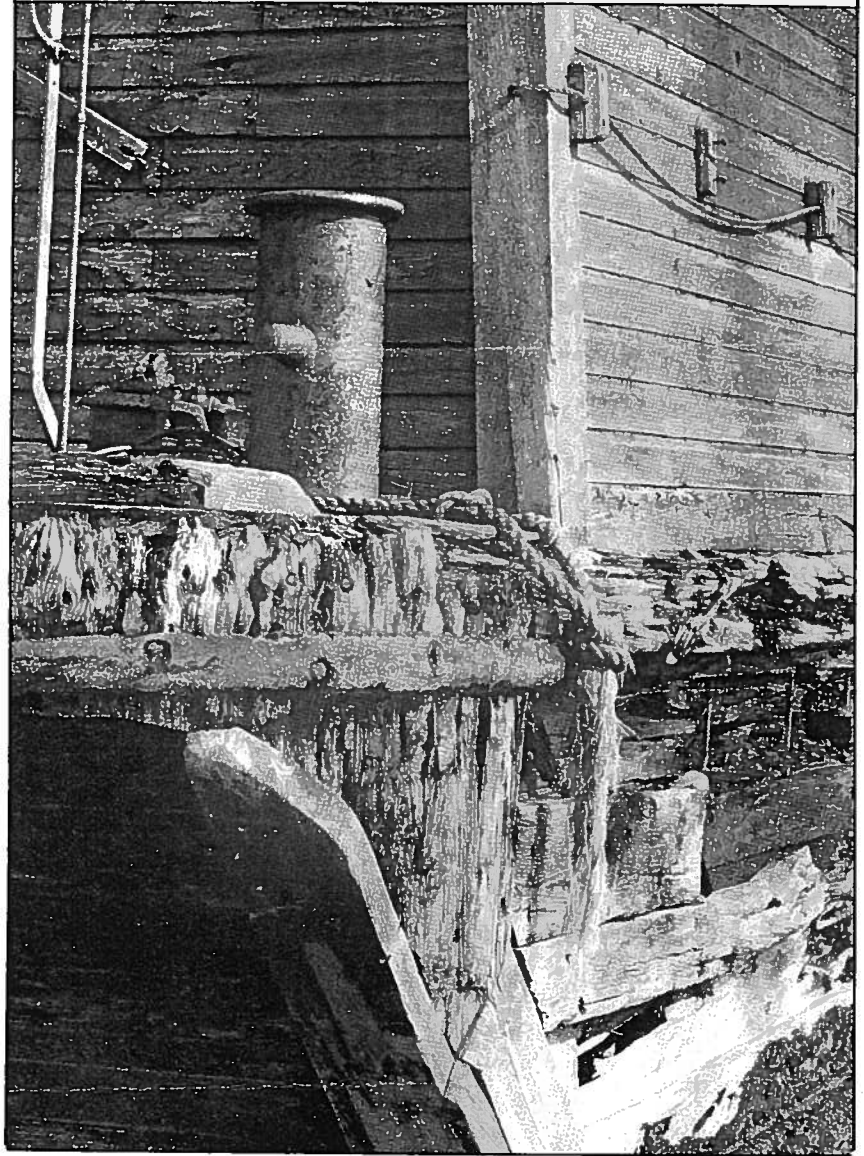


TIDINGS

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The Westerly Curling Club

For ninety winters local ponds have echoed to cries of "Sweep!" and "Be light!", sure signs that the curlers are at it again.

The great international sport of curling is generally characterized by its fraternal and social aspects, as well as the enthusiasm engendered in the hardy souls of its devotees. Many curlers (and their families) believe that the friendliness and hospitality which typify the sport almost transcend the skills found in any session of the game. Curling is primarily a game of skill, however, unlike many other competitive sports in which raw athletic strength or endurance are the determinant factors. Skilled curlers can be found in all age groups, from sub-teen to octogenarian. The game seems to have first appeared in its current format in Scotland early in the sixteenth century. Today, curling clubs are found in North America, Europe, and Asia (particularly China, Japan, and New Zealand).

