

# The Cottingham Story



**Harold Strom**

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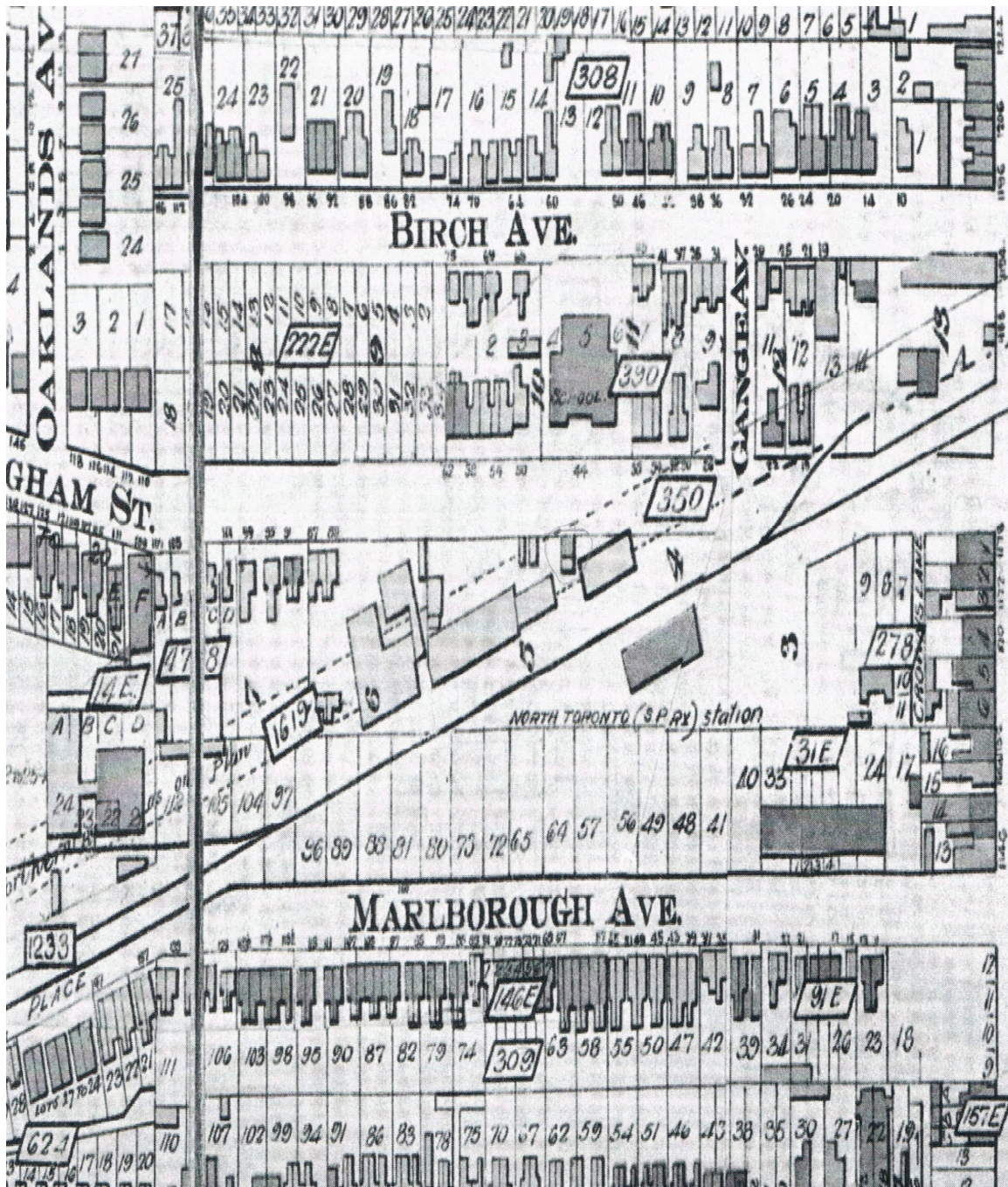
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## **Provenance**

Contrary to popular belief amongst old-timers of the Cottingham Tennis Club, neither the Toronto Street Railway Company (which used horses to pull its trams) nor the Toronto Railway Company (which used electricity) had anything whatever to do with the provenance of the property on which the club sits. It was commonly believed that before it had been acquired by the CNRA for use as a clubhouse for its recreational activities, the property had housed the business offices and stables of the Toronto Street Railway Company and that it was, in fact, those stables that had been converted into the locker and shower facilities of the club. This erroneous belief may have been born in the notion that, since the Yonge Street tramline ended at Cottingham Street, it followed logically that the nearby property would have been a suitable place to house the business office and stables of the company. However, the last horse-drawn tram ran up Church Street in 1894. And since no buildings whatsoever had appeared on that part of Cottingham Street until 1891, it is safe to assume that it was unconnected to Toronto's transportation system.

According to the Toronto City Directory, previously to 1890, all the property west of 89 Cottingham St. to Avenue Road was listed as "vacant land and stables." The first mention of property ownership at 109 Cottingham Street, the site of the club, was in 1891 with the appearance of the Ireland National Food Company, "millers and manufacturers of Cereal Food, Oatmeal, Rolled Wheat, etc., S.F. McKinnon, pres." The property continued under Ireland's ownership until 1906 when the name changed to P. McIntosh and Son, Millers and Cereals. All the land to the west of this property up to Avenue Road remained vacant.

