A Brief History

Of

The Simsbury Convalescents

INTRODUCTION

There is a new hockey team in Massachusetts which goes by the name of “The Andover Convalescents”, a “knock-off” on the name of a team which lived and died in Simsbury, Connecticut from roughly 1956 till 1975.

The paragraphs that follow are cobbled together from notes sent in by a number of Simsbury alumni. They will become part of a website Lou Shipley has created to give the new team some perspective. Given that some of the memories are almost fifty years old (and the hand writing a bit scratchy), the picture is reasonably clear. On specifics, however, there is disagreement; for example, recollections of the number of games with officials and timers range from 95%, to half, to 1/3 too “not many”. There are no surviving records of the schedule, results, roster, or scoring.

In the mid 1950’s, Simsbury was becoming a bedroom community to Hartford, CT. Most of the Convalescents lived there and in West Hartford. The Westminster School provided home ice from the start. Lou Shipley, founder of the “new” Convalescents, grew up in Simsbury and played hockey for the Junior Whalers and at Westminster and Trinity. About the time he was born, the original Convalescents organization was probably past its prime. The founding players moved on and the rising generation was less energetic. Interests and energy tend to wax and wane. The new Convalescents are alive and well, this time in Andover, Massachusetts.

HOW DID IT ALL GET STARTED?

According to Tad Montgomery (Westminster alumnus, teacher and the oldest contributor to this history) and Tucker Warner, the Simsbury Convalescents formed in 1956 or 1957, comprising a group of recent college graduates from the Simsbury/West Hartford area. Among the names that Tad recalls are Dave Chapin and Bob Borah. Tucker adds “Red Dog” Warren, Jack Soper and Quent Dewing. The name “Convalescents” was apparently borrowed from, “The Simsbury Convalescent Home”, located on Firetown Road opposite what is now the HopMeadow Country Club. Originally, the building was the residence of Governor (and later senator) George P. McLean (creator of the McLean Game Refuge); it has recently been renovated and renamed, “The Governor’s House”. For a time, the Convalescents game jersey sported a crutch as team symbol. One alumnus recalls that the purpose of the name and symbol were to make the opponents overconfident.

At first, the home ice was the Westminster School rink (then natural ice located behind the gym). One of the first games was against the Western Connecticut Wombats, a team made up of young faculty of the Kent, Hotchkiss, South Kent, Gunnery and Berkshire
Schools and lead by Burgess Ayres, Gunnery coach. There were also games versus a Choate School faculty team (lead by the Choate coach), the Darien Hornets, the Yale Cougars, “…another Yale club team…”, the Yale JV, Wesleyan, Trinity, Westminster School, Hotchkiss School, Loomis School and Hamilton Standard.

The original Convalescents seem to have been opportunists, shifting their home ice from the natural sheet in Simsbury to the Loomis School artificial (but uncovered) sheet and then back to Westminster’s new outdoor but uncovered artificial surface where they remained until the team dissolved.

In 1962 or 1963, Westminster moved their natural rink down the hill into a deep gully (to minimize the effect of the sun). In 1966 or 1967, the School created an uncovered artificial rink nearby. In 1968, the School was given what was supposed to be a state-of-the-art metal roof supported by prefabricated aluminum arches. Late on a Sunday night in February of 1969, that roof collapsed under the weight of a heavy snow load increased by a steady rain. The Convalescents had cancelled a scheduled practice for that evening. Finally, in 1973 or 1974 the School covered the ice with an open roof supported by free-standing wooden arches which are still in place.

Judging from the contributions of various alumni, there seem to have been two “eras” in the Convalescents’ history: the first extending from 1956 through 1963 and the second from 1964 until 1973 or 1974.

