



Members of the OTLBC in front of the clubhouse's lower verandah, circa 1927.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

April 3-8	April 3-8, OSCA Firehall Open House Week
Sat, April 7, 19:30	One Voice Benefit Concert with Big Soul Project Choir and Deep Groove Band, Southminster United
Sun, April 8, 13:00	OSCA Through The Decades Family Party, Firehall
Sun, April 8, 13:00	The National Capital Concert Band – 'A Spring Posy', Southminster United
Mon, April 9, 19:00	OOS Garden Club: Perennials for the Lazy Gardener with Michael Ritchie, Firehall
April 19-22	Mutchmor Book Sale, Mutchmor PS
Fri, April 20 to Sun, April 22	E-Waste Drop Off, Lady Evelyn Alternative School
Sat, April 21, 10:00-13:00	Earth Day Activities, Lady Evelyn Alternative School
Sat, April 21, 16:30	Trinity Music Series: Anglican Angels and Solitude: The Music of Astor Piazzolla, Trinity Anglican
Sun, April 22, 12:30	OSCA Presents 'Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory', Mayfair Theater
April 26-29	Ottawa Grassroots Festival, Southminster United
Tues, May 1, 19:00-22:00	OSCA AGM, Firehall
Sat, May 5, 10:00	Hike for Hospice Care, Carleton University Field House
Sat, May 5, 14:00-17:00	Hopewell PS Anything on Wheels Sale Drop Off, Hopewell PS
Sat, May 5, 19:30	Rideau Chorale Presents 'Faire Is The Heaven,' Southminster United
Sun, May 6, 9:00-11:30	Hopewell PS Anything on Wheels Sale, Hopewell PS

To see the latest listings, go to the online calendar at www.oldottawasouth.ca

HISTORY

The OTLBC's First Golden Age on Cameron Avenue, 1923-1929

By Ross Eaman

At noon on Monday, June 4, 1923, the temperature in Ottawa was 72 degrees Fahrenheit (22 Celsius), but it felt warmer because of the humidity. It was King George VI's birthday and people were making their first outings of the summer season – to Rockcliffe Park and Britannia for picnics and to more distant locations such as Tupper Lake, a favorite destination in New York State, which could be reached by train in the 1920s. On Cameron Avenue in what was then simply Ottawa South, final preparations were being made for exhibition matches at 2:30 pm by some of the world's best tennis players. They had come to Ottawa to celebrate not the royal birthday but the opening of a splendid new facility for the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club (OTLBC). General admission was \$1.00, or 50 cents for juniors for whom a special stand was set up.

Twenty minutes before the matches were to begin, there was a brief thunderstorm and rain was still falling when the first players took to the courts. The surface was heavy and the footing slippery, but the players carried on and were soon dazzling the gallery of 1,500 with their skill. So began the Cameron Avenue era at the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club, one also marked by insecure footing at times but met with the ingenuity and determination of the game's best players.

In the early 1920s, tennis was flourishing in the Ottawa area. In 1923, there were 27 clubs affiliated with the Ottawa District Lawn Tennis Association with a combined membership of 2,000 players. That year, the OTLBC had 534 tennis members with another 100 on a waiting list. It was able to accommodate them through a decision in 1922 to sell its Third Avenue property to the Ottawa Board of Education and purchase a 4.9 acre site on Cameron Avenue between Leonard Avenue and Brewer Park.

In those days, as Eric Minton recounted in the *Ottawa Journal*

a half century later, Ottawa South “had a number of heavily wooded areas, along the Rideau River, and on Cameron Avenue, coming right up to the street line in places. ‘The woods’ as they were locally known, provided natural playgrounds for children, and there was always the prospect that a gypsy caravan would be encountered.” Situating a tennis and lawn bowling club there was not an option until the high-level Bank Street Bridge was completed in 1912 and the streetcar line was extended to Grove Avenue. After the fields were leveled, twenty clay tennis courts and two eight-rink bowling greens were laid out by Joseph Flitcroft, the club's groundskeeper.

Who provided the inspiration for this move? The historical record is murky, but much of the credit must go to George A. Crain, an experienced contractor whose father built Lisgar Collegiate in the early 1870s. He was club president in April 1922 when members gave their unanimous and enthusiastic support for the move and was likely instrumental in getting architect John Albert Ewart to design the clubhouse.

By the early 1920s, Ewart was one of the city's top architects. The son of a former chief architect for the Department of Public Works who lived on Cameron Avenue, his projects included the Transportation Building, the A. J. Freiman Department Store, the Ottawa Civic Hospital, and Glebe Collegiate Institute. His legacy in Old Ottawa South includes Southminster United Church and the Ottawa South Public Library (now known as the Sunnyside Branch of the Public Library). In 1909, he built his own house at 114 Cameron, the present-day May Court Club Hospice, and several of its features are present in the clubhouse design. Construction began in the fall of 1922 at a cost of \$26,000. The general contractor was Ferguson & Lambert with numerous Ottawa trades participating in the work.