Tom Wright (crouching) and Russ Neagle, skips in the friendly heat of the curling battle, with a house full of stones.



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

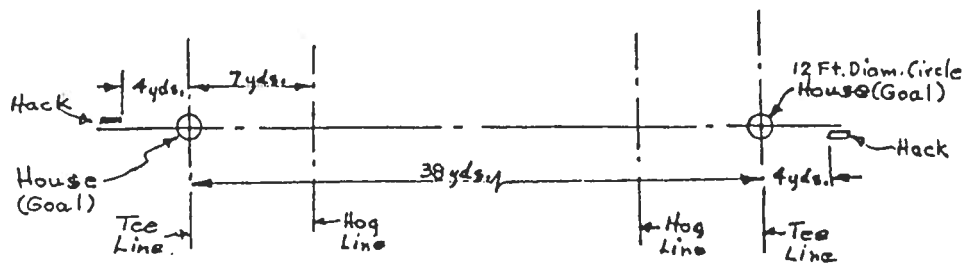
Stones: A curling stone is 11-1/2 inches in diameter, 4-1/2 inches high, and weighs 42 pounds. Because Westerly stones are primarily used outdoors (a very unique aspect of Westerly curling in this day of hangar-like curling facilities complete with ice-making equipment, observation lounges, and food and drink), they have a keen (fast) side and a drag (slow) side. The stone's handle can be screwed into either side, and changing the side to accommodate changing ice conditions can be done quickly. Many of the curling stones owned by early Westerly curlers were made from Westerly granite. The same stones are now owned by current Westerly Curling Club members; Tony Morris owns a set used by Andy Low, Sr., Harry Buckley plays stones once owned by William Bell, and Ron Cook, Jr. uses Albert Pawson's.

Rink: Because Westerly is primarily an outdoor curling club, a day's play will be done on an area of a local pond which has the best (thickest, clearest, least snowy) ice. The sheet of ice is called the rink. Twelve-foot-diameter goals (houses) are scribed in the ice with their centers 38 yards apart. There are inner rings scribed in each

house as well, similar to an archery target. Quite often a penny is placed at the center of each house, giving meaning to a player's shot being "right on the money". Another important feature of the rink is the hack, a wooden device which is screwed into the ice in back of each house. When curling, a player swings the stone back in a pendulum-like motion; on the down-swing the player springs from the hack and slides with the stone as it hits the ice. Momentum carries stone and player forward until the player releases the stone within 7 yards (the hog line), giving the stone the appropriate curl and weight (amount of thrust) as the stone is released.

Teams: Also called a rink, a team normally is comprised of four players (although more or less can be accommodated, as long as each of the two competing teams has the same number of players). Late arrivals to a curling match are added to either team one by one, a nice feature of the sport which adds to its conviviality.

Each player has a specific task regarding each stone curled by a teammate. The first person to play on each side is called the lead. Usually the more inexperienced of his team, the lead player strives to place both his stones in the house 38 yards away, controlling the



Skips Russ Neagle and Tom Wright survey the approaching stone and Tom urges his teammates to sweep.

weight and curl of his stones to the best of his ability; around the success (or failure) of the lead's stones is based the entire team strategy for that end (or series of curled stones). The second player either guards the good lead stones, pushes the ones which need help closer to the penny, or knocks opponent stones out of the house. The third player, called the vice skip, breaks up any clutter of opponent stones obscuring the house to permit the Skip, the fourth or final player for the team, having clear access to landing his stones on the money. Obviously, the Skip's stones are the most crucial in an evenly-matched game; Skips tend to be the more experienced curlers.

Stones are curled alternately between team members. A lead player

curls the first stone, followed by that of the opponent lead. Then the first lead's second stone is curled, followed by the opponent lead's second stone. Next the two second players curl their stones, then the vice-skips, and finally the Skips. When all sixteen stones have been curled, the score of the end is taken, with points awarded to the teams on the basis of their stones' proximity to the penny at the center of the house.

