

# The First Canadian Canoe Championships - August 4, 1900

By: C. Fred Johnston

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*"A splendid course, glorious sunshine, a refreshing breeze and thrilling finishes were the chief features which went to make the first annual regatta of the Canadian Canoe Association held at Brockville Saturday afternoon, an unqualified success."*

On Monday the sixth, the Bohemian Club would hold its annual picnic with the associated activities - canoeing, rowing and running races - activities befitting one of the foremost athletic clubs of the city. But the highlight of the weekend had to be the Canadian Canoe Association Championship Regatta that was to commence at 2:30 on Saturday afternoon. It was an honour for Brockville, that it was chosen to host this first ever event.

The formative meeting which led to the first C.C.A. had taken place in the same city some three months previous, when a representative gathering from Eastern Ontario and Quebec canoe clubs brought the new association into being. That historic event had taken place on Saturday, May 12th, in the most prominent hotel on the main street of Brockville. Located on the corner of King and Market Streets across from the imposing limestone City Hall, was the equally impressive Revere House, which in its long history had sheltered many notable meetings, but none more important than this meeting of canoeists.

The call for the founding meeting at Revere House was the outcome of a number of meetings called by a local group of paddling enthusiasts - W.C. MacLaren, C.A. McNaughton, J.B. McCaw, Brockville Rowing Club; L.E. Murphy, A.G. Davie, H.R. Gorrell, The Bohemian Club; George Wright, Nelson Abbott, and J. Cuthbertson, the Y.M.C.A. They gathered on Tuesday, April third, at the Y.M.C.A. parlors to discuss the formation of a local war canoe league. Consideration of a local league had been the consequence of a rather poor reception the American Canoe Association had given to a request for greater emphasis on war canoe racing within that association. Since 1880, when the A.C.A. had formed, it had been composed of three divisions, one of which was the Northern Division that included all of Canada. (In fact, almost all of the Canadian clubs were clustered around the Toronto-St. Lawrence River region with pockets of enthusiasm in areas such as Ottawa and Montreal.)

The preliminary discussion of April third, prompted another meeting for April 10, by which time contact had been made with clubs in the Montreal and Ottawa areas to see how receptive they were to the idea of a regional war canoe league. When discussions resumed on April 10, a letter was read from the honorary secretary of the Britannia Boating Club in Ottawa, which embodied a resolution favouring a scheme recently approved at a joint meeting of the Ottawa and Britannia boating clubs. The resolution, calling for a meeting of regional clubs, to found a war canoe league was endorsed by the Brockville group and the recording secretary, J.B. McCaw, was instructed to communicate a date and place for the meeting, at which time the rules and regulations governing the races could be drawn up.

In the midst of planning for the founding meeting, word was received from a group in Carleton Place that a club was in the offing in that village and they would be interested in joining the league. Accordingly, they were invited to attend the meeting called for Revere House on May 12, 1900, along with eight other clubs.

Assembling in the parlor of the four-storied, grey stone structure on that Saturday morning, was a dedicated group of canoeists: E.A. Black, Ottawa Canoe Club; E. R. McNeill, Britannia Boat House Club; H.S. Seamen and V. Hanna, Brockville Y.M.C.A.; E.W. Jones, C.A. McNaughton and W.C. MacLaren, Brockville Rowing Club; A.G. Davie, F. Black, F.R. Robinson and G. Howison, Bohemian Amateur Athletic Association; and James Powell and A.P. Drummond, Grand Trunk Boating Club. Interested, but unable to attend were representatives of the Lachine Canoe Club of Montreal and the Kingston Yacht Club. The Lachine Club arranged for J.B. McCaw of Brockville to represent them by proxy.

The meeting appointed C.A. McNaughton of Brockville as chairman and E.R. McNeill of the Britannia Club as secretary. (McNeill was a logical choice because in preparation for the meeting he had drafted a constitution which the assembly was to alter in minor ways only.)

Consideration of aims, objectives and programmes of the proposed association consumed the best part of the day. It was soon agreed that the organisation should be more than a war canoe league - but in any case was not to be in opposition to the American Canoe Association to which they all belonged. The delegates were no doubt concerned about the lack of response from the central Ontario clubs. However, their reluctance to participate in the Brockville meeting was understandable, as the incumbent Commodore of the A.C.A. in 1900 was William G. McKendrick of Toronto. (Dating back to 1880, it was traditional for the A.C.A. executive to rotate among the three divisions and, in 1900, it was the turn of the Northern Division.)

