

The Victoria Open: Some History

By Vivien Davies

Until the mid-1960s, the old Victoria Grass Court Tennis Club was located at Fort Street and Foul Bay Road where the Safeway and BC Liquor Store now ply their trades. Some of the members whose names are engraved on the trophies awarded in the last decades of that period have recently passed on, such as Ted Smythe and Doc Miller. Others still recall their triumphs: Wendy Cuppage/Ed Hedley vs. Sharon Whittaker/George McMinn, and the three time winners of the Mixed Diana Lawrence/Ray Aldeguer.

If Marsh Gordon were still around, he would remember not only who beat whom by what, but also who made the error or brilliant shot at the crucial moment. Marsh, though financially comfortable, was known for his thrift in making his tennis outfits last a long while. Once during tournament play, he was so incensed when the price of tea and muffin was increased from 5 cents to 10 cents that he left the grounds to purchase something less expensive at a nearby store.

Older players will recall playing with the perfect gentleman, Bill Dunbar, who would partner anyone, novice or pro, and insist on treating them to tea in the clubhouse afterwards. Both Bill Dunbar and Carl Brand died on the courts, and those who had played with them felt how appropriate such passing was.

Wendy Cuppage recalls being a ball retriever along with John Fraser (husband of Jandy Fraser) when the Davis Cup was played versus the U.S. on the Victoria Grass Courts. Jim McArthur, Kemble Greenwood and George McMinn were responsible for the organization of the event and also acted as line judges. George declares that courts one and two matched Wimbledon standards. The US won the encounter 4-1.

Perhaps Roger and Patrick Skillings were still too young to participate, but some of us remember their taking lessons with George Stencil on the side courts, 8 & 9. George's brother Alex had played Junior Davis Cup for Poland. You would recognize him not only for his long white pants and courtly manner, but also because he was always in the right place on the court to strike the ball – though he never appeared to run – he floated.