THE MEMORIES

THW- “Ohh – the SCHC. Fond memories with some of the best guys I’ve ever known…trying to sleep after playing in 10 degree weather out of doors…five Warners on the ice in 1960 at Hotchkiss (ed: the fifth, Bruce, is not on the roster; he played for Hotchkiss) – beer at “Red Dog Warren’s after the games at Loomis.” TW – “…interesting that everyone commented how we all would have been crushed to death (had we been on the ice when the roof collapsed); unlikely, but very likely that we would have been electrocuted!” TM – “…beating the Yale Cougars…”. DHH – “…always cold and windy nights at Loomis…”. BR – “I left during a game when I had one of our opponents in my arms without gloves and stick and finally realized it was enough…he was a…rink rat from Springfield…during a game at Loomis”. TW – “After a year off, Bill Ryan came back; during the first shift an altercation occurred…Bill’s fists were cocked; his better judgment prevailed, fists dropped; he skated off the ice, career over”. DHH – “…playing at the rat-infested Crystal Rink in Norwalk, CT…”. TW – “Imagine playing without a mask, helmet or elbow pads; I still have chips floating in both elbows”. BT – “…didn’t play a lot of away games as they always resulted in bad feelings”. THW – “Our last game at Yale was the finale – only 8 guys showed up and one, Quent Dewing, got hurt in the first period and sat out the rest of the game. I was running the show then and felt that if only 8 showed up for the highlight game of the year – and the only indoor game – then the time had come to call it quits. It was great while it lasted but enough was enough.”
THE INJURIES

TW - with the arrival of former Yale goalie, Bunny Terry, I took to the forward line. While playing Trinity at Loomis, my head was down and my right cheek met with the helmet of an opponent. I skated to the bench, knowing something was wrong as did Laurie Pratt who helped me off. Surgery the next day at the Hartford Hospital repaired my broken zygomatic arch; all was and is well, at least I think so”. (ed. A GOOGLE search confirms TW’s spelling and that his cheekbone was “depressed”).

GC – 1970 was the year that Simsbury celebrated its tercentenary (300th anniversary) with, among other things, a beard growing contest. During a Sunday evening scrimmage under the stars at Westminster, I took a slap shot just below my left eye and was knocked flat, bleeding like a stuck pig; I recall Mike Jackson and others coming with the snow-filled towel, leading me to a car and driving me to Dr. John Cannon’s house and then to his office; I can remember thinking, when John removed the towel, that he had the most awful, scrubby beard, just like a drunken doctor in an old western movie; his nine stitches left me with a fine scar, now barely visible among the wrinkles; they also prompted me to retire forthwith!

THE ROSTER (with position/comment where available)

Norm Armour, fwd, (consistent)
Rick Bellows
Bob Borah, def, (last cut ‘64(?) Olympic team)
Charlie Brainerd, wing
Pete Brainerd
David Chapin, center, (Dartmouth capt)
Gordon Clarke, def
Quent Dewing, wing
Dick Flood
Bob Greer, fwd
Dick Hopley, Zamboni
Bill Horn, wing
Roger Horton
Dave Hovey, l. wing; founder
Mike Jackson, Zamboni
Tad Montgomery, fwd; founder
Irv Morris, def
Jon O’Brien, def
John Pierson (Harvard capt.)
Rusty Post
Laurie Pratt, def
Bill Ryan, def (leader/shotmaker)
Jack Soper, def (Yale capt)
Art Stedman
Bunny Terry, goal
Aldie Warner, def
Jipper Warner, def
Seth Warner, l wing
Tucker Warner, r wing; founder
“Red Dog” Warren, center
George Welles, wing
Ted Worcester, goal, wing, def (fine skater); founder
David Yerkes, def

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS HISTORY

Tad Montgomery (TM), Dave Hovey (DH), Irv Morris (IM), Bill Ryan (BR), Gordon Clarke (GC), Bunny Terry (BT), Ted Worcester (TW), Don Werner (DW), Jon O’Brien (JO), Tucker Warner (THW).

AFTERWORD

This is not the sort of assignment I would have expected to undertake. I had to accept when Lou invited me to attend the Andover Convalescents Awards Banquet (which was held at 11:15PM at a local bistro after practice). The sum of my “on ice” experience consists of several seasons of pond hockey (played on racing skates because racing is mostly what I did as a youngster) and two seasons as a Sunday evening pick-up scrimmager towards the end of the life of the Simsbury Convalescents. That said, it is great fun making contact with old friends with whom I shared the experience.

AGC – 5/20/04