantially, remains as a reserve to be used only if required to ensure the Club's survival. From the beginning, the primary source of funds building the capital in this Trust has been the International Division of the SCLTC.