

Centennial Pipe Band

The Centennial Pipe Band started in Winnipeg in 1967 under the Pipe Majorship of Ian Conn and lead tip, Jim Barrie. The original members of the piping group were Ian Conn, Sandy Cherrie, Robyn McCombe, Garth McCombe, Gary Erickson, Tom Thompson, Charlie McKeachrin, John Love, Mr. Cummings, Randy McNicol and George Lawrence. The drummers were Jim Barrie, Anthony Erickson, Bob Palmer, David McNicol, Blair Brown, Wallace Stewart and Bill Thompson.

The band was originally formed as a competition band and it quickly rose to become one of the best, if not the best, pipe band in Western Canada. Ian Conn had won many solo competitions in Scotland, and he had played for many years with the Grade 1 Shotts and Dykehead House of Edgar Pipe Band in Scotland. Ian was able to teach a pipe band and achieve an unsurpassed tone and clarity of playing. He definitely elevated the overall quality of pipe bands in Winnipeg.

Jim Barrie had also recently immigrated to Winnipeg from Scotland and he was a world-class drummer. He soon had an excellent drum section and it proved its worth by coming in first at the Alma, Michigan Highland Games in Grade 1. The other Grade 1 drum sections did not take kindly to these 'interlopers from Winnipeg' winning first place, but that just showed the quality of drumming that Jim Barrie produced. Overall, the band came third in the grade 1 competition, and that was nothing to be ashamed of. However, Ian Conn had left the band the year before for personal reasons, and it was felt that if he had been with the band in Alma, it would have had an even stronger showing.

The band regularly competed in the Winnipeg, Selkirk and Moose Jaw Highland Games, where it won many competitions, and it was regarded as "the band to beat"!

It was very exciting and nerve-wracking to have played and competed with the Centennial Band, but it was an unforgettable experience to have been a part of it. The band also apparently inspired such well known pipers as Iain MacDonald, Pipe Major of the City of Regina Pipe Band, Ian Evans of the Erin Street Pipe Band, and Terry and Jack Lee of the World Champion Grade 1 Simon Fraser University Pipe Band. Ian Conn left a wonderful legacy with the Centennial Pipe Band.

Tommy Thompson took over from Ian Conn as Pipe Major, after a brief stint by Sandy Cherrie, and he did a terrific job with the band after that. This author left the band after the Alma competition in 1970.

If anyone reading this knows of the history of the band during the Tommy Thompson period, please feel free to add it to this history.

Submitted by Robyn McCombe