

# The History of the Nelson Midsummer Bonspiel

July 1st, 1945 marked the first Nelson Midsummer Bonspiel . July 1st, 2007 marks the 63 time the citizens and businesses of the City of Nelson have offered to the curling world a chance to play the game and meet old friends and new in July.

Through good times and bad this Bonspiel has survived .The first full week of July curlers will travel hundreds of miles, as they have done for more than a half century, to subject themselves to self-inflicted physical and mental abuse. The excitement builds as old-friends arrive at the Nelson Curling Club to begin this week of curling fellowship and fun. For the rookie, it is a most trying time. They must try to keep up with the veterans. Above all they must try to survive to Day Seven.

The idea for the Nelson World Midsummer Curling Bonspiel originated with Roy Sharp on April 5th, 1945 at the Nelson Curling Club's Annual Meeting. Initially his idea was met with much humour and disbelief . The local newspaper reported it in this fashion.

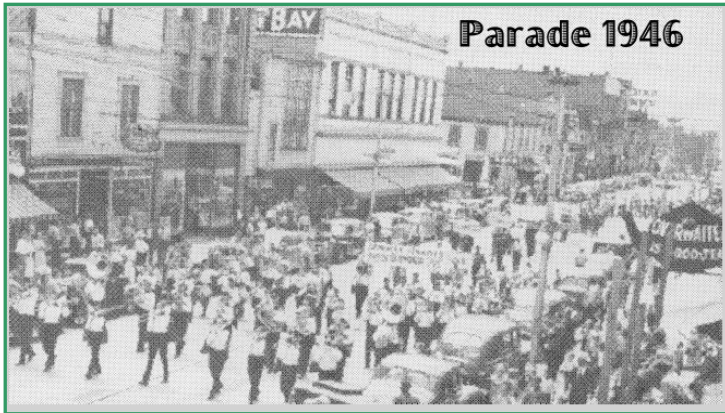
*"Roy Sharp's suggestion that a mid-summer bonspiel, similar to one staged annually in St. Paul, Minnesota, caused more merriment than serious talk at first, but when the thought was expressed that many more Alberta holidayer's would be attracted to the district as a result, it was decided to ask Mr. Sharp to see if the plan could be carried out. Mr. Sharp thought that the heavy insulation of the curling rink would enable the ice to be held, for summer temperatures in St. Paul were much higher than in Nelson. He had spoken to Calgary curlers who were enthusiastic about the idea. He agreed to approach the Civic Centre Commission and the refrigeration company for further discussion.*

*( April, 1945 Nelson Daily News).*

## AN ILL-CONCEIVED JAUNT INTO THE RIDICULOUS

Although there were many who viewed this idea of a curling bonspiel in the middle of summer as a "rather ill-conceived jaunt into the ridiculous ", it was such ardent curlers as Roy Sharp, Fritz Farenholtz, Art Gilker, Art Ronmark, George Hoover, Bob Peebles, George Horstead, Art Waters, Earl Hunt and Stan Bostock, to name but a few, who began to put the wheels in motion. By April 20, 1945, it was announced that the First Nelson World Midsummer Curling Bonspiel would be held during early July, 1945. However, even the most optimistic supporters had no conception as to how successful this bonspiel would eventually become. In a recent interview with the last living founder, Fritz Farenholtz noted that back in 1945 he never imagined that he would one day be attending the 50th Midsummer Bonspiel.

Members of the Nelson Civic Center Commission and representatives from the Curling Club immediately went to work to decide on a date, scope, duration, and types of competitions for this Bonspiel.



Meetings were held to determine how the curling ice would be kept in good condition during the hot days of summer, how to accommodate the curlers should the response be favorable, what entertainment could be provided, and how best to publicize and promote the event. Those who favored the project pointed out that Nelson was ideally suited to hosting a Midsummer Bonspiel. Situated in the Selkirk Mountain range on the West Arm of Kootenay Lake, Nelson was a lovely summer vacation spot.

The Kootenay Lake offered fishing, boating, and ferry rides and the surrounding countryside was ideal for golfing, tennis, hiking and drives through spectacular scenery.

In addition to this, Nelson was fortunate in having the first municipality-built Civic Center of its kind on the continent. Although there was very little paid publicity, the novelty of a midsummer curling bonspiel provided the momentum for the word to be spread.

### FAMED BROADCASTER BILL GOOD PLAYED A CRUCIAL ROLE IN PROMOTING BONSPIEL ACROSS CANADA

Great credit for the early years promotion of the Bonspiel must be given to Bill Good Sr., national radio sportscaster of the Winnipeg Tribune. Going on the air as early as April 25, 1945, in his nation-wide sport program, Bill Good mentioned the Nelson summer bonspiel and said he would be glad to give further particulars in up coming broadcasts.

