

"Old Joe" Called the Shots He Shrugged Off Setbacks

Joseph A. Patrick lived most of his life in the shadow of his two famous sons, Lester and Frank, and we caught only fleeting glimpses of his contribution to a new way of life in British Columbia.

This virile man, with the physique of a Samson and the charm of an Irishman, loved a contest whether it was fighting John Barleycorn or sponsoring a Methodist Revival meeting and challenging the Devil himself: He was a man of rights and wrongs, there was no middle ground, no grey areas.

It is therefore rather surprising to learn, even at this late date, that "Old Joe", as he was affectionately called by both young and old, was the man who brought ice hockey to this coast and played a big part in revolutionizing the game.

He was willing to call anyone's bluff and several times shocked the so-called elite East with decisions that rocked it on its heels.

There was an unusual comradeship between "Old Joe" and his two "boys" and he let them glory in their hockey triumphs, while he and his delightful wife enjoyed their progress.

It was my happy privilege to be closely associated with the Patrick family from the time they took up residence in Victoria in 1911 until Father Time rang the bell at varying periods, and to have taken part in the burial of Joseph, Lester and Frank in side-by-side plots in Royal Oak Burial Park, where "Old Joe" had planned it years before and had overcome earlier objections from the sons.

Joseph Patrick was born on Aug. 4, 1857, not long after his parents arrived in Quebec from Ireland and a few months after his father had died. Times were rough in his early years and he often related his story about Potatoes and Point. If there was to be a kipper for a meal it was held over the table and when the ample helpings of potatoes were set before each, they were told to point at the kipper. It was something like the story my own father told about Bread and Point, in which you pointed at the butter dish, but couldn't have any.

Joe often told of the times when he drove a team of oxen to Boston with a load of beans and laughed about "taking coal to Newcastle," as Boston was the bean capital of the United States.

Although the Patricks were devout Protestants and lived in Roman Catholic communities, they developed no frictions and, even in later years, always stoutly defended the people of Quebec from the shafts which so many westerners hurled at them. They became bilingual and went to school and university there and became well versed in the life and culture of the habitant.

After his early struggle "Old Joe" became a Quebec business man, specializing in timber limits and lumbering. He also became adept at raising a family, probably imbibing some of the elixir of the French-Canadians' penchant for plenty of children. He had nine children, four girls and five boys, who were to be factors in the hockey world.

In 1891 Joe formed the Drummond Lumber Co. and moved his family to South Durham, 60 miles from Montreal, where skating and shinny were the natural plaything. Mrs. Patrick sensed the desire for Lester to skate well and on his 12th birthday she bought him a pair of spring skates which he clamped on his regular boots.

Two years later Mrs. Patrick bought Lester a hockey stick for 25 cents and right away the future Silver Fox began stickhandling in cans and firing them at targets.

When Lester failed his first year at university Joe put him to work as a bookkeeper in one of his five wood-and-coal offices. When the inside work bored Lester, his father gave him \$25 and told him to take the 60-day harvest excursion train to Alberta and get whatever was irritating him out of his system. Lester intended to be a cowboy, but he was soon involved in hockey and it was then that Joe ordered him back to Montreal, where Frank

had just graduated as a three-letter man from McGill University, and set up a three-way partnership.

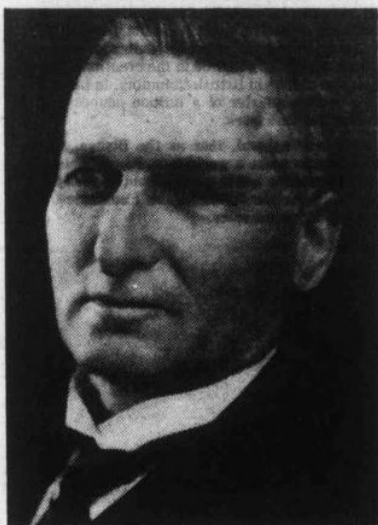
Soon after Joe heard of some valuable timber in the Nelson district. He sold out his interests in the Montreal area and took the train and his family of nine to Nelson, where a thunderous welcome was provided for them, due to the fact that Nelson had a pretty good hockey team and Lester and Frank would be big attractions, as both had promising careers and Lester had already captained the Montreal Wanderers and won two Stanley Cup series.

