

THE STORY OF CHILLIWACK'S LAWN BOWLING CLUB – The sport of lawn bowling has been around for centuries, but it did not formally make its appearance in Chilliwack until the early 1920s. Although the sport is reasonably straight-forward, with minimal 'equipment' requirements, it does require a sizable square of grass of near-golf-green texture and quality. In the early 20th century, although Chilliwack was going on 50 years old, such a piece of dedicated and manicured real estate did not yet exist.

There was certainly much interest in the sport in Chilliwack at that time, particularly from many of the early settlers who had arrived from Ontario with strong British ties. It took one of Chilliwack's more illustrious citizens, Harry J. Barber (1875-1959) to really get 'get the ball rolling' with the popular game. Barber was instrumental in introducing lawn bowling to Chilliwack, as well as ensuring that the sport had a solid basis upon which it could thrive.

Harry Barber was born in Ontario, and after obtaining his degree in pharmacy, he arrived in Chilliwack in 1898, at age 23. He soon became the proprietor of Barber Drugs, a well-known Chilliwack institution which operated for decades at Five Corners. Barber was active in various civic organizations, notably as President of the Chilliwack Board of Trade, as well as chairman of the school board for eight years. He also served as Mayor of Chilliwack from 1914 to 1917, and for 15 years, from 1925 to 1940, he was the Conservative Member of Parliament for the Fraser Valley.

Barber's pharmacy business was very successful and, circa 1915, he was able to purchase one of Chilliwack's first mansions, at 170 Yale Road East (then known as Westminster Avenue), between Williams Street and Victor Street. Better known as "Stonehurst" (and as La Mansion Restaurant in later years), the magnificent four-storey, 17-room, 5,985-square-foot house had been constructed in 1909 by Chauncey Eckert. The property's expansive grounds included gardens and a great lawn. In fact, the front lawn extended east beyond where next door's Bon Marche building (built in 1950) used to be.

Harry Barber had lawn bowled before and he quite enjoyed the sport. At the urging of many of his friends and fellow lawn bowling enthusiasts, Barber decided to turn the front lawn of his stately home into Chilliwack's first lawn bowling green. In spring of 1920, after Barber had invested some time and money on his yard, Chilliwack's lawn bowling devotees started playing regularly on Barber's front lawn on Yale Road East.

At that point, Chilliwack still had no formal lawn bowling club, but that was remedied the following year. On September 29, 1921, at Chilliwack's City Hall, the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club (the Club) was formed, with over 100 gentlemen (representing over 5% of the City's population at the time) initially expressing an interest to join. A joint stock company called The Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Company (the Company) was also formed at the time (with authorized capital of \$10,000).

The Company's immediate mandate was to purchase a site and construct a bowling green, and thus establish a permanent home for the Club. The Club knew that it could not much longer continue its operations on Harry Barber's front lawn, and a search was soon commenced for a suitable location for the Club's first dedicated venue. In short order, the Company obtained an option on three parcels of land on Gore Avenue. The budget for building a top-flight bowling green was set at \$3,500 (\$44,000 in 2021 dollars). However, nothing ever became of the potential Gore Avenue location for the Club's new home, and the search for an appropriate site for the Club continued.

Meanwhile, in July 1922, the ever-patient and accommodating Harry Barber arranged to have lights strung over his front lawn bowling green to allow the Club to play longer into the evenings. Late-night traffic on Yale Road East would often slow down or stop to watch the games.

As it turned out, the very next month, August 1922, the Company purchased (for \$345) a 132-foot lot at the southeast corner of Princess Avenue and Edward Street, directly across from the nine-year-old Chilliwack Drill Hall. Work started immediately on the Club's new green, and by late September 1922, it was reported that work was "proceeding rapidly on the grounds". Inevitably, Chilliwack's rains and inclement weather soon came, and

work on the Club's new bowling green was deferred until the spring of 1923.

As the following spring unfolded, the Club's new home at 110 Edward Street, at Princess Avenue, was finally finished and ready for use. The property included a well-constructed 120' by 120' green, along with a basic building that served as a clubhouse and storage facility. The very first game of lawn bowling at the Club's new home took place on Monday, July 2, 1923. The formal opening ceremony for the Club's new premises took place the following week at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 11, 1923. There were a number of dignitaries present for the festivities, and Harry Barber spoke to the assembled crowd.