The Name: Curling gets its name from the physical fact that the spinning stone will bend, or curl, in the direction of its spin as it goes down the ice. A stone with a lot of spin will curl dramatically within its 38-yard travel. By giving the stone a slight turn to the right or the left when releasing it, the curler causes the stone to rotate, and therefore



(Above) Tallying the score, from left: (kneeling) Marty Brailich, Jack Nichols, Andy Low, and Jack Mudge; (standing) Charlie Lazarek, Tony Morris, Wes Potter, Tom Wright, and Harold Cooper. (Opposite) The minutes of the Niantic R.I. Curling Club inaugural meeting on December 21, 1896.

the path of the stone will be an arc. A well-thrown rock has from 2 1/2 to 4 complete rotations as it travels the length of the rink; for a right-handed player, an in-turn sends the stone arcing to the right and an out-turn to the left (for left-handed players, the opposite is true). Skillful curlers can get just the right amount of spin on the stone so it negotiates past other stones and winds up behind them, close to the money; when this tricky and delicious phenomenon occurs, some of the credit is usually given to the sweeping involved in the stone's traverse.

Sweeping: Done by the two curlers who are not curling that particular stone. Positioned at either side of the sheet of ice, they follow alongside their teammate's stone

as it runs. When the Skip thinks the stone is bending (curling) too much, or that it is slowing down too soon, he yells "Sweep!" and they do. Pounding the ice with short, fast, powerful brush strokes, the sweepers cause friction with their brooms, melting the ice just ahead of the stone. When the stone runs on the swept surface, it tends to straighten its trajectory despite its curl; it will also run for a greater distance. Sweeping illustrates another unique team aspect of curling; unlike bowling or other games where team members are on their own and their scores are the only real team contribution made, curlers all contribute to the success of each stone thrown because they determine its course until it comes to rest. The Skip guides his teammates in the handling of each

Niantic Curling Club
Niantic R.I.

Organized Dec 21st 1896

December 21st 1896

A meeting of the Curlers in Niantic, was held in the Seventh Day Advent Church, on Dec 21st 1896, when a Curling Club was organized.

Present, Eben Crockett, John Currie, Samuel Caven, Theo. Black, John Grant, James Grant, Richard Thornton, Andrew Clark.

John Currie was elected President.
Eben Crockett - - Vice President
Andrew Clark - - Secretary & Treas.

It was mov. Sec. & carried that the Club be named the Niantic Curling Club.

It was mov. Sec. & carried that the admission fee each for all members would be 25 Cents up to the 1st January/97 after that date 50 Cents each



"Stacking the brooms" on Stony Brook Pond, Stonington, in 1986.

stone, and knowing the ice is an important part of his effort.

The Play: Normally, Westerly curlers play two or four ends and have a refreshment break, better known as stacking the brooms. After a warm cup of soup, coffee, tea, or whatever, new Skips are chosen and play is renewed. This sequence is repeated until all players have skipped. Each side's stones are identified by red or blue pom-poms which are temporarily secured to the handle of each stone. In practice sessions and during bonspiels (matches with other curling clubs), the Westerly Curling Club players follow the Grand National Curling Club rules of play.

WESTERLY CURLING THROUGH THE YEARS

Curling was introduced to our area by Scots who came to Westerly in the late nineteenth century to work in the granite and textile industries. Although the exact date

of the organization of the Westerly Curling Club cannot be documented, it is known that the Westerly club competed against the Niantic (now Bradford), RI Curling Club in 1897 at Burden's Pond. A dedicated curler named Jack Nichols (1882-1973) preserved many of the old curling memorabilia, having joined the Niantic club in 1909 and serving as the club's secretary-treasurer from 1914 to 1919. The Niantic Curling Club was formed on December 21, 1896, at a meeting held in the Seventh Day Advent Church; thanks to Jack Nichols, the original longhand minutes of the meeting survive today. At the original meeting of eight curlers (just enough for two rinks), it was moved and carried that the secretary write to one of the New York City curling clubs for a book of "Regulations, Rules, and By Laws". It was also voted at the meeting to acquire a sterling silver single-handed