By Archie Wills

Joe Patrick loathed professional sport and one day in Nelson, Lester showed him a telegram which offered him \$100 expenses to join the Edmonton team and challenge for the Stanley Cup. Joe, knowing that the players were pure amateurs agreed, but, insisted on Lester keeping an expense account. When Lester returned home Joe asked for the accounting and Lester's best figuring could not bring his expenses to more than \$61.

"All right," said Joe, "Send back \$39 to Edmonton."

In later years Lester quipped: "I bet I'm the only amateur who ever made a refund." Lester often said the only difference between a professional and an amateur athlete was that a professional admitted he took money.



Joseph A. Patrick
a high-principled leader

However, Joe was forced to change his opinion when Lester received a telegram from the Renfrew Millionaires, who were ferreting the bushes for good hockey players to challenge for the Stanley Cup in 1909. It offered Lester \$3,000 for 10 games. Joe didn't know there was that kind of money in amateur sport and when Frank heard about it he asked Lester to get him into the act.

Lester wired back acceptance on condition that they also engage "The greatest defenceman he had ever seen," who happened to be Frank. A deal was made to pay Frank \$2,000. Joe was visibly pleased when the two boys left Nelson with a guarantee of \$5,000 for 10 games, which consumed but a few weeks of their time.

After the sons returned and buckled down to work in the woods and sawmill, Nelson was visited by a cloudburst. Joe had just herded into their pool, logs to the value of about \$80,000, sufficient timber to meet the demands of the saws for some weeks.

The banks of the pool collapsed under the flood waters and the logs were swished into the Slocan

River, into the Kootenay and ended up somewhere along the Columbia. Lester was told of the tragedy and alerted his father who went to survey the damage and financial loss.

"Too bad. Can't do a thing about it," he commented. From his vest pocket he pulled one of his favorite cigars, lit it, then returned to his home and began preparing his Sunday School lesson for the next day. He always taught a class in whatever Methodist Church he worshipped.

Joe watched the family fortune grow and could not resist an offer of \$350,000 for his holdings in 1910 and took it.

What to do with it was the big question. Joe had visited Victoria and made up his mind to retire there when the time came. Was the time ripe, now?

True to his undertaking, Joe called Lester and Frank into consultation and they mulled over the subject. Lester was now 27 and Frank was 25 and both were in the best years for playing hockey. Before long the question simplified itself into where they should play hockey and put some of the money into a plan which was jelling in Frank's head.

Knowing that Joe wanted to live in Victoria, Frank unloaded his plan to go to the Pacific Coast and build hockey arenas in Victoria, Vancouver and New Westminster.

Lester didn't fancy such a scheme as nobody out here knew anything about hockey and they seldom had frosty weather.

Lester suggested they go east, where the money was, and where both sons were well and favorably known.

It was obvious that Joe would have to decide the matter and he went along with Frank. They pledged their new-found holdings to the venture. Lester accepting the decision with a few misgivings.

There was little joy in Nelson when the Patrick decision was announced. The fans there remembered that the Patricks had built them a new rink and that the Patrick boys had played for the Nelson team and had beaten all comers and played for nothing.

Before Joe moved his family to Victoria a couple of evangelists visited Nelson and had the blessing of the senior Patricks. It was announced that Lester would appear on the platform at one of the meetings, no doubt at the urging of his mother, who admired her first born child.

The Methodist Church, in which the meeting was held, was packed, standing room only. The evangelists conducted their part of the meeting and then it was announced Lester had something to say. No one knew whether or not there would be a confession.

To everyone's surprise and delight, he recited a whole series of Drummond's habitant verses, including Little Baptiste. Lester had a flair for performing as a monologist and, having lived in Quebec, he had the Drummond style down to perfection. Lester's mother was delighted at Lester's performance and she was to witness it several times later in Victoria, when Lester would perform at club or patriotic functions on the stage of the Royal Victoria Theatre.