By September 1925, a portion of the lawn bowling green already needed "improvement and reconditioning". The Company retained the services of the groundskeeper at the one-year-old Chilliwack Golf Club on Fairfield Island. The cost of the reconditioning work was estimated at \$200. At this time, membership in the Club stood at 66, of which 32 were shareholders in the Company. A significant number of those who indicated they were prepared to join the newly-formed Club back in 1921 never actually followed through on their commitment, but this would be of little consequence.

The formal opening of the 1926 season for the Club took place on a very hot May 12, 1926, when the temperature reached "90 degrees in the shade", with 64 bowlers and a fair-sized crowd on hand.

Early on, an annual Club ritual was established in Chilliwack in which the Club's greens and the new lawn bowling season itself were officially declared open by the Mayor and assorted other dignitaries. After saying a few words to the assembled bowlers and spectators, the Mayor would also ceremoniously throw down the first bowl (similar to throwing out the first pitch at a baseball game). The Chilliwack Progress would be on hand and would report in detail, with accompanying photographs, the festivities of Opening Day. This annual rite of spring in Chilliwack lasted well into the latter part of the 20th century, and it has been revived in recent years.

In 1928, the Club affiliated itself with the BC Lawn Bowling Association, and thus the Club's members were permitted to enter provincial competitions, as well as participate in inter-club competitions.

By 1933, an annual tradition had been developed called the "Good Friday Lawn Rolling". Every Good Friday, members would work on the green with big rollers, getting it ready for the new season's imminent opening.

For the first ten years of the Club's operation, the game of lawn bowling in Chilliwack had been for gentlemen only. However, on June 8, 1933, the Chilliwack Ladies Lawn Bowling Club was formed at a well-attended meeting at City Hall. The official Opening Day for the Ladies Club was held the following week at 2:00 p.m. on June 14, 1933.

After over a decade of operation, the Club had outgrown its very basic 'clubhouse', and on May 15, 1935, a new clubhouse, one storey in height, was officially opened. This structure exists today, as part of a bigger (and taller) clubhouse.

One of the Club's more prominent members during the 1940s was Wilfred Kipp. In addition to being Chilliwack's Postmaster for the 24-year-period 1925 to 1949, Wilf Kipp was also a very proficient lawn bowler, and he served at one time as the Club's president. In the early part of the decade, Wilf introduced a little intrigue to the local (and provincial) lawn bowling scene when he became the practitioner of a new lawn bowling technique. The Chilliwack Progress used cryptic adjectives such as "moderne", "stream-lined", "new era", and "revolutionary", without actually disclosing what Kipp's new technique was. In July 1943, it was announced that "scouts" from some of Vancouver's lawn bowling clubs were heading to Chilliwack to "study" Kipp's new system of bowling.

Lawn bowling held a prominent position in Chilliwack's sporting and social scene during the 20th century. The annual Opening Day, the first bowl of the season, getting the green prepared for the season, games' results, the Club's annual general meeting, awards dinners, the annual Christmas dinner, and so on were all regularly and

extensively covered by the Chilliwack Progress, often with photographs.

By 1958, membership in the Club stood at 74 bowlers, with 59 men and 15 women. Long before this time, the Club's clubhouse was deemed inadequate for its needs, and an ambitious \$3,500 expansion was completed, just prior to the season's Opening Day on April 23, 1958. The large-scale remodelling of the 1935 structure resulted in the ground floor being turned into a locker room and a storeroom, with a concrete floor. The present clubhouse was extended 14 feet and the entire structure ended up being four feet taller, and a new roof was installed. The upper floor changes also included a new kitchen and ladies' clubroom.

By 1968, partly due to changing demographics and priorities, the Club concluded that its membership, and consequently its finances, were unacceptably low. Thus, in June of that year, the Club became a "Society", as it was hoped that a society would be able to draw in more members, while only charging them a nominal fee. The new society members were not allowed to bowl, but they could watch the games, attend and vote at meetings, and participate in social functions. If society members did want to bowl, they would have to pay additional fees for that privilege.

This 'membership drive' of 1968 was an attempt to raise funds to replace rotting fencing and posts (some almost 40 years old) around the Club's property. Similarly, some light standards had deteriorated and needed replacement. However, the Club's change in name to "Society" did not result in the additional members and revenues that were anticipated, and thus the new name did not last long, and soon "Club" was back in place.

The Club subsequently applied to the City of Chilliwack for a grant of financial assistance. This request was considered appropriate, based on the fact that in 1968 the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club/Society was the only one in BC that was owned and funded by its membership. All other clubs in BC were owned by parks boards or cities. After considering the Club's request for several months, in October 1968, the City decided to approve and include this grant in its 1969 budget.

