

The Origin of Canada's Official National Winter Sport from Hurley on Ice to Ice Hockey

By Dr. Garth Vaughan

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Nova Scotia was still a British Colony at the time that the Irish game of Hurling was introduced to boys at Canada's first college, King's College School in Windsor, N.S. back around 1800, the school having been established by United Empire Loyalists in 1788. The first Principal of King's College School was an Irishman named William Cochran, who had been educated in Ireland and left to come to America for the express purpose of teaching youth. He began at King's College, New York, but, following the American Revolution, left for Nova Scotia. The Rev. William Cochran D.D. was born in Omagh in County Tyrone and was educated at Trinity College Dublin. For more than 40 years he was a Missionary of the Church of England and a Professor in King's College, Windsor. According to his great granddaughter, Mary Cochrane in 1916, William was a fiery graduate of Trinity College Dublin and was full of Irish Nationalism. His political opinions and cantankerous temper took him to New York and as a mark of his displeasure with the Government and his family he shed the last letter of his name on the voyage in 1784, so you will find William Cochran, without the "e".

The name of King's College, New York was changed to Columbia College and then to Columbia University, thus freeing up the name of King's College. Here, he accepted the position of Principal of Nova Scotia's new King's College at Windsor. During his time in that position, the Irish game of Hurling, the world's fastest field game, caught the imagination of college school boys who adapted it to the ice of their favorite frozen skating ponds and created a new game of Hurley on Ice which developed into Ice Hockey, using flat wooden pucks rather than the conventional Irish ball/sliotar.

The Nova Scotia game of Ice Hockey was taken to Montreal by James George Aylwin Creighton of Halifax in 1872, where it was first played as an "organized game" on March 3rd, 1875. Just recently, in Montreal, a monument has been placed to honor both J.G.A.Creighton and the site of that so-called "first game of organized hockey".

As the game spread beyond Montreal, it was next played in Ontario. At Ottawa, the Governor General at the time was an Englishman appointed by the Crown, named Lord Frederick Stanley of Preston. He and his wife had eight sons and three daughters. Two of the sons, Edward and Arthur played Ice Hockey with an Ottawa team made up of senators and aides-de-camp, called the Rideau Hall Rebels. This team was a predecessor to the present NHL team called the Ottawa Senators. The Rebels competed with other Ontario teams. Lord Stanley allowed the Rebels to use his private rail car to travel to other towns for Ice Hockey matches. Lady Stanley was also thrilled with the game and tried her hand at it by playing with a women's amateur team in Ottawa. Governor General Stanley was so fascinated by the game and the involvement of his sons and political friends with Ice Hockey that he had an associate purchase for him in Britain, a

silver rose bowl, a mere seven inches tall, at a cost of \$48.67, that would serve as a championship trophy for Senior Amateur Hockey in Canada in 1893. At that time, Ontario was as far as the game had progressed in its trek west across the country from Nova Scotia.

Lord Stanley's position as Governor General of Canada ended in 1893 and he and his family returned to England. Two years later, he captained a team that challenged the Royal family to a game of Ice Hockey on the grounds of Buckingham Palace. Four of his sons played in that game including Arthur and Edward who had played in Canada. This adds a note of interest regarding the international spread of the game which is also of historical significance, for today the game is played in all parts of the world. In 1908 the Lord Stanley Trophy became the Stanley Cup, symbolic of Professional Senior Hockey Championship in Canada.

Ice Hockey reached Winnipeg by 1890 and quickly became accepted and firmly entrenched as the favorite winter sport in the west. One other fact of historic interest is that the game was played on natural ice surfaces all across the country until it reached British Columbia where the warm climate did not allow for natural ice. Therefore artificial ice was required. That happened in 1911 when the now legendary "Patrick brothers" of Nelson, B.C., Frank and Lester Patrick built the Victoria Arena and Vancouver's Denman Arena. They also enticed eastern hockey players to join them, and established the Pacific Coast Hockey Association. As Canada was building from east to west, they established Ice Hockey on the West Coast. In the 1914-15 season, the Vancouver Millionaires under the guidance of playing coach and manager Frank Patrick won the Stanley Cup.

With the Stanley Cup now known the world over, the Ireland Monument currently being designed for Stanley Park (opened by Lord Stanley on October 29th, 1889), Vancouver will pay tribute to the Irish origins of ice hockey.