In 1912, the land was registered in the name of Canadian Cereal and Milling Company Ltd. whose head office was on Adelaide St. E. And in 1919, 109 Cottingham Street was inhabited by Standard Fuel Company, coal and wood, whose head office was on King St. W. It is eminently reasonable to assume that the business conducted on the property, which land surveys in the early 1900s show housing multiple storage-like buildings, would have had need of stables for horses to draw their goods wagons and that those stables, rather than the stables of the Toronto Street Railway Company, were what eventually became change facilities for the tennis club.



Goads Fire Map plan for 1912. Note storage- and factory-like buildings along the railway right-of-way. Note also the small building fronting onto Cottingham St. (to the left of the 350 sign) which became the clubhouse of the CNRA and remained essentially unchanged until it was torn down in 1993.

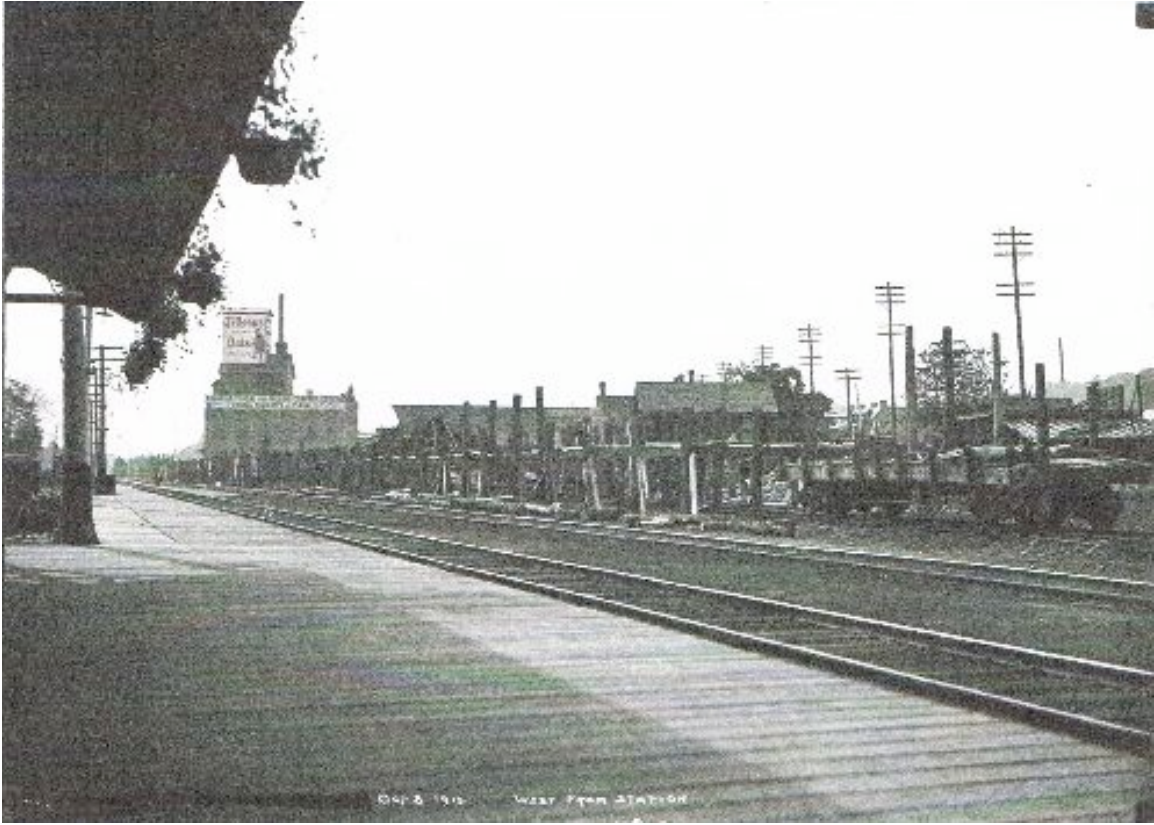
In 1912 and 1913, the Canadian Pacific Railway undertook to replace all the level crossings on its mainline across the city. For many years there had been a CP station on Marlborough Ave. just west of Yonge St., almost directly opposite where the tennis club would eventually reside on Cottingham St. (see map). When embankments were built for the railway (and

underpasses on Yonge St. and Avenue Rd.), the property which houses the tennis club no longer had direct access to the railway and, accordingly, was no longer so convenient for use as a grain or coal storage facility.

In 1922, the properties at 105 and 109 Cottingham St. were registered to the Canadian National Recreation Association. For all intents and purposes, the land continued to belong to the CNRA until 1987, although its use as a recreational facility by railway employees diminished over the years until not a single employee/member remained.



View along Cottingham St. west from Yonge circa 1900. Note the CPR station on the left behind which a grain elevator can be seen, presumably on the property where the tennis club now stands. Notice the bell tower of Cottingham Public School on the right. [Photo courtesy of City of Toronto Archives.]



View west from the CP station platform. Note the piles on the right in preparation for the forthcoming railway grade change. [Photo courtesy of City of Toronto Archives.]

