

# The VICTORIAS

WINNIPEG'S STANLEY CUP CHAMPIONS



The 1896 Stanley Cup champion Winnipeg Victorias: George Merritt (goal), Rod Flett (point), Fred Higginbotham (cover point), Charles Johnstone (cover point), Dan Bain (center), Jack Armytage (rover - Captain), Colin "Tote" Campbell (left wing), Tom "Attie" Howard (right wing), Bobby R. Benson (spare-left-right wing), Jack Sheppard (goal-played 1 regular season game), E.B. Nixon (President), Able Code (Vice President/Manager), J. Carter (Mascot/Trainer).

BY JOHN JAMESON

Photos courtesy the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame and the Manitoba Indigenous Sports Hall of Fame

**One of the many Easterners who migrated to Winnipeg in the latter part of the 19th century, was lawyer Patrick Anderson Macdonald, who had settled in the city in 1880.**

In 1886, while on a visit to Montreal, MacDonald observed that organized hockey had captured the interest of Easterners. Hockey clubs and leagues had formed, and fans were packing the rinks, and paying, to watch.

A noted sports enthusiast, MacDonald returned to Winnipeg with the type of hockey stick used in the East. Local lumber merchant Brown & Rutherford copied the pattern to produce more sticks and that winter a few informal games were played on the Red River.

With no suitable hockey facility available the game struggled to catch on. Outdoor rinks were make-shift, leaving players and observers at the mercy of prairie winter conditions.

By 1890, the public was reading newspaper reports of the local hockey matches. On November 3, 1890, at the instigation of Jack Armytage, the Victoria Hockey Club was formed. A short time later Fred Ashe formed "The

Winnipeg" followed by a third hockey club, organized by the Royal Canadian Dragoons, simply named "Fort Osborne".

On December 20, 1890, the first organized hockey game in Western Canada was played between the Victorias and the Winnipeggs at the downtown outdoor Winnipeg Railway Rink. A sparse crowd paid 15 cents each to watch the Victorias post a 4-1 victory.

The game's early rules featured seven players to a team and no substitutes allowed except for injury. It was an onside game, meaning forward passes were illegal. Only lateral or back passing was allowed. If penalized, players were sent to the sidelines, or "on the fence" for a brief time.

## NEW RINKS AND THE ANDERSON CUP

It was not until 1887 that hockey was first played indoors, in a converted roller rink known as the Royal Rink. Soon, new indoor skating rinks were being built. The Manitoba and North West Senior Hockey Association was formed for the 1891-92 season with the majority

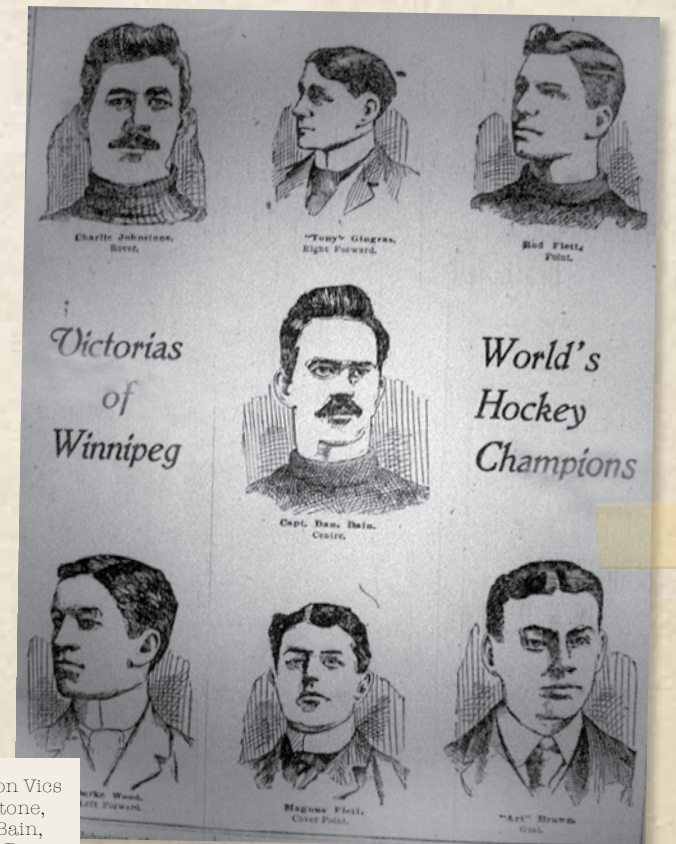
of the games played at the Thistle Rink on Market Avenue just off Main Street. The T. A. Anderson Cup was introduced in 1892 as the first serious trophy. The Victorias would claim the Anderson Cup three years straight.