The Club's annual membership fees rose by an average of 2.5% per year between 1953 and 1990. In 1953, annual fees were set at \$20 for regular bowlers and \$12 for first-time novice joiners. By 1961, fees had risen to \$25 for regular bowlers and \$15 for first-time members. In the following 14 years, fees remained essentially unchanged, as in 1975 annual fees were \$26.50 for men, \$15 for first-time novice joiners, and \$15 for ladies. By 1990, annual fees were at \$50.

In the spring of 1975, the Club's clubhouse again underwent extensive renovations. Funded by a federal New Horizons \$3,000 grant, the top floor of the clubhouse was extended six feet to the north. This extension provided more space, as well as some cover on hot or wet days for those who sat on the benches outside the lower-level locker/storage room. Also included in the renovations was an expanded kitchen, a new heating system, and a new roof on the building. One of the goals of the renovation was to enable the clubhouse to be utilized on a year-round basis, both by the Club and the general public. It was hoped that additional revenue could be generated by the public renting the clubhouse for wedding receptions and small parties. All the renovation work was completed in time for the official Opening Day of the 1975 season, which was Saturday, May 24th at 1:30 p.m.

Funding and membership numbers continued to be issues for the Club for the remainder of the 20th century. In 1977, the Club requested assistance from City Council by way of property tax relief, and the City granted it a 50% reduction in its property taxes for that year. In 1979, similar property tax relief was granted. In 1987, City Council gave a grant of \$1,852 for a new sprinkler system for the Club. In 2001, the Chilliwack Foundation awarded the Club \$3,500 for a new lawnmower.

In 2003, the Club's bowling green was in top condition and its clubhouse well-scrubbed, as the Club successfully hosted the lawn bowling segment of the 2003 BC Seniors Games.

At 99 years old and counting, the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club, at 9350 Edward Street, is Chilliwack's oldest sports club in continuous operation, and it is experiencing a resurgence in interest and new memberships.

IMAGES: There are 18 images accompanying this article, each with a detailed narrative.

#1 - This circa 1922 image, facing east along Yale Road East from Five Corners, shows Harry Barber's home, Stonehurst, in the background. Barber's business, "Barber Drugs", is identified to the left of the shot. The location of Chilliwack's first lawn bowling green, on the front yard of Stonehurst, was less than 300 metres from Five Corners. (Image Credit: Chilliwack Museum and Archives Collection, Photo Number: 1977.013.002)

#2 - This is a 1948 photo of Stonehurst, on Yale Road East. Harry Barber had sold his Stonehurst home seven years earlier, and by this time the great front lawn, home to Chilliwack's first lawn bowling green 25 years before, is smaller and populated with shrubs and trees. (Image Credit: "This is The Story of Chilliwack", Chilliwack Board of Trade)

#3 - This photo, taken in 1921, shows a group of Chilliwack lawn bowling enthusiasts enjoying their game in the great front yard of Harry Barber's house, Stonehurst, on Yale Road East. (Image Credit: Chilliwack Museum and Archives Collection, Photo Number: 1984.057.001)

#4 - This current-day shot, facing southeast from Yale Road East, shows the location of Harry Barber's home, Stonehurst, at 46290 Yale Road East. From 1920 to 1923, Stonehurst was also the home of Chilliwack's first lawn bowling green. Harry Barber owned Stonehurst for 26 years, and he built the stone fence that fronts the property. Stonehurst remains one of the few homes in the Chilliwack area to be built of stone. (Image Credit: Chilliwack History Perspectives Collection)

#5 - This is a current-day shot of the front yard of Stonehurst. The great front lawn, which in the early 1920s was the home to the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club's first green, is now much smaller and features a number of trees and fountains. The New Mark Condos, on Yale Road East at Victor Street, are visible to the left of the shot. Also visible in the middle of the photo is a red sign indicating the location of a liquor store to the east of Stonehurst. This used to be the old Bon Marche store, but prior to 1950, this area was part of Stonehurst's great lawn, and the actual location of the Club's bowling green. (Image Credit: Chilliwack History Perspectives Collection)

#6 - This 2004 aerial image shows the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club's relatively close proximity to downtown Chilliwack, and Five Corners. (Image Credit: Google Earth)

