

SPORTS: RICHMOND ATHLETIC CLUB & LACROSSE

Interview with Wm. Easterbrook, 8092 Fremlin, August 15/73

Interviewed by Joyce Schuss (No tape)

Firmly convinced that sports provided a healthy outlet for youthful energies, Bill Easterbrook contributed many hours to the young people of Richmond. His involvement dates back to the early 1920's when lacrosse, basketball and soccer were the most popular games in the community. With the growing interest in these three sports in particular and athletics in general, it soon was evident to Easterbrook and several others, that Richmond was ready for a tighter organization to direct the sports scene. The Richmond Athletic Club was formed.

R.M. (Rudy) Grauer was the first president, followed by Easterbrook and then Archie Blair.

The philosophy behind the Richmond Athletic Club was to support all sports but because of keen interest, much emphasis was placed on lacrosse. At this point in the interview, it was clear that Mr. Easterbrook was more interested in discussing early lacrosse despite the attempts of the interviewer to enter into a conversation about all sports.

Easterbrooks employed a miller, George Wilson, who had played lacrosse in Brantford, Ontario, winning the Minto Cup. Wilson encouraged Bill Easterbrook, who also had played the game as a young boy in his native town of Tweed, Ontario, to organize a team of 17-18 year olds and enter it in a city league. Thus the Eburne team was formed.

Mr. Easterbrook recalls the following players, most of whom lived on Sea Island. There were the McDonald brothers, Hughie, Angie, Harry and Duncan. Easterbrook played too, along with Bob Tait, Les Richards (later a blacksmith in Marpole), Jack and Guy McMillan, the Grauer brothers, Rudy, Gus and Carl, Arthur and Harry Peters and Allan Gibbons who hailed from Steveston. The home field was the site of Ocean Cement in Marpole, then McLeery and Weston.

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Many games were played at the Cambie Street Grounds, Easterbrook recalled. Teams from Fairview, Mount Pleasant, East End and West End were in the league. Easterbrook mentioned 'Preacher Green' from the Marpole area as a 'super-fan'.

Easterbrook related a story, similar to Sam Gilmore's, about how the Brighthouse team acquired strip. The Steveston team was decked out in magnificent uniforms supplied by the canneries. The Brighthouse team was forlorn in contrast. Several of the boys were playing bare-footed! Reeve R.M. (Rudy) Grauer shook his head in dismay at the Brighthouse team which, incidentally, was several goals behind. He challenged the team. "Thump Steveston and you'll have as good if not better strip," is how Easterbrook recalls the incident. Thump them they did and Grauer lived up to his promise.

Easterbrook's story of the Brighthouse Box differs substantially from other old-timers. However, his story is more accurate, it would appear, because of his personal involvement and the fact that his father was a founder of the Richmond Agricultural Society.

The land and some monies were donated by the Richmond Agricultural Society and the Richmond Athletic Club raised the balance of the necessary funds. Stands were built, flood lights installed but the playing surface was not paved.

Reeve Grauer telephoned Easterbrook in a rather mysterious tone and asked him to meet at the Brighthouse Box. Upon arrival, Easterbrook was introduced to Byron 'Boss' Johnson, a former player for the Victoria Senior Club and then Senior Lacrosse Commissioner. (Later Premier of British Columbia.)

The Municipality purchased sand, gravel and asphalt from Gilley Brothers in New Westminster and Johnson was Vice-President of the firm. Johnson marvelled at the quality of the Box and Grauer was quick to suggest that it would be much better after Gilley Brothers had 'donated' the paving material. The implication was clear to Johnson and before long, the paving was done.

The Steveston Box was constructed later, adequate but not as grand as the Brighthouse facility.

Ed Gilmore was cited as an excellent coach who made it clear that he, not the players, ran the team. For example, Easterbrook related how, at a game in New Westminster, Art Noble overheard a conversation between Easterbrook and Gilmore in which it was decided to bench Jackie James because the Salmonbellies were too rough on small men like James. Noble argued that he wouldn't play if James didn't play. Gilmore quietly asked Noble for his sweater as a gesture indicating who was boss. Noble changed his mind.

Personalities recalled by Easterbrook included Jimmy Gunn and Hugh Gifford as outstanding game officials and Herb Delmonico as a superb goal-tender. "Herb had only one eye and I was constantly amazed how he made some stops," said Easterbrook. Wilf Hamson and Dougie Ross were the best players from Richmond, Easterbrook claims.

With good sticks costing upwards of \$15.00 in 1973, Easterbrook recalled the best of sticks then priced at \$2.25 to \$2.50. "Tisdalls Sporting Goods in Vancouver was the place for lacrosse equipment at that time," he stated.

Easterbrook recalls girls' lacrosse as quite rough, the girls much poorer stick-handlers etc. Girls' games usually followed boys' games.

In the 20's, Andy Paul of the North Shore Indians nominated Easterbrook as vice-president of the British Columbia Lacrosse Association. Easterbrook became president later and finally secretary of the Canadian Lacrosse Association for two years.

The late Austin Taylor, a wealthy city businessman and avid lacrosse fan, invited the famed comedian, Joe. E. Brown, to a Richmond-Salmonbelly game at Queen's Park Arena in the early 30's. Completely taken with the game, Brown's enthusiasm was spotted by fans who besieged him for autographs. Brown happily left the Arena with a stick and ball signed by both teams.

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Jack Benny and Mary Livingstone abruptly left a similar situation with Benny complaining to police officers that he found the autograph-seekers a distinct annoyance.

Easterbrook just might have cleared up the mystery behind the 'Walkem Trophy' currently in the Municipal Museum. George Walkem was mayor of Point Grey and a frequent visitor to the Richmond Agricultural Fair at which lacrosse games were a popular event. He has a hazy recollection of the trophy being awarded at the Fair.

Richmond was divided into districts for a basketball league (i.e. South Arm, Steveston etc.) and Bill Gilmore refereed many of the games usually held at the Cambie School Gym.

Easterbrooks remembers attending boxing matches at Steveston and Brighthouse outdoor arenas. Bill Townsend drew a big crowd peraps because he also played lacrosse, suggested Easterbrook.

Unfortunately, most of the records relating to the Richmond Athletic Club were destroyed in a 1925 fire at the Easterbrook flour mill - established in 1906- at the corner of No. 3 and Bridgeport Roads, later the site of Aylmer's cannery.