cup for which there would be competition once each season; thus was the Rob Roy Cup and competition begun. From these old records, we know that the annual Niantic membership fee was initially 25 cents; after January of 1897, it rose to a whopping 50 cents. The tradition of thrift continues today; the Westerly Curling Club's annual membership fee is by far the lowest in the nation, if not the world. The club's solvency can be attributed not only to good financial practice but to minimal expenditures as well, there being no expensive real property or icemaking equipment to maintain.

Matches were played either on Burden's (now Chapman) Pond or Gardner's Pond, depending on the ice conditions. Each member's set of two stones was carted to the pond, a burden indeed. In 1897, boxes were constructed for curling stone storage at Burden's Pond, the site for that season; later, a shed was constructed for the purpose. During the 1897-98 season, the Westerly and Niantic clubs played matches on Burden's. The following season each club sent representatives to discuss competition and medals and a cup for championship play. Rules of the matches stipulated that a series of three games of not less than two rinks per club be played annually. The club with the greatest number of points would hold the trophy for the year. If three games would not be played then the greatest number of points in two games, or if necessary, in one game, would determine the winner. Somewhere around 1905, the first Westerly Curling Club disbanded, and the membership split into two new

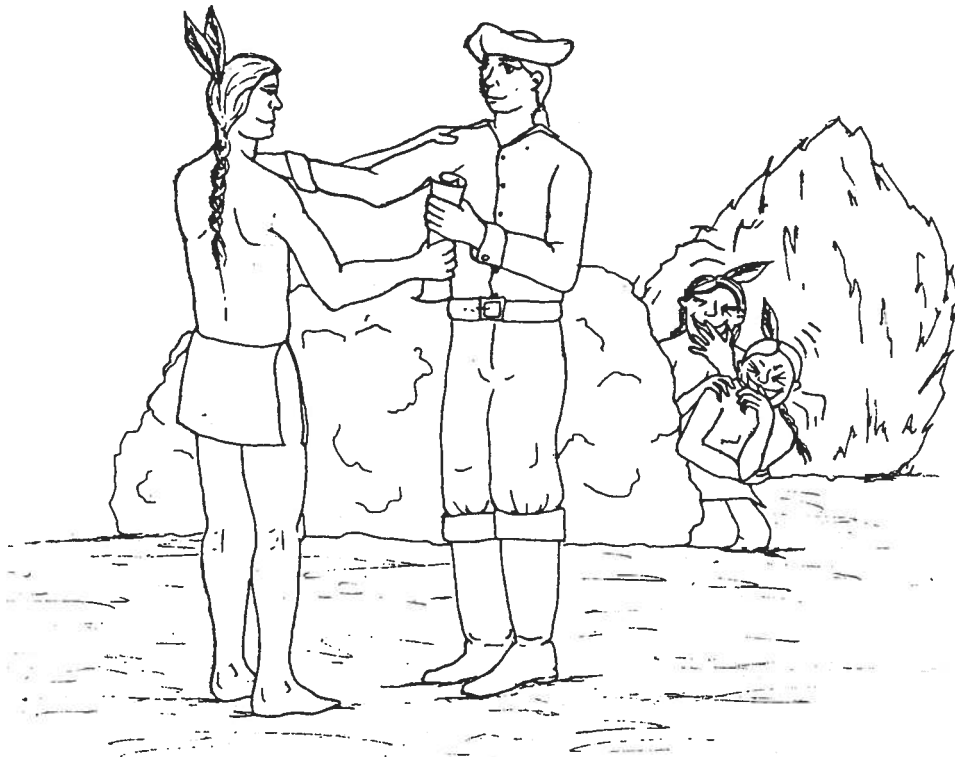
clubs, the Rob Roy and the Waverly. The games played then were known as 21 shot games; that is, the first team to amass 21 points was the winner. The games had to be played on Burden's Pond unless better ice could be found elsewhere. These conditions could only be altered by consent of both clubs. In 1908 rules governing the play for the cup were changed so that the Rob Roy club could join the competition. All games were to be played to time agreed upon by the Skips before play started, with not less than two rinks from each of the clubs. All ends which were started before the time was up were to be completed.