#7 - During much of the 20th century, most anything involving the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club was considered newsworthy in Chilliwack. The Chilliwack Progress regularly and extensively reported on various Club happenings such as the annual Opening Day, the first bowl of the season, getting the green prepared for the season, games' results, the Club's annual general meeting, awards dinners, the annual Christmas dinner, and so on. This image is a sample of the Progress's reporting of the Club's activities, in this case the annual general meeting of 1934. The article concludes by stating that the Club's venue is "one of the prettiest places in Chilliwack". (Image Credit: Chilliwack Progress Archives)

#8 - The annual Opening Day of the Club's lawn bowling season was a big event in Chilliwack for much of the 20th century. There would be a big turnout, speeches, ceremonies, and the Chilliwack Progress would announce the upcoming opening, as well as report extensively on the actual event. This image shows the announcement that ran in the Progress on April 29, 1942, regarding the opening of the 1942 season the following week. (Image Credit: Chilliwack Progress Archives)

#9 - This image was taken on Opening Day, Wednesday, May 7, 1947. In the photo, Harry J. Barber, the 'father' of lawn bowling in Chilliwack, is pictured speaking with two fellow bowlers as they examine their bowls. (Image Credit: Chilliwack Progress Archives)

#10 – Typically Chilliwack’s lawn bowling season concludes in early October. However, on rare occasions, the weather has cooperated to allow the season to be extended. This image, taken on November 7, 1949, facing northeast towards Princess Avenue, shows a group of well-dressed bowlers assessing the results of their bowls on a sunny November afternoon. The formal dress codes of the time that are evident in this shot are a relic from the past, as Chilliwack’s Club emphasizes relaxed informality. (Image Credit: Chilliwack Progress Archives)

#11 – This photo was taken on April 23, 1958, Opening Day for the Club that year. Mayor T.T. McCammon is pictured as he is about to throw the first bowl of the season. To the Mayor’s right is Harry Barber. This would be Barber’s final Opening Day at the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club, as he would pass away the following year. (Image Credit: Chilliwack Progress Archives)

#12 – This image was taken in May 1975, and it shows workers putting the finishing touches on the Club’s clubhouse expansion, just in time for that season’s Opening Day of May 24, 1975. The new six-foot extension to the north (including the new access door and stairway facing east) is well illustrated in this shot. (Image Credit: Chilliwack Progress Archives)

#13 – On occasion, it has been necessary for the Club’s bowling green to be completely ‘rebuilt’. This image, from the summer of 1989, gives an indication of the significant amount of planning and effort that goes into such an undertaking. That year, the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club’s green was reconstructed with an innovative approach. This process involved digging out the green to a depth of nine inches, carting the old soil away, and then replacing it with a special blend of sands. After the sand was levelled, it was seeded with a mixture of bent grass and two types of fescue. The resulting green was judged a success, and superior to the state of previous greens. (Image Credit: Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club)

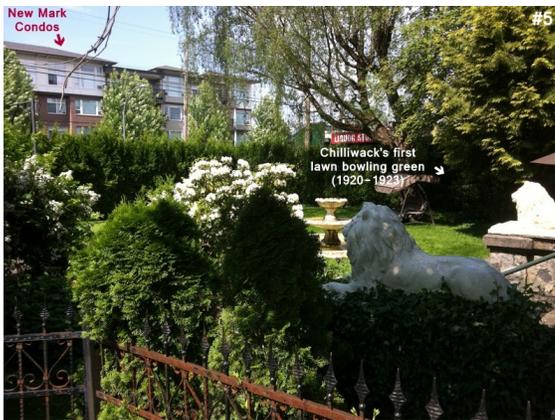
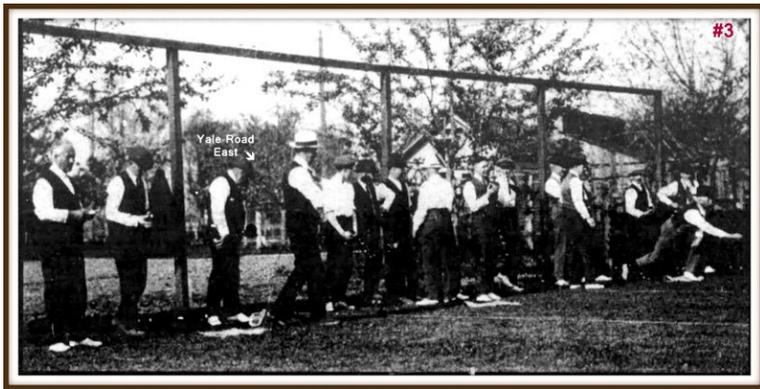
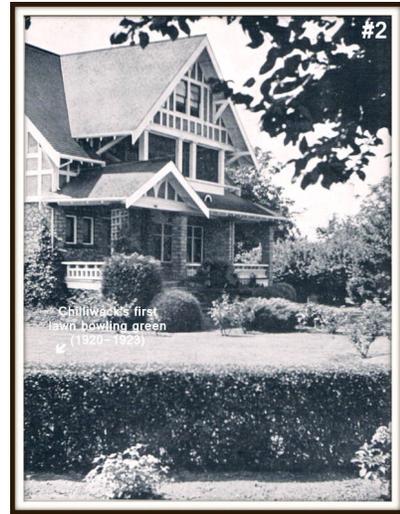
#14 – This image, facing southwest towards the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club, was taken from the high-rise residential structure located near the northwest corner of Princess Avenue and Mary Street. (Image Credit: Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club)