## The Canadian National Recreation Association

Six red clay tennis courts were laid down in the mid-1920s when tennis was on the cusp of becoming a very glamorous and popular sport. Unfortunately, however, no records or photos of the period seem to have survived, nor does any of the current membership have any recollection of events before the advent of Charles Portanier in 1964.



There are a couple of surviving artifacts from the 1930s (shown above). The cup on the left is known as the Ontario Athletic Commission 1930 Toronto Public Utilities Tennis League. The small plaques are inscribed Team Prize for Annual Competition. Won by C.N.R.A 1930; Won by H.E.P.C. 1931; Won by C.N.R.A 1932; Won by C.N.R.A 1933; Won by C.S.A. 1934; Won by H.E.P.C 1935; Won by C.N.R.A 1936. (I guess that

since the last winner was the CNRA, the cup remained in possession of the club and was taken into safekeeping by Pam Portanier, wife of Charles.)

The right-hand cup, whose provenance is completely unknown, is called The St. Thomas Trophy. It is inscribed: CNRL Tennis, Open Tournament, Men's Singles. In 1931 and 1932 it was won by P.C. Southern of St. Thomas; in 1933 it was won A.L Wilson of Toronto; in 1934 by C. Brown; and in 1935 again by A.L. Wilson. Presumably, the CNRA at the time had a separate contingent in St. Thomas, which competed with other CNRA groups in Ontario.

According to a document obtained from the National Archives of Canada,<sup>\*</sup> there appears to have been an effort by the railway to sell the property in 1945 or 1946. In a letter dated Oct. 4, 1946, the president of CNRA declares that "the railway-owned property on Cottingham St. is not for sale at the present time." The writer, whose name is not given, says that he believes it would be in the best interests of the company (CNR) "to encourage the perpetuation of the Toronto CNRA which operates the tennis and clubroom facilities on Cottingham St."

Apparently, even then, the CNRA depended on the tennis club to subsidize the other activities of the organization: annual fees for CN employees was \$4 while those for associate members was \$10. Associate membership (i.e. those people who had no direct involvement with CN) was deemed essential for the maintenance of a viable tennis club because their aggregate fees amounted to "a justification for the company to continue paying taxes on the property" which, in 1946, amounted to \$498.97.

In another letter, dated Feb. 26, 1957, a statement of accounts for 1957 was submitted to the company. The statement reports that the total expenditure for maintenance of the courts and clubhouse amounted to just over \$3000. To make ends meet, a fee of \$16 per annum was levied on associate members while employees paid \$7. It seems clear that, of the approximately 2000 CNRA members, not enough of them played tennis to justify the expenditure, thus making it necessary to allow associate membership to make up the shortfall in revenues.

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\* Since Canadian National Railways was run under federal auspices, all documentation related to the railway and its associated organizations are housed in Ottawa.



It is clear that, during its early years, the tennis club was not run as an entity separate from the other activities of the CNRA. It was not until it became apparent that CN employees were no longer interested in tennis and that the great bulk of membership was comprised of associate members, that it began to take on a life of its own. I do not know how it came about that the CNRA ceased taking a primary interest in the club's management nor how Charles Portanier came to be its president, but in 1964 he was elected and the modern age of the tennis club began.

### **“King Charles’ Golden Days”**

Charles Portanier was elected club president in 1964. He remained in that position, mostly unopposed, until 1979. Charles could be difficult, rigid and autocratic. He was almost solely responsible for selecting those who were allowed to become members and those who were not; his selections were almost invariably based upon personal preference. The rules by which he ran the club were often arbitrary but usually consistent. He insisted upon proper tennis wear—whites only in the early days—and proper tennis decorum. He did not accommodate challenge to his rules; you could argue about the reasonableness of some of those rules, but you could never win.

But despite Charles’ rather eccentric leadership, the club was a very happy place to play. People were clamouring to get in. Each year, mobs would show up on admissions day to be interviewed by Charles. There were over 250 members and a waiting list of many more. It often took several years to become a member or, depending upon Charles’ inclinations, maybe never.

Often courts were so booked up that one had to wait for two hours in order to play for 30 minutes. But it didn't matter; one didn't mind hanging around the whole day because the atmosphere was so electric and social, and there were often great matches to watch. One valuable asset the CNRA had which the present club does not, was an easily accessible and generous greensward where people could gather and socialize. Many opportunities for socialization presented themselves as the club sponsored many round robins and tournaments.

The 1960s and 70s were “golden days” for tennis and the CNRA was one of the magnets of the new enthusiasm. It attracted many first rate players

and its men's and ladies' teams did consistently well in the Toronto Tennis League circuit. In 1965, not only did the club host the Toronto and District Tennis Championships, but one of its members, Detlev Nitsche, won the men's singles championship. And the following year, one Joe Oscanca reached the semi-finals of the Leaside Tennis Championships.

Fees were low, as little as \$75 per adult member as late as 1979. Perhaps Charles' greatest strength lay in his relations with the CNRA executive which were cordial and businesslike. Fifty percent of tennis membership fees were given to the CNRA in return for which, it maintained the courts and paid the caretakers. The arrangement proved very beneficial to the CNRA as the tennis club fees subsidized many of the CNRA's other activities. It proved beneficial for the club as well, because when, in 1979, the time came to resurface the courts and provide new lighting, the CNRA proved willing to finance the project.





Always lots of activity in the CNRA days. (Photos courtesy Pam Portanier)



"King" Charles and his Court: Keith Smith and Frank Richman.