As the Nelson Bonspiel Committee kept him informed of the details and progress, Bill Good began to spread the news across the country. Soon other news services and radio stations began to give this up coming event a great deal of publicity. Nelson men who were in the armed forces in Europe were informed by newspaper and radio that Nelson was holding a summer bonspiel. This was followed up by the Newsreel organizations coming to Nelson and filming this historical event.

Bill Good's pre-bonspiel promotion was enough to change the minds of many curlers. Instead of attending the St. Paul's Summer Bonspiel, Les Nicholls of Saskatoon and F. Van Epp, of Portage, Wisconsin chose to come to the Nelson Midsummer Bonspiel. The response to this event was overwhelming. Initially the Bonspiel Committee had limited the entries to 50 rinks, but soon had to increase to 64 rinks. Due to the response, local and district entries had to be cut to a minimum to allow more distant rinks into the Bonspiel.

It was on Wednesday, July 4, 1945, at the CKLN radio station in Nelson, that Bill Good spread the news of the Midsummer Bonspiel across the Trans-Canada network. This was the first time a National program originated in Nelson, B.C.

*According to the July 6, 1945 edition of the Nelson Daily News, Bill Good noted that it was the persistence of Ed Kelter, Civic Center Secretary-Manager, who kept sending him "newsy stories about the spiel. A different story with a different slant came regularly every week. Because of this a lot of credit should go to Mr. Kelter, 'one of the smartest publicity men I've known. " Bill Good went on to say that the "Bonspiel was a smart idea. 'How else ... could you have got such a large number of tourists to stay in one spot for a week and spend all their money in one center?'*

*July 6, 1945 Nelson Daily News*

During a dinner given by Mayor Stibbs honoring Bill Good for his promotion of the Bonspiel, a number of people inquired as to why Mr. Good devotedly kept promoting this event. According to the July 6, 1945 edition of the Nelson Daily News, Bill Good noted that it was the persistence of Ed Kelter, Civic Center Secretary-Manager, who kept sending him "newsy stories about the spiel . A different story with a different slant came regularly every week. Because of this a lot of credit should go to Mr. Kelter, 'one of the smartest publicity men I've known. " Bill Good went on to say that the "Bonspiel was a smart idea. 'How else ... could you have got such a large number of tourists to stay in one spot for a week and spend all their money in one center?' Bill Good continued to attend the Midsummer Bonspiel for many years and in addition to curling - he won the D Event in 1952 - did his nightly broadcasts from the Civic Center and from the homes of some of the Nelson residents.

*"Right now I'm sitting on a sheet of ice... on a chair, of course... in the curling rink at the Civic Center. The temperature right here is 40 degrees above zero. Outside it has been 80 and 85 degrees above zero all afternoon. And now in the early evening, it is beginning to cool down a bit. But inside this curling rink, of course, I'm having no trouble keeping cool. Nor are nearly 300 curlers from every part of Canada, and from the United States who have been in Nelson all week, taking part in one of the world's most unusual, most startling sporting events. This is the original Canadian Summertime bonspiel ... a gala affair it is, too. It's been a glorious week of fun and sport.*

*Curlers are here from as far East as Oshawa, Ontario ... from Dawson Creek in the North, from California and Wisconsin, in the South. . . and from Vancouver Island. Fellows as well known as Frank McCallum, the Oshawa Mayor, making his second trip this way; French D'Amour, curling King from Trail. . . Bob McGhie, Jimmy Mark and Freddie Wendall, members of the championship rink. From Winnipeg, Ken Watson, a Dominion curling king; From Delisle, Sask. the hockey playing Bentleys, and many, many more.*

*In Canada there are four great curling classics, in my opinion ... for vastly different reasons. This is one of them ... the original Midsummer Bonspiel in Nelson. The Winnipeg bonspiel must be included because it is the world's greatest bonspiel - with more entries than any other ... There is the Nipawin affair in Northern Saskatchewan because it is the richest in the world... And there is the Dominion Championship every year, with rinks from every province - great because, it is the classic of them all. There are other great bonspiels of course, but 1 list these four which smack of greatness in sport. And they are great - and this one, I must admit, is my favorite. I've been bouncing back here year after year like a rubber ball.*

*Excerpt from copy for Bill Good's national radio show.*

And so it has gone on, for a total of 63 consecutive summers. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bonspiel was held in 1994. One hundred and twenty eight men's, and 98 women's teams participated in that event.

Over all of those years, the great, the good, and the common folk of curling have all come to Nelson to compete and to enjoy the camaraderie and all of the other great social and recreational opportunities the city and its people and businesses have to offer. Among those who have skipped the bonspiel winning teams are two champions of the world, Hector Gervais, of St. Albert, Alberta, and Lyall Dagg, of Vancouver.

As it was in the beginning, the bonspiel has been sustained by a massive volunteer effort from the club and community, as well as valuable financial support from the business sector.