

BRUCE BEACH HISTORY – 2010

The Tennis Courts of Bruce Beach

The first history of tennis courts at Bruce Beach is found in Rev. W.A. Bradley's *Historical Sketch of the Bruce Beach Summer Resort*. His last entry was for 1938 and new courts have been added along the beach since that time.

According to Bradley, "the Bruce Beach Tennis Club had its inception in 1914 as a subsidiary to the Golf Club" when two courts were laid out on Steve Tout's Property, one at the south end of Tout's property and another in the central part, but only the latter was used. Photographs in a Bruce Beach Photography Club album confirm this court was located in our present church yard. I remember my mother recounting how sheep would interrupt games played here.

This one court was soon insufficient for the increasing number of cottagers and so in 1920, the Bruce Beach Association decided that each Division should have a court. As a result, in Division I a clay court was built north of the pump at the foot of McCosh Hill. In 1926, this court was abandoned and two cinder courts were built at the top of the hill, still on Robert McCosh's property. Wet conditions exacerbated by flooding in the spring of 1926, caused the Division II cottagers to abandon their court and join Division I on the higher ground. These courts were used by the Division I and II cottagers until 1934 when they resurveyed the area of the original Division I court and decided to build two tennis courts and a badminton court there. Two tarvia (a kind of asphalt) tennis courts were ready for use when cottagers returned the next summer. "Division III laid out their first court (grass) in 1922 in Mr. Pollock's field, at the foot of the 8th Concession hill". Two years later, the court was relocated across the road but water runoff from the hill made it difficult to maintain this clay court. By 1929, a cement court was built to the north, at the foot of Hugh Cameron's hill. Even further north, as more cottages were erected, two clay courts were built in the newly created Division IV. Thus, from Bradley's account, there were five, active tennis courts at Bruce Beach in 1938.

Currently, the most northerly courts are the "Area 8 to 11 Cottage Owners' Tennis Courts". These two courts are located behind cottage 125, in Cameron's Grove, on land purchased from Hugh Cameron in 1944. The Article of Agreement for this sale is dated August 31, 1944 but the deed was not registered until August 7, 1947 after the final payment was made. For about 20 years prior to this purchase, the same land was leased from H. Cameron for two tennis courts and a playing field. Gordon Lane (#130) provided much information about this, including that, according to the late Don Currie (#124), the courts were first installed in 1924 or 1925. An interesting situation unfolded. When the sale agreement was drawn up, it stipulated that the courts were for all Division IV cottagers (#104 to 177). This is many more than those comprising Cameron's Grove (#121 to 136), and it was the Cameron's Grove cottagers who bought the land. A recipe for disaster one might think. However, in a spirit typical of Bruce Beachers throughout our history, it was decided that even though the courts

were on Cameron Grove property, in fact occupying about a quarter of that land, all Division IV people could play on them and that the Division rather than merely the Grove families would maintain them. This solution mirrors that in Division I where two courts are located on McCosh Grove land but all Bruce Beachers are welcome to use them.

Between 1938 and 2010, the increase in cottagers resulted in more tennis courts being constructed, including two private ones. Our most southerly court is located just south of the 6th Concession and east of Gordon Street and it is restricted to shareholders in that area. As was true earlier, the impetus for creating this facility was crowding on the Division I courts. According to Sandy Henderson (124 Gordon St.), his late aunts Liz and Pearl Henderson (110 Gordon St.) donated the land with the stipulation that there be no Sunday tennis. According to Archie Blandford (128 Gordon St.), the posts for the backstops and for the net were obtained by George Johnson (146 Gordon St.) with the help of the Elliot's, from their farm woodlot. Dave Grant (139 Gordon St.) remembered that the benches were built from wood from an old barn on the 4th Concession. Because the late Ernie Marshall (142 Gordon St) was instrumental in promoting this court, it was named the "Ernie Marshall Tennis Court" in his memory, when it opened in 1962, according to Pat McFarlane (148 Gordon St.).

The second new court was built behind cottages 62 and 63. Like the Marshall court, this is a private one for families in 13 cottages in the immediate vicinity who comprise the "Snow-Don Grove Tennis Club". (Why the hyphen was inserted into Snowdon in the club's name is a mystery.) Peggy Goodenow Felton (#52), the club's secretary, provided details on its history. She wrote: "In July a group of avid tennis players, headed by Peggy Lawson (#63), decided that they would like to have a tennis court on the Snow-Don Grove property. The Snow-Don Grove shareholders approved the plan in August of '73 and construction began the next year." Ten cottages housed the charter members of this club but since then three more families have joined. Peggy recalled in the early years, a mixed doubles tournament was held for the Lawson Dawson trophy. This was a broken tennis racket with some dirty tennis balls mounted on a piece of wood. It was so ugly that no one really wanted to win it! The creation of this most recent club brought the total number of courts at Bruce Beach to seven.

As this review shows, tennis has been a part of Bruce Beach since 1914. Playing on courts of various surfaces, in various locations, whether for beautiful silver cups or ugly trophies, we have united along the beach to create and maintain courts from south of the 6th to the 10th Concession. Finally, over the years, Bruce Beach-Kincardine tournaments have enhanced relationships with Kincardine residents and we should remember that the local farmers helped us to establish our tennis tradition at Bruce Beach.

Frances Stewart
Bruce Beach Historian