The December 26th, 1896, game saw Westerly beat Niantic by two shots. On December 29th that same year they played again; Niantic won by one point. In the first game each rink had five players and in the second each had four. In February, 1897, four rinks met at Burden's, and Niantic won the match by 13 shots.

There was competition for the Rob Roy Cup in games played in January, 1914, between Waverly, Rob Roy and Niantic. Waverly came out on top with 60 points, Niantic had 49 points, and Rob Roy, with 27 points, was third.

No curling log books are in the Westerly Curling Club possession for the 1920-1945 period. It is known that most curling was done at Burden's Pond. During these years private automobiles were used for the first time to transport stones. Some curlers of this period were Andrew Low, Russ Neagle, Thomas Wright, Tony Broadfoot, John MacFarland, Jack Nichols,

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poured into new bottles, like perpetuating the lore of Pawcatuck Pete, "guiding" the public as with the Barnum & Bailey circus tent signs "To The Egress" (when the owners wanted the paying patrons out the "Exit"). There's a pair of cannons in Stonington Village's Cannon Square just waiting for someone, some dark night, to turn them 180 degrees. The late Capt. Prent Lamphere offered lessons in how-to-carry-it-off with his show-business theatrics and consequent newspaper coverage. He kept live sea robins in the well of his party fishing boat with which he entertained tourists and tricked neophyte reporters. Holding up the common bottom fish so their "wings" would flap, he'd launch into his spiel about how these famed Florida flying fish had been blown north by recent hurricanes.

Finally, with this art form, there's a way to work up interest in the off-shore boundary disputes over Sandy Point or the Folly, and whether the real estate involved belongs to Rhode Island, Connecticut or New York. Some Long Island pranksters long ago set the pace for this gambit by writing advance stories in the New York newspapers with realistic details of the imminent sawing off of an offending portion of the mainland. At the appointed hour, thousands of wide-eyed spectators lined the shores for the promised event. Could be that a local audience could be inveigled to ring the shores of Little Narragansett Bay in anticipation of Sandy Point's being cast adrift and towed to a resting place well outside the territorial waters of New York, Connecticut, or Rhode Island.

Larry Chick

The Westerly Curling Club

Continued from page 27

Gordon Fiddes, Robert Valentine, Albert Pawson, Stewart Cruickshank, Bob Meikle, and Archie Meikle (Sr. and Jr.), Tom Wright was the spark plug in reviving and keeping curling alive during the 1945-69 period. Tom served as the first president of the Westerly Curling Club when it was reorganized in 1961, and was instrumental in enrolling the Westerly group in The Grand National Curling Club of America, which consists of 35 curling clubs located in the eastern US. This membership proved to be a wise decision; the club has since enjoyed the good play and fellowship at many "friendlies" and "bonspiels" (matches) at curling clubs all over the Eastern United States.

The upcoming 1986-1987 season marks the beginning of the second quarter-century for the reorganized Westerly Curling Club. The club's logo features The Rhode Island Red Rooster encircled by a blue band, and the logo is reproduced on the club's pin. It is customary to exchange pins with members of opposing rinks after playing in bonspiels, and the "Westerly Chicken" is a highly prized memento among curlers.

The Westerly pin will continue to be distributed throughout the curling world as a sign of the sport's well-being in our area. Heightened interest in the ancient sport, combined with the unique outdoors play which the Westerly Club practices, promise a bright curling future for area residents as they perpetuate the curling camaraderie which began in the Westerly area ninety years ago.

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