If one season marked the launch of hockey in Manitoba, it was in 1892-93. Hockey had taken off, and not only in the city, hockey clubs and hockey facilities were being established in rural communities across the province.



Confident it's talent could measure up against established Eastern clubs, an all-star team from Winnipeg's senior clubs traveled to Ontario and Quebec for a series of exhibition matches in February of 1893. The team returned home with a record of 8 wins and 3 losses, outscoring the opposition 71-37.

In January of 1895 the Vics would set out on their own eastern tour, outscoring their opponents 33-12 on their way to a record of 4-1.



The 1901 Stanley Cup champion Vics Starting Seven: Charlie Johnstone, Tony Gingras, Rod Flett, Dan Bain, Blake Wood, Magnus Flett, Art Brown.

It was after a 5-1 victory over the Montreal AAA club, Winnipeg Captain Jack Armytage visited the Montreal clubhouse and noticed a small rose bowl trophy. It was the newly minted Stanley Cup, donated by Lord Stanley of Preston, the sixth Governor General of Canada, for the amateur hockey championship of Canada.

The Cup, Armytage noted, was a challenge trophy. With confidence high from their eastern tour, Winnipeg challenged Montreal for the Stanley Cup. The Stanley Cup trustees accepted the challenge, and a “sudden death” game was scheduled for Feb. 14, 1896, at Montreal.

**VICTORIAS WIN THE CUP**

A skeptical Montreal crowd gathered that day, more out of curiosity than concern. “The blizzards from the land of the setting sun” however, stunned their hosts with a 2-0 victory. Armytage scored the winning goal for the

new Stanley Cup champions while George (Whitey) Merritt, outstanding in goal for the winners, startled the Montreal crowd by wearing protective white cricket pads.

Winnipeggers gathered at a number of locations throughout the city and received the first ever play-by-play accounts of the Stanley Cup match via CPR Telegraph. They were soon rewarded with news of the victory.

The team returned on Feb. 24, to a mass display of civic pride and what is considered to be the first Stanley Cup parade. The Vics would enjoy the Stanley Cup for 10 months before accepting a challenge from the same Montreal squad for Dec. 30, 1896, in Winnipeg.

The highly anticipated match took place at the McIntyre Rink on Albert Street. Ticket prices were astronomical for the time, ranging between \$6.50 and a hefty \$15.00 (\$575 today), with crowds standing in line for long hours in the cold

hoping for a ticket. Despite home-ice advantage, a capacity crowd watched the determined Montreal seven come from behind to win 6-5 and reclaim the Stanley Cup.

The Victorias were Western Canada’s finest hockey team. The city’s top young athletes, like Donald “Dan” Bain, Jack Armytage, and A.T. Howard were determined to showcase Winnipeg as a city capable of producing top-level athletes. The game’s popularity had exploded and by the 1898-99 season there were well over a hundred teams in Winnipeg alone.

Challenging Montreal Victorias for the Cup in 1899, the series was set as a best-of-three for the first time. In the opening game, Bain was struck above the eye and forced to leave the match and the Vics would lose 2-1. With Bain sidelined, the Vics’ relied on winger Tony Gingras, a Métis player from St. Boniface known for his toughness and scoring touch.

Gingras had picked up the

first goal in game one and was leading the Winnipeg offence in the second game when Montreal’s Bob McDougall viciously slashed him across the knee, injuring him. When referee J.A. “Bill” Findlay only issued a minor penalty — despite McDougall admitting the slash was intentional — Winnipeg left the ice in protest, and the game was forfeited to Montreal.