Doubles champs and runners-up: Howard Simpson, Dave Cresswell, Mike Koci, Keith Smith.

## 1979

1979 proved to be a very eventful year for the tennis club; many changes occurred, some of which foreshadowed the great upheavals of the late 1980s.

In early March, Charles sent a letter to the members informing them that the playing surface of the courts would have to be changed; after about 50 years of use, the red clay surface was about to disappear. Charles reported that the supplier of the material could no longer obtain red clay because its manufacture had ceased in Ontario. After investigation, Charles discovered only two possible options to replace the existing surface: Hartru, a synthetic clay which was imported and expensive and Tenntop, a locally manufactured product which was, according to Charles, almost identical to Hartru but less costly to purchase.

Charles approached the CNRA executive with his proposal to purchase the cheaper material and, to their credit, the executive approved the

very considerable expense required to purchase 116 tons of the stuff and to acquire the labour and machinery to resurface the courts. New poles, nets and tapes, etc. were also required. It was anticipated that the new surface would be “compacted to a depth of 1/2”.” Since a significant portion of the operating revenue of the CNRA came from tennis club memberships, it behooved them to be gracious in the matter.

Work was slated to commence when weather permitted in early April and Charles predicted that it would be completed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of May necessitating a later opening than usual. Charles proposed adding a surcharge of \$25 to the annual fees to help defray the costs of the renovation.

Charles undoubtedly intended to do the best he could for the club and its members, but by simply laying a new surface on top of the old clay he unwittingly perpetuated a problem that had existed for a long time. After so many years of use and compression by a roller each season, the clay surface had become so compacted as to be almost as impermeable as concrete. As a consequence, any substantial rainstorm would leave the courts flooded and often out of play for several days. This condition was not improved simply by the laying of a new surface.





Laying the new surface on top of the old red clay. Note the brand new town houses under construction on Sydney St. to the left. (Photos courtesy Pam Portanier)



The new courts in use. Note the almost universal adherence to Charles' whites-only policy.



Tournaments attracted many spectators. Note the old clubhouse change rooms that had been in constant use for over 50 years. Note also, on the right, that limited parking on site was available for members.

The new courts eventually opened and proved to be a great success for the members despite continuing drainage problems. New halogen lights were also installed. While a few neighbours protested the increased illumination, for the most part, the neighbourhood accepted the changes to the club as an enhancement to the community. In all, the CNRA spent more than \$30,000 on the improvements. The president of the CNRA conceded, rather shamefacedly, that the Association had “drained a lot of capital from the tennis club” and that it was time to put a little back.

At the annual general meeting that October, Charles was very upbeat about the changes to the club and, despite ongoing problems with groundspeople, said that he “was thrilled and honoured to have been able to run the club as Chairman for the past fifteen years and bring it to the success that it is.” Despite the universal accolades and wholehearted approval by the membership for his work for the club, when it came time to reelect him as president, an opponent, David Cresswell, was placed in nomination. This may have been the first time in 15 years that Charles had not been reelected by acclamation.

David Cresswell was a longstanding member of the club who had phoned all his friends to “come out and vote” to get himself elected president. He also brought along proxies from supporters who were unable to attend the meeting. Tired of Charles’ idiosyncratic control over membership—all new members had to be individually interviewed and accepted or refused under Charles’ personal criteria—Dave wanted to open the membership to a more eclectic group of people. He said that he objected “to the manner in which the members were taken into the club.” He felt that there should be a waiting-list and perhaps a membership committee, although he agreed that “there were reasons why one should want to be selective.” He also stated that “[o]ne person should not be burdened with the responsibility of who gets in each year.”

Despite the chair’s refusal to admit Dave’s proxies, he was elected president for the 1980 season. Thus ended the long reign of “King Charles” and a new era in the club’s history began.

As the 1980s wore on, a series of presidents succeeded Dave Cresswell, one of whom, Dave Brown, persuaded the CNRA to do a proper job of renovating the courts by a complete parging. Accordingly, about four feet of material—all the old red clay—was dug up and replaced by proper layers of stones and sand for drainage and topped by about six inches of Hartru. New fences were also installed. With a new playing surface, the club continued to prosper, but dark clouds were forming on our horizon as the CNR’s mandate began to change.



Dave Cresswell, the new president



## **CN/CP vs. The Neighbourhood**

Because the dealings amongst railways have always been arcane and not open to scrutiny, it is hard to explain why the lands inhabited by the tennis courts belonged to both CP and CN. All of courts 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 belonged to CN while the caretaker's residence and part of court 1 belonged to CP. By the same token, the most northerly railway track extending "approximately from Salem Avenue (west of Dovercourt) to [a] point west of Yonge Street" belonged to CN while the other lines belonged exclusively to CP. While the railways made their own dispositions as to use of the tracks, there remained a matter of rationalization of ownership.

Accordingly, around 1970 CN decided it had "no further requirement" for the railway track and was willing to sell those lands to CP; it did, however, wish to keep its rights to the lands on which the tennis courts lay. Because the two parcels were contiguous, CN was required to make application to Toronto's Committee of Adjustment to sever them .