Three generations of Ewarts played tennis on Cameron Avenue. As Ewart's grandson Doug emailed me: “I remember our father, John

Cossar Ewart, telling us that his Dad designed the clubhouse. Our Dad was born in 1911 and played his tennis there in his youth and indeed, introduced me to tennis at the club as well. We lived in the area of Alta Vista Drive and Cunningham Road so we didn't get to venture to the tennis club too often unless we were visiting our grandparents on Cameron Avenue.”

In 1925, Ewart joined the club, and as he entered it he may have considered how well his design reflected the advice of American architect Aymar Embury II in an article published in the *Architectural Forum* that year: “The design of the successful country club, both exterior and interior, should express ease, comfort and well-ordered gaiety. A club is primarily a social place and . . . requires a main lounge where members can relax during the day and entertain at night. On no account should piers or columns obstruct the floor space of either a lounge or a dining room, which at times may be used for dancing. Another key feature is the veranda. Porches, terraces or verandas should be placed as to give them full views of the tennis courts.”

As described by the *Ottawa Journal*, the ground floor of the OTLBC clubhouse contained “a buffet, a secretary's office, a lounge rotunda, locker rooms, and shower facilities, while the second floor had a large main lounge, a ladies' lounge, two card rooms, a dining room, and a kitchen.” True to Embury's vision, there was a wide verandah and balcony with a view over a lawn to the courts. Embury could not have done it better.

The cost of the project was \$43,700 – \$7,500 for the land and \$36,200 for the clubhouse, courts, greens, and general improvements. After selling its Third Avenue property and paying off the mortgage, the club had \$23,700. Events like bridge parties at the Daffodil Tea Rooms on Sparks Street raised money for furnishings. But the other \$20,000 came mainly from the sale of debentures paying six per cent interest, a debt instrument often used for expansion projects. With revenues of \$9,300 and expenditures of \$6,300, the plan was to pay them off over 15 years.

The official opening was saved for June 4, 1923, the day Bill Tilden agreed to come to town. William T. or “Big Bill” Tilden was the best tennis player in the world at the time. He had won Wimbledon in 1920 and 1921, the first American to do so, and was in the midst of a run of six straight U.S. championships from 1920 to 1925. Joining him for exhibition matches were Lindley Murray, the U.S. national singles champion in 1917 and 1918; Samuel Hardy, captain of the U.S. Davis Cup team; and William F. Crocker, one of Canada's best players. The timing

was opportune, for two and a half years later, Tilden would have his knuckles rapped by the U.S. Lawn Tennis Association for playing an exhibition match for a Christmas fund in New York City.

During the first set of his match with Murray, Tilden slipped on the greasy surface and aggravated an old injury in trying to save himself. But after losing that set 6-3, he rebounded to win the match going away 6-4, 6-1. He then combined with Crocker in doubles, winning the first set 6-4, but eventually losing 6-2, 6-3.

Reading coverage of the matches today is a revelation. In the 1920s, sports journalists were much more interested in tennis, using flowery language to describe the action. “In the third game [of the third set],” the *Journal* reported, “Tilden began to warm up . . . and brought Murray to the net and sent a sizzling passing shot . . . Tilden then went up to the net for a low fast cut to the corner. Murray made a marvelous recovery, but Tilden, with a dazzling pick-up, surprised him and in a fine rally which followed Murray netted the ball.”

After the matches, former Mayor Harold Fisher officially opened the facility and paid tribute to George Kydd, the club's founder in 1881. At 7:30 pm, there was a dinner at the Chateau Laurier to which members of all clubs were invited. The cost was \$2. Tilden gave a speech, emphasizing the importance of a strong tennis program in Canada.

Much has changed at the OTLBC since the 1920s. In those days, most members came by streetcar for five cents a ride, and tennis balls were supplied by the club. Tea was served on Saturday afternoons at 4:00 pm with sandwiches and cakes followed by a dance or hop in the evening. Tennis was not played on Sundays until the mid-1920s and then only after 1:00 pm.

According to the *Journal*, the final summer of the decade was marked by “splendid weather throughout.” The Governor General's Trophy Tournament in lawn bowling was held at the club and won by its entry. “As a fitting climax to a year of progress,” the club organized the Ottawa Tennis Ball at the Chateau Laurier for all city tennis players and their friends. It took place on Friday, October 18, eleven days before “Black Tuesday” when the stock market crashed and the world plunged into the Great Depression. For the club, grim days lay ahead.

Ross Eaman is a resident of Old Ottawa South and a long-time member of the OTLBC.

This is a shortened version of the first of a series of essays written in connection with the OTLBC's clubhouse restoration project.

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