In 1900, the Victorias challenged again, this time facing the Montreal Shamrocks in a three-game series. The Vics pushed it to a deciding third game, falling 5-4.

The Vics were now battle-tested with Burke Wood, a former Shamrock winger, joining the fold. Bain was back as captain, Gingras was healthy, and the defense was bolstered by the addition of two more Metis players, Rod and Magnus Flett (Gingras and Rod and Magnus Flett are also honoured members of the Manitoba Indigenous Sports Hall of Fame).

**VICS WIN CUP AGAIN**

Their persistence paid off in 1901 in a rematch against the Shamrocks. The Victorias opened the series with a 4-3 victory with Wood scoring two goals against his former team. The second game ended in a 1-1 tie after regulation. In the extra period, Bain took the puck on a rush, skated the length of the ice, and scored the first overtime goal in Stanley Cup history. The Cup returned to Winnipeg.

In 1902, the Vics successfully defended the Cup at home against the Toronto Wellingtons with back-to-back 5-3 victories. Later that year, they would lose the Cup on home ice to the Montreal AAA in a three-game series.

In 1903, the Victorias challenged Montreal AAA once more. By then, many of the Vic’s old stars had called it a day including Dan Bain, but the Vics would extend the series to four games — one tied, one Winnipeg win, and two Montreal victories. The last match ended in a 4-1 defeat. It was the Victorias final Stanley Cup appearance.

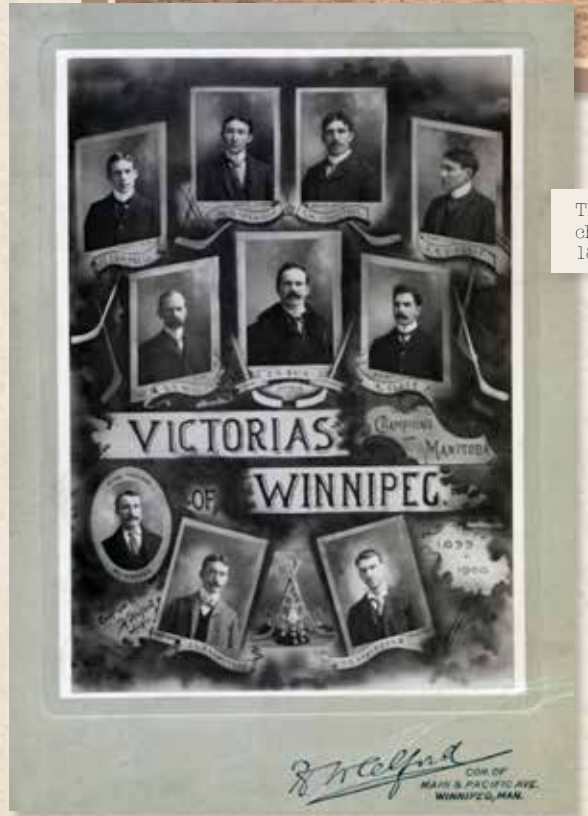
By then, new and larger facilities were being built across the country. Increased attendance meant more money to entice players, and Eastern clubs were paying top dollar for talent. The players, in turn, were aware that their services were in high demand. As early as 1903, Manitobans had been lured to professional hockey leagues in the United States.

Across Canada, the issue of payments was causing a rift in the amateur hockey community as many felt the game would be soiled by implementing “professionalism”. The reality

1911 Winnipeg Victorias



The Victorias of Winnipeg, champions of Manitoba 1899 and 1900



Stanley Cup challenges between 1896 and 1903, claiming the Cup three times. In the first 10 years of Stanley Cup competition, Winnipeg was the only city other than Montreal to win the coveted trophy.

Winnipeg Victorias would help shape the modern game and inspire generations of Canadian hockey players. Their garnet jerseys may have faded into history, but their legacy will be acknowledged in the Fall, 2025. The Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame will be honouring the Victorias legacy with a mural on the south-facing wall of the former Bank of British North America at 436 Main Street.

*Resource: “An Immense Hold in the Public Estimation:” The First Quarter Century of Hockey in Manitoba, 1886-1911. by Morris Mott*



The 1900-01 Winnipeg Victorias



Victorias Captain Dan Bain hockey card