

SPORTS: LACROSSE

Interview with Sam Gilmore, 1064 Steveston Hwy., August 14/73
Interviewed by Joyce Schuss (no tape)

Sam suggests that the first Richmond field lacrosse team was organized in 1910 and played in a South Vancouver league. Home games were played in a pasture called 'London's field' at the South Arm of the Fraser River. London's field was an inconvenient location for visiting city teams but proved handy for Delta teams at a later date.

Cow 'patties' on the field were common and a source of annoyance for the city players. "We's run over the manure and think nothing of it," said Sam. "The Vancouver boys would side-step it and lose ground and time," he added.

By 1912, there were enough players to form two teams. Number 3 Road was selected as the boundary. The boys west of the boundary were nicknamed 'The Fish-eaters' by the boys east of the boundary. In turn, the Fish-eaters called their opposition the 'Muskrats.' When necessary, the Fish-eaters would supplement their team with cannery workers while the Muskrats strengthened their roster with surveyors working for the C.N.R. along the South Arm of the Fraser.

From 1913-15, Ladner, East Delta and Westham Island teams combined with a Richmond team to form the Lower Fraser Valley League. The McKenzie Cup, emblematic of League supremacy, was never won by the Richmond team, Sam recalls.

"It's a wonder there were no drownings crossing the river by gas-boat," said Sam. "The boats were big enough, but with exuberant fans, giggling girlfriends and players filling them, that was some crossing!"

Sam recalls the often heated rivalry between Richmond and Ladner players and fans. At times, the playing area was roped off to keep excited spectators from invading it. Sisters, with sons on rival teams, wouldn't speak to one another and cousins wouldn't allow blood relationships to interfere with the competitive spirit that prevailed.

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In 1914, the Richmond team was resplendent in purple sweaters with a bright orange 'R' on the front. Ordered through the Timothy Eaton Company, the turtle-neck style proved too hot for summer lacrosse. "Obviously hockey sweaters," mused Sam.

During the first war, lacrosse in Richmond ceased. But not at the Armed Services Training Base in Victoria! With sticks supplied by the Y.M.C.A., Sam along with his brother Les, Herb Howse and Davie Errington, also Richmond players, not only played the game during breaks from Army training in Victoria, but in France too!

The Gilmores, Howse and Errington were instrumental in organizing a July 1st Armed Services Sports Day in France. And, of course, lacrosse was included in the activities. These men, with fellow soldiers of the 29th Battalion, won two semi-final games but missed out in the championships.

Sam recalls lacrosse club sponsored New Years Eve Balls at the old Cambie School Gymnasium. The turn-out was always good and the proceeds purchased sweaters and, if necessary, helped an injured player meet medical expenses.

Tom Gifford and Sid Warwick, both from New Westminster, stand out in Sam's memory as excellent officials. They were paid a nominal fee for a game, and, according to Sam, wouldn't tolerate players arguing about penalties.

Sam relates the story of his relative also named Sam Gilmore, a referee who was dubbed 'Five-Minute Sam' during a South Arm-Brighthouse game. South Arm forward Bob Moir was trying his best to get past Brighthouse defenceman Jack Travers. In frustration, Moir swore at Travers and was immediately slapped with a five minute penalty by the referee. Wilf Hamson questioned the vision and intelligence of the referee in rather direct language, and, bingo! another five minute penalty, hence the nick-name.

Three boxes were built in Richmond with the advent of box lacrosse. (c 1920). Sam suggests that Reeve Rudy Grauer used some influence in obtaining provincial monies for the construction of the Brighthouse Box. The saw mills in the Eburne area helped

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supply materials for the Bridgeport Box. The Steveston Box was municipally built. All three playing surfaces were grass and Brighthouse and Steveston had both stands and lights. The Bridgeport box was torn down, the other two renovated and repaired and still in use.

Box lacrosse proved extremely popular locally. Lighting allowed greater flexibility in scheduling games. Box lacrosse rules allowed for fewer players on the floor at one time, a welcome ruling especially during planting and harvesting times.

About 1936, Reeve R.M. Grauer and local Police Chief Alfie Johnston organized a five-team intermediate league, soliciting aid from the canneries and local merchants. Bill Easterbrook, a man dedicated to sports and local youth, was a league commissioner along with Herbert Skuse, the community shoe-maker. They settled disputes and appointed referees.

The Imperial Cannery sponsored the Steveston team, the Brighthouse merchants the Brighthouse team. The South Arm team was sponsored by the Phoenix cannery and was called the 'Sovereigns,' that being the trade-name of Phoenix canned goods. Sam doesn't recall the sponsors of the Bridgeport and East Richmond teams, but suspects the farmers may have helped the latter.

Protective padding was optional but most players wore gloves of some kind. A few wore padded caps. "A far cry from all the gear the kids wear today," said Sam.

Apparently the huge crowd at Queen's Park Arena hooted and shouts of "Hey, look at the big sissy!" filled the air as a face-masked Eastern goalie stepped on the floor. It wasn't long before Western goalies adopted the protective face mask.

Richmond developed some excellent lacrosse players, Sam believes. He names three, who, in his opinion, were exceptional, Bill Morphett, Angie and Harry McDonald.

Sam was delighted to learn that the Richmond Minor Lacrosse Association revived, in 1972, the Grauer-Patterson Cup, commonly called the 'Reeves' Cup. Reeve Grauer of Richmond and Reeve Patterson of Delta donated a trophy for

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the winner of a Richmond-Delta game. (Not sure what division then, but Intermediate now.)

Sam chuckled loud and long when recalling an incident involving, (you're right!) more Gilmores. It seems Edie Gilmore wasn't too pleased to see her brother Dave fighting in mid-floor with a Steveston player, especially because Dave seemed to be losing and the Steveston goalie looked like he was going to be the 'third man in.' She hoisted her skirts, jumped over the fence, grabbed the goalie's stick and hit him with it. The referee was another brother, Bill, and the crowd roared with laughter as he briskly escorted his sister back to the stands.

Sam still follows lacrosse quite closely. He attends most of the Junior A 'Roadrunner' games and thinks the calibre of play is high. He says he wouldn't admit it to any lacrosse 'old-timer', but he thinks the kids play a better game today.