When the neighbours got wind of CN's application to the Committee of Adjustment, they immediately became suspicious of the railways' motives in desiring the split. They had never liked CP as a neighbour and constantly complained, amongst other things, about their neglect of the right-of-way and the increasing levels of noise. They worried that the transfer of CN's rights to the track might lead to increased traffic with the possible addition of a CP commuter line. They were also suspicious that CN's application for severance was the first step toward an attempt to rezone the tennis court lands for redevelopment.

Although CN insisted that "no change in uses is contemplated," the neighbours vigorously opposed the application which was made in September 1971. The local residents' association, the East Escarpment Association (later the Cottingham Square Community Association), complained that CN had been inconsiderate over the years, especially in the matter of parking which caused congestion and was "hazardous to area children." They also demanded that CP "give a clear statement of the proposed use of the severed railway track."

The Committee of Adjustment dismissed CN's application and there the matter rested until 1977 when CN reapplied for severance. Once again, the CSCA, with the help of local aldermen, opposed the application. The

hearing was held on March 22, 1977. It was the finding of the Committee of Adjustment that:

the proposed severance is a matter of considerable concern to the residents of the area who are particularly concerned as to the future of the property being used as a private club. The Committee has endeavoured to obtain an undertaking regarding the future of the private club and is advised at the present time there are no plans for the re-development of this property, which [is] not required for railway purposes. At the same time however, the Committee is also advised the property is included in a catalogue of property which [is] surplus to the needs of Canadian National Railway, and that it may well be that at some time in the future, Canadian National management will instruct the real estate department to dispose of the subject property by way of a long-term lease, sale or exchange basis. In dealing with an application for severance, the Committee is required to have regard for those matters set out in Section 33, sub-section 4, which includes the Committee's responsibilities to have regard among other matters, to the health, safety, convenience and welfare of the future inhabitants and as to whether or not the proposed subdivision is premature and necessary in the public interest. In this instance the Committee is of the firm view that the proposed sub-division is premature and is not necessarily in the public interest in that the future use of the property cannot be established at this time.

CN appealed the decision to the Ontario Municipal Board which brought down its decision in April, 1978. In a preamble to its decision, the O.M.B. summarized some of the history of the property, stating that it had been used as "a dairy or coal company" before being acquired by the old Canadian Northern in 1910, which railway had "presumably found it expedient to acquire this parcel as excess lands when they were acquiring their right-of-way."

In noting the two primary objections to the application, the O.M.B. ruled that in the first—the complaint that the severance would allow increased traffic on the railway line—it was powerless to affect CP's use of the additional line since it had already been using it since 1969. In the second—that severance, under existing zoning, would permit the construction of approximately 40 townhouses—the O.M.B. ruled that "in view of the many years that the parcel has been presently used, the residents should have some input into the form the development would take." The application, therefore, was dismissed.

## The Events of 1987

Of course, there is more than one way to skin a cat. Starting in the early 1980s, CN began selling off all the real estate that was not directly involved in the operation of its rail service. The property at 105/109 Cottingham Street was just such a piece of real estate. It is not known when CN Realty first offered the land on the market, but the neighbourhood awoke one spring morning to discover that the Badminton and Racquet Club of Toronto had made a \$1.7 million offer to CN Realty for the property. No conversation had taken place with any members of the tennis club nor had the neighbourhood residents' association, the CSCA, been informed of any pending change of ownership or land use. Wild rumours floated around the neighbourhood suggesting that the B & R was planning a satellite club for its St. Clair headquarters that would include a bubble for winter play and a large new premises for a change room and possible venue for partying. Of course, that would mean a huge increase in traffic and parking.

Needless to say, when it found out, the existing club membership was distraught; there was absolutely no way it could possibly raise sufficient funds to make a counter offer. An emergency meeting was called but it led to recrimination and hysteria and a botched election in which *two* presidents were chosen to try and find a solution to the dilemma. Members were asked to contribute \$500 to a war chest; about 50 did so and these became the first of those CNRA members invited to join the Cottingham Tennis Club.

The CSCA also rose up in arms and demanded an explanation from CN Realty as to why their organization, which had so much at stake, was ignored during the negotiations. The neighbours had always had a rather edgy relationship with the tennis club, but despite relatively minor cavils and annoyances, like parking and lights, they rather liked having the tennis club in their bailiwick. First of all it lent a certain "tone" to the community: a private tennis club which members of the neighbourhood could join. Secondly, so long as it remained a designated recreational area (something that was highly desirable in downtown Toronto), the community did not have to deal with the possibilities of rezoning and development with all their attendant problems.

Rather belatedly, on July 27<sup>th</sup>, the executive of the B & R issued an open letter to the Cottingham area community outlining their plans for the tennis club. They insisted that they had no other intention but "to continue

the existing tennis club uses.” Their plans were to make relatively minor improvements, such as reducing the number of courts to five, increasing parking spaces from 9 to 16, retaining and refurbishing the clubhouse but eliminating the existing change facility and adding about 48 lockers to a new one. It also promised to improve the landscaping, fences and lights. Finally, they insisted that they had “no other plans for the site at the moment, nor for a winter bubble. If further changes emerge, the B&R Club would review those in cooperation with the Community Association and adjoining neighbours.”

In its final paragraph, the B & R letter insisted that the B & R Club would be “a responsible participant in the local community and [would] make every effort to deal with the needs and concerns of the various groups in the area.” In every way, it seems, except to invite anyone from the community or the CNRA to join the new entity or play tennis there.