Having agreed upon a constitution and the laws of canoe racing, the founding convention dissolved itself and in accordance with the constitution they had approved, an executive committee was formed, one representative from each club. Named to the first executive committee of the Canadian Canoe Association by the nine founding clubs were:

**Ernest A. Black** - Ottawa Canoe Club  
**Edward R. McNeill** - Britannia Boat House Club  
**Archie McPhee** - Carleton Place Canoe Club  
**James Powell** - Grand Trunk Boating Club  
**John Mowat** - Kingston Yacht Club  
**H.S. Seamen** - Brockville Y.M.C.A.  
**C.A. McNaughton** - Brockville Rowing Club  
**Andrew G. Davie** - Bohemian Amateur Athletic Club  
To be appointed - Lachine Canoe Club

Duly elected as association officials were E.A. Black of Ottawa Canoe Club, Commodore; C.A. McNaughton of Brockville Rowing Club, Rear Commodore and E.R. McNeill of Ottawa Britannia Boat House Club as Secretary-Treasurer.

Considerable business was transacted at that first meeting but of the most significance were the details of the first C.C.A. regatta. Decided upon at that time, was the approximate date for the races, early August, and the site, Brockville, Ontario. Whereupon the Bohemian Club was selected as the host club, with the associated responsibilities.



*Bohemian Club, 1900*

Between May 12 and August fourth, the Bohemians, with the co-operation of the other two local clubs, prepared for the first C.C.A. The weekend of August fourth was selected probably in the hope that a few visitors would remain over till the Monday to embellish the annual Bohemian Picnic competitions. A schedule of events was agreed upon and with the usual appeal for public support, prizes were obtained for the various events.

### **Schedule of Events**

Event No. 1

Championship Race - Single Canoe: Double-Blade. Geo. P. Graham, M.P.P. Cup and G.G. Lafayette Medal

Event No. 2

Championship Race - War Canoe Banner and 15 individual prizes

Event No. 3

Championship Race - Single-Blade Canoe Medal

Event No. 4

Championship Race - Canoe Fours Trophy and Four Medals

Event No. 5

Exhibition for boys under 18 - Single Canoe: Double-Blade. Wm. Coates and Son Medal

Event No. 6

Championship Race - Single-Blade Tandem Trophy and Two Medals

Event No. 7

Exhibition - Upset Canoe Race, F.B. Steacy Cup

Event No. 8

Four-Oared Race for Bohemian Club Championship

Throughout July, the prizes were on display in the windows of local merchants. A particularly attractive display, using the local club colours, was arranged by Mr. J.H. Gaffney in the big window of the Robert Wright Store. (Robert Wright was the father of George Wright, the President of the Brockville Y.M.C.A. and the man who initiated the move to found the war canoe league.) Additional displays were located in the store windows of Woods' and Morrison's on the main street.

Local interest in the events was stimulated by reprints of information extracted from the local newspapers that covered the rival clubs. A number of items out of Ottawa suggested that the city would send a sizable complement to Brockville. In contrast, the situation in Kingston seemed undecided. The August first issue of the Kingston Whig reported that "in Kingston there is really no interest in canoeing," although the Yacht club had put out \$150 for a new war canoe that received little use to date. John Mowat squashed that rumour by announcing that Kingston would be represented in all events at the upcoming championships. The Brockville papers pounced on his comments and they were duly noted in the local paper.

No doubt considerable time was spent lining up the appropriate officials. E.A. Black, the Commodore, agreed to serve as umpire. William Percival of Britannia, was appointed chief judge, assisted by Andrew Davie of the Bohemian Club, and James Powell of Grand Trunk. W.J. Johnstone of Ottawa, F.B. Steacy and H.B. Coates of Brockville were called upon to assist with the timing. C.A. McNaughton and H.S. Seamen were appointed Clerks of the Course and F.A.C. Bickerdike, Chief Measurer. As a measure of the influence of the local organisers, W.H. Comstock, the local M.P. was availed upon to donate his steam yacht Albani for the use of the regatta officials.

A celebration party was not forgotten! The host Bohemian Club planned an evening social at which time the winners would receive their due rewards. Planning seemed to go well. On Friday evening, August third, the reception committee met in the Y.M.C.A. parlours and reviewed the arrangements for the visiting paddlers. No untoward comments and/or problems were noted in the daily papers.

The first canoeists to arrive came by train from Montreal early Friday evening. Early Saturday morning - Regatta Day - the Kingston contingent - all four - arrived by mail steamer from the Limestone City and about 11 a.m. a special train with approximately 600 paddlers and friends arrived from the Carleton-Ottawa area.

