The History of Oak Bay Website – Gary Wilcox

http://www.webturf.com/oakbay/history/encyclopedia/index.html

Willows Arena
(Victoria Ice Arena)

. *Willows Horse Show Pavilion becomes city's second arena* .

Duncan MacPhail photo courtesy Royal BC Museum and Archives | I-00906 . . .



Willows Arena (1944)

The Willows Horse Show Pavilion served as
Victoria's ice arena from 1941–1944

After Oak Bay's *Patrick Arena* burned to the ground in 1929, Victoria went without an arena for several years, despite exploring some possibilities, until Barney Olson undertook to convert an existing building — the Horse Show Pavilion on the Willows Fairgrounds — in 1941.

Two ice hockey leagues commenced with the 1941/42 season and the calibre of hockey was very high as many easterners stationed in Victoria, either as servicemen or shipyard workers, played in the NHL or in eastern pro leagues.

Teams from Victoria, Nanaimo, Vancouver and New Westminsterin formed the four-team Pacific Coast Amateur League. The Bapco Paint Co. sponsored the Victoria *Bapcos* entry. Opening day was November 12, 1941. The official opening ceremonies commenced at 8:10 pm and the hockey game, Victoria vs Vancouver *Norvans*, began at 9:00.

An Island League was also formed that included teams from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Nanaimo and the Victoria Machinery Depot. This league included top players like "Chuck" Rayner, star goalkeeper for the New York *Rangers*, and Bernie Strongman, who returned after the war to captain the Victoria *Cougars* in the early 1950s.

The 1942/43 season was the high point of league action with the talented Army team almost unstoppable. They won their way to the national finals for a chance at the Allan Cup only to lose the final game to the NHL-star-studded Ottawa *Commandos*. By next season, as players on the service teams were being shipped overseas, team rosters thinned and leagues folded.

But this opened up more ice time for other sport organizations in the community, particularly for women and boys.

The Victoria Figure Skating Club, which originated in the Patrick Arena, had its second home in the Willows Arena where members practised and put on ice shows. And Victoria Minor Hockey had its beginning in the Willows Arena, thanks to the efforts of Ivan Temple.

But this ressurgence in ice-skating sports was short lived. Tragedy struck in 1944 when, for the second time in Oak Bay, an ice arena burned to the ground in a spectacular fire. The Sports Centre building, next door, was also destroyed in the blaze.

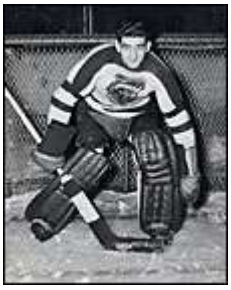
From the ashes of the Willows Arena grew the desire for a safer, fireproof building as a memorial to those who lost their lives during World War II.

Victoria's Memorial Arena opened in 1948.

SPECIAL THANKS
Dave Unwin
Archie Wills' material courtesy of *Greater Victoria Sports Hall of Fame*

PHOTOGRAPHS

Click on photos to view enlargements



Chuck Rayner

courtesy Greater Victoria Sports Hall of Fame



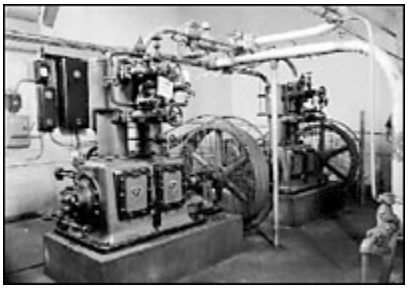
Army Team

courtesy Greater Victoria Sports Hall of Fame



Bernie Strongman

courtesy Greater Victoria Sports Hall of Fame



The Refrigeration Plant

courtesy Royal BC Museum, BC Archives | I-00907



The Fire

Oak Bay Fire Department photo courtesy Dave Unwin, Greater Victoria Sports Hall of Fame

The History of Oak Bay Website
A CENTENNIAL LEGACY PROJECT