Under the leadership of Patrick Martin, both a neighbourhood resident and a member of the tennis club, an emergency plan was instigated to circumvent the B & R. The first order of business was to try and discredit the B & R and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the sale. The second was a campaign by members of the community to try and raise the money to match the B & R’s offer.

The community had strong political support in City Hall, the provincial legislature and in Parliament. And because of Patrick Martin’s job at the Globe and Mail, an ear in the press. An article by well-known leftist journalist, Stevie Cameron appeared in the Globe on Nov. 26, 1987, under the headline, “Charge that club keeps Jews out heats up dispute over land.”

As we all know, community squabbles can get vicious and personal, so vicious and so personal that they burrow deep into the community folklore and fester for generations. Rarely, however, do these fights involve an exclusive private Toronto club, a well-heeled mid-town neighborhood, the Canadian National Railways and two federal Cabinet ministers.

I stumbled into this one innocently. Letters from the Badminton and Racquet Club, better known as the B & R, and from something called the Cottingham Community Club started arriving at the door. (Elsie Falconer, a B & R board member, was surprised we were getting the mail. “You’re on the wrong side of Avenue Road.”) But someone thought we were close enough to the Cottingham area to be worth lobbying.

It looked like an interesting fight. The Cottingham bunch were a group of successful mid-town residents who were strongly opposing the takeover of a small local, private tennis club by the nearby B & R which needs to expand its facilities. The CNR is involved because it owns the land in question and had agreed to lease it, with a purchase option, to the B & R.

The Cottingham group, which now has the support of the local ratepayers' association, won a postponement of the deal at City Hall this summer; they said increased traffic and noise would change their quiet neighborhood and endanger their children. The neighborhood group presented a counter-offer to the CNR, one matching the B & R's \$1.7-million offer.

So far, so good. Your average community flap except for the upscale nature of the combatants. The B & R, you see, is a 60-year-old club with 2,500 members, a seven-year waiting list and initiation fees of about \$6,000. The Cottingham group includes bank vice-presidents, lawyers, business people and some media people including Globe and Mail Focus editor Patrick Martin.

What makes this fight so emotional is that the Cottingham group claims the B & R has a restricted membership which does not permit Jews to join and they say a Crown corporation should not allow the sale or lease of land owned by the Canadian people to an anti-Semitic club.

"Many members of our community are outraged at the prospect of having in our neighbourhood a private club that has racist membership policies," says a statement by the Cottingham group to the CN board. That is why this file has landed on the desk of Transport Minister John Crosbie, who is responsible for CN. And Privatization and Status of Women Minister Barbara McDougall, the area's MP, has brought representatives of both groups together for a meeting tonight with CN officials.

The Cottingham community has many Jewish residents who are upset that a restricted club might move in. "I am concerned about my children's noses being pressed against fences of a club from which they are excluded for all time because of their religion," Joseph Hoffman said.

B & R officials vehemently deny the club is restricted. "That's so untrue," Ms Falconer said. "We've just taken in an Egyptian this year. Yes, it's largely Gentile because people tend to propose their friends but membership is open. The fact that Jews and blacks and Chinese don't try to apply does not mean the club is restricted."

B & R president Peter Barnard is just as angry. "The racism thing is categorically wrong," he said. "It's morally reprehensible. It's used as a tactic by those who wish to stop the deal." The B & R, he said, has no policy on Jews, "but like any club it has a membership process and current members nominate new members."

It takes time to change a club's membership, he said, but they hope to build a wider ethnic mix.

Still, neither Mr. Barnard nor Ms Falconer knows how many Jews belong to the B & R. Four or five is her guess; Mr. Barnard refused to speculate. Other sources say there are three, two of whom are married to long-time Gentile members. Two prominent B & R members plan to ask if the club discriminates at its annual general meeting in two weeks.

Local Liberal MPP Ron Kanter, a Jew, met a B & R delegation a few weeks ago to discuss the whole issue. "I told them I had a sense of passive discrimination from the club and suggested some steps they could take." He asked them to consider doing what Toronto's Granite Club did when it wanted zoning approval to move to new facilities in North York: Open the membership to Jews and other minorities.

So far, Mr. Kanter has not heard back from the B & R delegation. Mr. Barnard dismissed Mr. Kanter's concern that the delegation has not got back to him, saying that the question does not arise since the club is open. . . .

The CN board meets Tuesday to decide the issue. "We made a deal," Mr. Barnard said, "and if they back off we'll sue them." The CNR's president, Ronald Lawless, met this threat just as firmly. "There has been an agreement made between the CN and the B & R but all such agreements are subject to board approval. Mr. Barnard knows this."

CN's decision will send out a strong message, not just to two determined antagonists but to the whole country.

Naturally, the B & R reacted vigorously and heatedly. In a letter to the Globe, dated December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1987, Peter Barnard condemned the "tactics of a self-interested group trying to stop a legitimate business transaction." He claimed that a small group, lead by Patrick Martin, opposed the B & R proposal "for its own ends" and blocked attempts by the club to deal with the legitimate concerns of the community:

This technique of implying racist policies that don't exist, of using innuendo to alarm overly sensitive politicians, as well as stirring up a community by outright distortion of facts, was unfair to the Cottingham community. We have been concerned for many years that the membership of our club does not reflect the ethnic diversity of the community nor the attitudes and values of our membership. We are and have been encouraging our membership to nominate new members regardless of racial or ethnic background. However, with a no-growth policy and a seven-year waiting list, this change in membership unfortunately takes time.