Joe moved his family into a large house, sometimes referred to as a mansion, on Michigan Street, adjoining the estate of Capt. John Irving, the early shipping magnate, who later sold out to the C.P.R. On the site today is a large highrise apartment.

Joe took a firm hand in the new hockey venture, placing Frank in Vancouver and Lester in Victoria.

They bought sites, paying \$10,000 for six lots at the corner of Epworth and Cadboro Bay Road, opposite the present Oak Bay Secondary School, and a much fancier price for the site in the West End of Vancouver, near Stanley Park.

The next step was plans for the arenas. The one in Victoria, which would seat 4,200 spectators, was built for \$125,000, but the one in Vancouver, which would be the largest in Canada until the Forum in Montreal was built in 1925, would seat 10,000 and the cost \$350,000. They hoped to have an arena in New Westminster but this was delayed due to shortage of money and the team had to play its games in Vancouver.

It was the Patricks' intention to sell shares in



THE PATRICK FAMILY gathered on the steps of their lovely home on Michigan Street on Aug. 4, 1924. At intervals, the members returned to resume their regular positions on the steps. In the back row are left to right: Lester Patrick, Mrs. Miller (Cynda), Stanley Patrick, Joseph Patrick, and Frank Patrick. Mrs. Patrick is in the centre flanked by her two other daughters, Mrs. Strickland (Dora) and Mrs. William Scott (Myrtle). Guy Patrick sits next to Mrs. Scott and Ted Patrick is opposite him. Ted might have been the best athlete in the family but lost his leg in a sleigh accident in Montreal. Mrs. Scott is the only one still living and is mother of Graeme Scott, Victoria businessman. She lives in White Rock, B.C.

their venture, but the natives had little confidence in the scheme as ice hockey looked like a loser. Someone bought \$5,000 in shares, but the Patricks soon recouped that as they didn't want a single outsider in their corner.

Next came the need of large refrigeration systems to manufacture the ice and maintain it at an even temperature for skating and hockey. Joe despatched Lester to eastern United States to, not only to pick out machines to do this, but, also to sound out enough hockey players to man three teams. There were no artificial rinks in Canada and only one in New York. In those days natural ice was used in the rinks and all windows were kept open and the fans sat in buffalo robes or the like.

Lester accomplished both missions, getting two artificial ice plants and enough first-class players for three teams, the average pay for the 15 games was \$700, plus transportation.

Christmas Day, 1911, arrived and the Victoria Arena was ready for the official opening for skating. I was among the multitude which attended and the ice was so crammed with novices and the folks who had skated on the prairies or in the east, that it was impossible for anyone to fall down.

Then came the night of January 3, 1912, when Joe Patrick and his sons presented the first hockey game played anywhere on artificial ice in the Victoria Arena between the Victoria Aristocrats and the New Westminster Royals.

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Patrick, their three daughters and two of the younger sons, were in the special box, suspended from the huge trusses, which held the building together and which was to be their box until the building was destroyed by fire in 1929.

Lieutenant-Governor Paterson dropped the first puck and all the business leaders, politicians and the many ordinary folk, who had never seen a hockey game, filled the arena to its greatest capacity. The fact that Victoria lost the game meant little to Joe Patrick because the miracle had happened and he and his boys were launched on a new and challenging career, which was to absorb their fortune and force Lester to have to sell cars to make a living.

The early years were rewarding, then the First World War upset all plans and the Victoria franchise was moved to Spokane as the army wanted the arena to augment the big base in the adjacent exhibition grounds.

With the war over Victoria Aristocrats were back in their home rink and Joe Patrick made a bid for a seat on the city council, which he held for four years. During this time he became an advocate of tourism and, after B.C. changed over from driving

on the left side of the road, a legacy from our colonial days, to the right side on Jan. 1, 1922, he made a new move.