#15 – This is a current shot of the Club’s locker room, located on the lower level of the Club’s building on Edward Street. Many decades of lawn bowling preparation, discussions, and camaraderie have taken place within these four walls. (Image Credit: Chilliwack History Perspectives Collection)

#16 – This 2012 street-level image shows the bowling green and the clubhouse of the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club, facing southeast from the intersection of Edward Street and Princess Avenue. (Image Credit: Chilliwack History Perspectives Collection)

#17 – The Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club’s 2015 season is now underway, and here is a recent shot of some members enjoying a game on a sunny morning. The formal ‘all white’, or shirt-and-tie dress codes of yesteryear are now a thing of the past, as comfort and informality are now themes of the Club. (Image Credit: Chilliwack History Perspectives Collection)

#18 – This final image gives an idea of the passion that lawn bowling has inspired over the centuries. The painting depicts events of July 19, 1588, over 430 years ago. Specifically, it represents one of the most famous lawn bowling matches in history. Sir Francis Drake, the legendary English naval hero, and his troops were preparing to meet the invasion of the Spanish Armada, and thus stave off the conquering of England. Sir Drake was also an avid lawn bowler. While lawn bowling that day at Plymouth Hoe on the English Channel, he was urgently advised that the Spanish Armada was in sight, and rapidly approaching English soil. Immortally, he was then quoted as saying, “We still have time to finish the game and to thrash the Spaniards, too.” Sir Drake then finished the match, which he lost, before embarking on the fight with the Armada, which he won. This dramatic and telling moment was captured in this famous painting, in which Sir Drake is preparing to throw his bowl, while to the left of the image, one of his lieutenants is pointing to the approaching Spanish Armada. A copy of this painting hangs in the clubhouse of the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club. (Image Credit: britishbattles.com)



**K. A. Boyd Is New #7
President Chilliwack
Lawn Bowling Club**

The 12th annual meeting of the Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club was held at the City hall Wednesday, about forty members being in attendance. The retiring president, Chas. Fox, in his annual report, gave an outline of the club's activities, which showed that an enjoyable and profitable time had been had by all.

Chas. Fox, retiring president, and Ward Sharp, retiring secretary-treasurer, who had faithfully looked after their official duties for the past two years, regretted their inability to take on these duties for another term, and their resignations were reluctantly accepted and a hearty vote of thanks accorded them and all retiring officers for the efficient manner in which they had carried out their duties.

Other officers also reported, showing that the club was a real asset to the community.

Election of officers for 1934 resulted as follows: K. A. Boyd, president; H. J. Harding, vice-president; A. Manfield, secretary-treasurer. Executive: J. Mallot, C. J. Whittaker, S. Creasey, J. W. Fletcher, C. H. Fogg, C. Mitchell, B. W. Harris, J. C. Johnson.

Skips for 1934: A. H. Turvey, J. C. Johnson, W. Sharp, R. B. Sutherland, C. J. Whittaker, J. Mallot, H. C. Fox, P. H. Wilson, K. A. Boyd, J. McConnell, D. Richardson, B. T. Malcolm, C. Parker, H. J. Harding, E. C. Smith.

The opening day has been set for Wednesday, May 9, when the annual classic, President vs. Vice-President teams will engage.

It is rumored that the club will have a new clubhouse, and the lighting effects are due for improvement.

The ladies' club started last year shows signs of steady growth. The club extends hearty greetings to any lady or gentleman who would like to spend an enjoyable afternoon or evening at one of the prettiest places in Chilliwack.

#8

Twenty-first Annual

OFFICIAL OPENING

Chilliwack Lawn Bowling Club

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6

2:30 p.m.

Everybody welcome. Refreshments served.

Greens situated opposite Drill Hall.

Wm. Dusterhoef, Secretary.