Barnard's objections notwithstanding, Cameron's article and Martin's provocations encouraged members of the Cottingham community and ex-members of the CNRA to engage in a picket in front of the B & R's tony St. Clair and Yonge clubhouse. All this unwonted publicity thoroughly embarrassed the members of this upscale tennis and social club, and they demanded that the B & R rescind its offer to purchase the CNRA.

This left the second problem: How to raise money to purchase the property. Community activists managed to locate a developer who was willing to put up approximately \$1.4 million to purchase the frontage on Cottingham St. to build five townhouses. With that amount of money in hand, it only remained to gather a little over \$400,000 to match the B & R's offer to CN and have some left over to realign the courts and build a clubhouse. Accordingly, Patrick Martin undertook a campaign to interest the community in purchasing the club.

A nascent executive comprised of representatives from both the neighbourhood and the former CNRA proposed to raise the money by selling tennis memberships at a cost of \$2000 per household in the community and \$2000 per adult member of the CNRA (\$3000 per couple.) As matters turned out, the executive managed to sign up about 100 households and 50 ex-CNRA members and so accumulated about \$300,000.

At the same time, presumably because of pressure from members of Parliament and City of Toronto politicians, CN announced that it would reject the B & R's offer and "throw open the bidding for the Cottingham land to all comers." With no other offers on the table, however, CN proved willing to entertain an offer from the community association and even negotiate a little on the price.

At this point, having already engaged the interest of certain City politicians, the executive decided that it might be preferable to have the City purchase the land, deal with the sale of the frontage to a developer and lease the tennis courts to the club at a nominal rent. In this way, City expertise and influence could be brought to bear on the negotiations, the site would be preserved as a tennis facility in perpetuity, and realty taxes on the tennis court lands would not be payable in the future by club members. The City agreed to this proposal subject to a contribution of \$250,000 toward the purchase price by the club. For this consideration and the City's other indis-

pensable help, the club agreed to provide public access to the courts for limited hours each weekday morning and afternoon.

On June 17, 1988, City Council debated a report from the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation dealing with the “acquisition of premises” from the CNR of lands on Cottingham St. The report recognized that the negotiations between the CN and the City would probably go on for some time. Therefore, since CN was unwilling to lease directly to the club, the report recommended that the City accept a 4-month lease from CN Realty and offer to sub-lease it to the club. This would allow the club to be available for play in the 1988 season. CN promised to maintain the courts until their transfer and also undertook to “use its reasonable efforts to obtain” written consent from Canadian Pacific for the transfer of its portion of the lands. The report concluded that “[t]he leasing of this tennis facility from the CNR and licensing it to the Cottingham Tennis Club provides residents of the City with an unique opportunity to play tennis on tennis courts that would otherwise not be accessible to them at no capital cost to the taxpayers of Toronto.”

To its credit, over this difficult time, CN lived up to its promise to maintain the courts and, in addition, left all its tennis equipment in place. Thus, when the lease was actually signed on June 18<sup>th</sup>, and the lands transferred, they were ready for play. By this time, Patrick Martin reported, 120 households had signed up to become members and a pro, Garth Naumoff, had been hired.

Ultimately, the City of Toronto negotiated the land sale with CN for a purchase price of approximately \$1.8 million. At the same time, the City sold off the frontage on Cottingham St. and took on the job of dealing with all approvals of zoning, variances and design, and especially the sticky problem of severance. In June, 1988, the new club was almost ready to open for business.

[An interesting sidebar: In future years, the erstwhile antagonists, Barbara MacDougall, MP and Peter Barnard, president of the B & R, both became members of the CTC.]



## The Cottingham Tennis Club

The CTC finally opened for business under its new imprimatur on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1988. A few days were spent getting the courts ready for play, some new equipment was purchased and by the 21<sup>st</sup>, an open house had taken place. About 120 households had subscribed, which included 50 CNRA members. Recruitment had slowed due to the late opening and complicated negotiations, but an active campaign was undertaken to bring the numbers up to 200.



In the first two or three years thereafter, there was a lot of enthusiasm and members had a lot of fun. Enthusiasm was such that the club's members agreed to install expensive lighting for night play on three courts. In 1991, when the lights were actually installed at a cost of almost \$60,000, they turned out to be a huge mistake. First of all, not enough members used the lighted courts to make their installation cost-effective. Secondly, they were installed on 35-foot poles and proved to be so overwhelmingly bright and so odious to the neighbours, their use was soon forbidden. The club's loss was considerable and irrecoverable.

The original enthusiasm that brought the club into being was soon throttled because those people who wanted to save the tennis club were not necessarily those who wanted to play tennis. In the early 90s, in the midst of

a serious recession, the hefty initiation fee became a deterrent to joining. Some of the original members, mostly those from the adjacent community, started to drift away, either through lack of interest or simply by moving. By 1993, the club's membership had fallen to 125 from the original high point of 178. There was one plus side to this fall-off, however: No refunds of initiation fees was required.