There were but 30,000 automobiles in B.C. at this time and Joe had hopes of enticing the hordes of Americans who were taking to the highways in their motorized buggies to come to Vancouver Island. With Carl Pendray, Benny Nicholas and George Warren he went to Seattle, picked up an obsolete ship, which resembled a worn-out scow, and announced it would operate between Bellingham and Sidney, carrying automobiles. It was the first auto ferry, the forerunner of the fine fleets we have today.

Joe hadn't released his finger on control of his hockey empire and one year, when the National Hockey Association lured away one of the Aristocrats, Joe and his sons made a bold move and snared the entire Toronto club and placed it in Seattle.

Things began to go sour in Seattle and Pete Muldoon suggested that they should have the games on Sunday nights, when sell-out attendances would result. The matter was broached to Joe who gave a resounding "no" and they never had Sunday hockey there. Joe would go broke first. He was adamant in his views on Prohibition and fought vigorously to have it introduced in B.C. in 1916. There was no tooling with "Old Joe."

However, he had the satisfaction of knowing that all his clubs won the Stanley Cup, Vancouver in 1915, Seattle in 1917 and Victoria in 1923.

Joe felt the pinch again in 1922 when the Big Four League, which included Edmonton, Calgary, Regina and Saskatoon and operated as an amateur outfit yet paid players, began to mess around with players which the Patricks counted as theirs. They had operated on a handshake and never had official contracts and most of their oldtime hands liked it that way.

When Joe was crossed he reacted with bold blows and stripped the camouflage from the Big Four and had it outlawed by the amateur body, whereupon the Western Hockey League was formed with the four prairie clubs, Vancouver, Victoria and Seattle.

The time came, however, when the Patricks faced the firing squad. It was 1926 after Victoria Cougars had won the Stanley Cup in 1925 and had returned from Montreal where they had played the Maroons in the last series between east and west. I was in Montreal at the time and was aware of the big deal which was brewing. It would bail out the Patricks, who could no longer compete with NHL teams when salaries were skyrocketing.

On this coast the fans were shocked when

the announcement was made that the Patricks had sold 50 of their players for \$350,000 to the NHL and major league hockey in these parts would come to an end.

Imagine \$6,000 for players like Frank Fredrickson, Duke Keats, Eddie Shore, Frank Boucher, Jack Walker, Frank Foyston, Hap Holmes, Hughie Lehman or Mickey McKay. Today, they would be worth their weight in gold as some of them were as exciting to watch as Bobby Orr or Bobby Hull. But, just remember, Fredrickson's salary for 30 games a season, was only \$3,500, tops in the league.

When Lester was safely installed as coach and manager of the New York Rangers at \$10,000 a year, and Frank was managing-director of the NHL, Joe Patrick relaxed and moved from his mansion in James Bay which was too big for his dwindling family, marriage having absorbed all of them, to a lovely home he built on Joan Crescent, where he and Mrs. Patrick celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary in 1933.

Mrs. Patrick died in 1939 at age 78 and Joe passed along in 1941, aged 84 years. They are both buried in the places allotted for them in the plots which Joe bought when Royal Oak Burial Park was opened in the 1920s.

It seems strange, after the resistance the family made to occupying plots which Joe had bought for them, that Lester, who died in June, 1960, at age 77, is buried in the plot next to his mother.

Just 28 days after we laid Lester to rest, Frank died suddenly and they brought him from Vancouver and placed him in the grave which Joe had assigned to him. A vacant spot is between Lester and Frank and will be occupied by Grace Patrick, Lester's widow.

In 1974 Mrs. Frank Patrick died and she was interred in the plot next to her husband.

There the three Patricks who revolutionized hockey, bringing in the blue lines, the penalty shot, forward passing, kicking the puck and many other innovations, rest in peace after the turmoil of half a century of professional hockey.

The Douglas firs swing their branches above the graves, each morning's sun kisses the ground under which they lie and birds chirp cheerfully.

It was wonderful to have known and worked closely with this remarkably family for many years and I'll never forget the twinkle in Joe's eyes as he waited for reactions after his dry humor left one guessing as to the intent of his story.