Fourth on the schedule was canoe fours with entries from: Britannia: E.R. McNeil, A. Lynch, L. Turcotte, R. Percival; Grand Trunk: C.W. McLean, C.N. Marshall, A. Marshall, A. Veary; Ottawa: F.H. Clayton, A.F. Sixsmith, J.H. Lawless, A. Clayton; and a Kingston entry, J. McD. Mowat, G.F. Dalton, R.E. Burns, H. Britton. Kingston started very fast, took the lead, only to be overtaken by Ottawa. Grand Trunk came on at the end to overtake Ottawa for first place leaving Britannia to come in third ahead of Kingston. The race took 4.09 3/5 minutes.

The exhibition race in double-blade singles canoe for boys under 18 turned into a "no contest" with Pulford of Britannia leading Walsh of Carleton Place to the finish in a procession-like fashion in the time of 5:22.

Next to the war canoe race, the single-blade tandem event aroused the most interest. Entered were: J. Percival and G.R. McNeil, Britannia; J. Percy Grand and Ira McLean, Y.M.C.A.; A. McPhee and George Cornell, Carleton Place; A.L. Marshall and C.N. Marshall, Grand Trunk; R.W. Patterson and G. Mumford,

Ottawa; E. Clayton and P. Mainguy, Ottawa; (Undetermined), Kingston. Like the war canoe race, this also turned into a very close contest with Mainguy and Clayton of Ottawa coming out on top in a time of 4.45.

Because there was only one entry, the upset canoe race was not held. The final event - the exhibition four-oared race for the championship of the Bohemian Club - ended the first Canadian Championship Regatta. Remaining was the party and the presentation of prizes to the winners at the Bohemian social that evening at eight. The 41st Regimental Band provided the musical entertainment, the Commodore Black made the presentations to the first Canadian Canoe Association Champions:

**Harvey Pulford**

Brockville Rowing Club  
Single Canoe, Double-Blade

**Captain Frank Black**

Bohemian Club  
War Canoe

**H.B. Cowan**

Ottawa Canoe Club  
Single-Blade Canoe

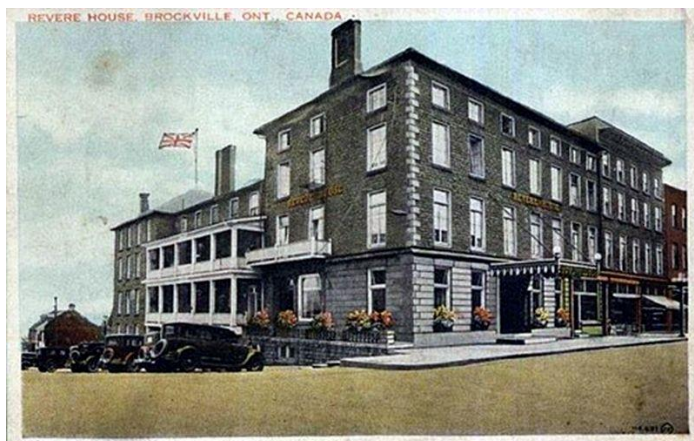
**Charlie W. McLean, Charles N. Marshall, Alex Veary, Arthur L. Marshall**

Grand Trunk Boating Club  
Canoe Fours

**E. Hawley Clayton and Phil N. Mainguy**

Ottawa Canoe Club  
Single-Blade Tandem

An exhaustive day on the water, the music, the fellowship of other paddlers, all made for an enjoyable party, but for a large number, that could not be - at least not in Brockville. The Ottawa crowd whose excursion train had to leave for home at 9 pm left the party early, and one could imagine that, in addition to the prizes, they took an element of the Saturday evening festivities away with them as they endured the long journey north.



*Revere Hotel  
1910*

Perhaps it was the party which drew them away, or it could have been the customary fatigue that sets in after a day in the sun on the water; in any case the founding fathers failed to turn up for the executive meeting scheduled for that evening. They had earned their night of celebration and merriment. Had they not founded a new national association? Could they not feel satisfaction and pride on the successful completion of the first ever C.C.A.

There were some who would say that it was a "modest" regatta - only five championship races - (and a couple of those races were less than spectacular) hardly anything to compare with the annual A.C.A. canoe competitions. For that reason, there must have been some speculation on the future of the association as those who took part wound their way home. Could a sport which seemed to grow from the very origins of Canada ever become a popular activity? Would the tide of professionalism roll over canoeing as it seemed to be doing to many other amateur sports? Could other clubs be enticed to join? Would the association expand beyond the Montreal-Ottawa-St. Lawrence triangle? So many questions... so many unknowns... so much building to do.

Only time would tell if their plans were well made, if their dreams would materialize. Just as the war canoe was the reason for wanting an association, surely the sight of those 90 paddles splashing in unison was reason enough to make it succeed. And succeed it would.

### ***Through the waters to friendship.***

*\* Pictures of the Brockville area are from the book "Brockville, A Pictorial History" by Adrian G. Ten Cote and H. Christinia MacNaughton.*