Insofar as construction on the Cottingham frontage was concerned, nothing was happening. Due to the recession, the original purchaser of the property had gone bankrupt and it was not until 1993 that a new developer was able to begin construction of the five townhouses. When that happened, the club was forced to plan for a new clubhouse because the old facility, which had been there since the 1890s, was ripped down. By this time, the CN had been paid off and a deal negotiated with CP to purchase its small share of the property. Fortunately for the club, the City once again involved itself in this transaction and not only negotiated a reasonable price—\$30,000—but also took care of all the details of land assembly and variances. It was this CP portion of Court 1 that was destined to become the site for the new clubhouse.

One of the club's members, Morton Katz, was asked to design a clubhouse but, while it would have been state-of-the-art, it was way beyond the club's financial ability to pay for and was larger than the neighbourhood was willing to tolerate. In the end, a more modest change-room facility was planned, to be erected at the same time as, and by the contractor for, the Cottingham St. townhouses. The cost was expected to be about \$80,000.



The old stables were still serving as the club's change-room. (Photo courtesy John Peckham)

By this time, however, there was no money left in the club's capital account, \$384,000 having been spent for land acquisition, new fencing, new net posts and watering system, and those unfortunate lights. It therefore became necessary to assess the membership an additional fee to pay for the new facility. In April 1993, the club's executive called a special general meeting seeking members' approval for it.

At that meeting, the membership voted in favour of building a change-room facility and authorized the borrowing of up to \$70,000 to begin construction. It also authorized an assessment of \$600 per member payable over two years to pay for it. At the same time, they voted to reduce the initiation fee to \$1000 in an attempt to attract new members.

There was, however, considerable resistance to this supplemental fee and many members did not renew their membership. Furthermore, the campaign to recruit new members was not very successful despite the reduced initiation fee and the expansion of the eligible area from which new members could be recruited. (Joining the club as a new member still entailed considerable expense: \$1000 for the initiation, \$300 for the prorated share of the change-room and \$321 annual dues.)

By the mid 90s, the club's membership had fallen to less than 100; halving the initiation fee did nothing to bolster the numbers. Another scheme, the institution of "seasonal memberships," allowed new people to join the club for one non-renewable season without having to pay an initiation fee. The idea was to interest these people enough so that they might be tempted to join as full members the following season. This scheme, too, was not a great success since it did not produce a significant increase in numbers. By 1998, there remained only 84 fully paid members, only one-third of whom were women.



John Peckham, on the left, was one of the very few neighbourhood members left in the club.

Finally, in about 2000 or 2001, the club's executive decided to eliminate the initiation fee entirely, contrary to some members' desire to maintain the club's exclusivity. There was an immediate response and the membership numbers began to climb returning the club to both fiscal and athletic health.

## The Present

Since about the year 2000, with a long-term lease from the City of Toronto, the club has been stable and prosperous. Under the presidency of Jerry Tostevin and the management of pro, Pat Gamey who has been our pro/manager since 1995, the club has reached its full complement of 175 members while the courts have been beautifully maintained. The club has about 40 years left on its lease with the City. For at least the last 10 years, the membership fees have remained constant at about \$300. Only in 2009 was there a modest increase to \$350.



Some ladies enjoying some refreshment after a tough round-robin match in 2009.

Cottingham School has kindly offered a few parking spaces in its lot during July and August thus lessening the possibility of resentment over parking on the neighbouring streets. One of the club's efforts to maintain good community relations is a six-week summer clinic for Juniors, attendance at which primarily includes neighbourhood children.



The clubhouse as it appears today.

## Appendix

### **Club Presidents**

1964-1979	Charles Portanier
1980-1981	Dave Cresswell
1984-1985	Dave Brown
1987	Al Title
1988-1989	Patrick Martin
1990-1991	John Peckham
1992	Jason Lee
1993-1994	Lorne Glass
1995	Peter Paccione
1996	Vickie Harrison
1997-1998	Rick Howell
1999-2000	Linda Krupowicz
2001-	Jerry Tostevin

### **Club Pros**

Mike Koci  
Frank Richman  
Duby Petrovic  
Barry Taylor  
Greg Halder  
Rob Benneyworth  
Steve Warboys  
Matt Goldman  
Garth Naumoff  
Pat Gamey

### **Open Singles Champions (since 2000)**

YEAR	MEN	WOMEN
2000	Sam Midha	
2001	Sam Midha	
2002	Adam Salahudeen	Jane Foley
2003	John Payne	Cynthia Goodchild
2004	John Payne	Rebecca Kingston
2005	David Mitchell	Audry Kalman
2006	Peter Walker	Cynthia Goodchild
2007	Peter Walker	Audry Kalman
2008	Adam Salahudeen	Nichole Wolfe
2009	Paul Kingston	Audry Kalman

## **Afterword**

Any club member, ex-member, member of the community or anyone else, for that matter, who may have any information on the history of the Cottingham Tennis Club, is welcome to contribute his information for inclusion in this history. Best of all would be documentary evidence but, lacking that, even anecdotal memories would be welcome. Some information is missing, for example, on the club's presidents in the 1980s. And it would be nice to be able to fill in the names of the ladies' single champions in 2000 and 2001. Especially useful would be photographs that go back to the 1970s and 80s. Please send what you have to [hstrom@sympatico.ca](mailto:hstrom@sympatico.ca)