



1111 Echoes

Winter 2000

A newsletter from the R. I. Reds Heritage Society

Welcome Member

To the more than the 200 members of the newly formed Rhode Island Reds Heritage Society, the Founders Committee bids you welcome and extends its thanks for joining the Reds team. The Society was founded early this year with the following goals:

- To perpetuate the glorious 51-year history of the old R. I. Reds team of the American Hockey League that thrilled fans from 1926-27 through 1974-75,
- Organize membership to help achieve this goal and share the team's nostalgic history,
- Collect memorabilia and artifacts representing the Reds, and
- Display this collection at a permanent exhibit frequented by hockey fans.

Your *valued* membership will help us achieve these goals in due course. In the meantime, here are some of your benefits for participating: this is your first of three annual newsletters scheduled for the 2000-01 season, with your personalized membership card enclosed.

We are also planning a special members' get-together at a P-Bruins game, hopefully sometime in March. We'll let you know. Plus, we are hoping to have a R. I. Reds barbecue reunion sometime in July (details to be announced in your March/April newsletter).

In the meantime we wish you and your family a happy and peaceful holiday season and a prosperous and healthy new year.

Sincerely,

The R. I. Reds Heritage Society Founders Committee: *Tom Army, Arnold Bailey, Buster Clegg, George Patrick Duffy, Frank Galasso, Tom McDonough and Billy Vigeant*

Our Newsletter Name

A lot of suggestions to name our newsletter were put on the table, including *Cackles from the Reds Roost*, *Coop Scoop*, *The Rooster Crows Again*, *Reds Memories*, and even *Cock-a-doodle-do* (just kidding).

The old 5,500-seat R. I. Auditorium, sometimes called "The Arena," was torn down in the spring of 1989, having sat mostly vacant for 17 years after the Reds moved into the Providence Civic Center in 1972, ending the fabled relationship between the R.I. Reds and the old ice barn.

Built in the mid-1920s, the Auditorium opened for hockey during the 1926-27 when the Reds first emerged as a member of the old Can-Am League. They stayed there for 46 years. The building's location? 1111 North Main Street in Providence.

When the ball and crane finally (and tragically) brought down this sports relic, the 1111 location was converted into a parking lot for employees of the neighborhood's renowned care center, Miriam Hospital.

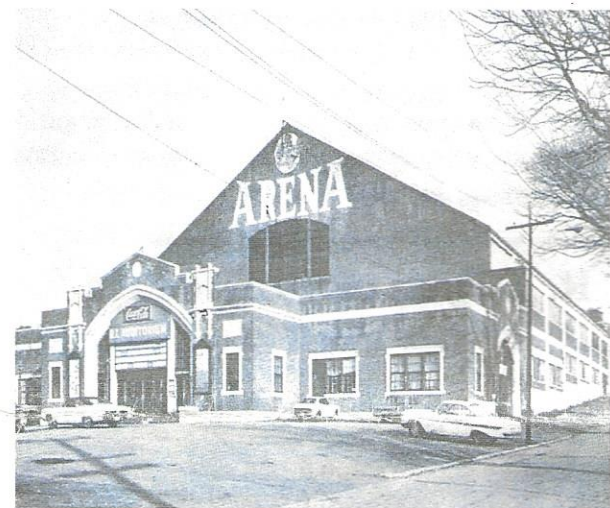
But today, the site is eerie. Some of the foundation still exists. Neighborhood residents and patrons of the next-door Penalty Box tap have reported that late Sunday evenings, only during winter months, strange sounds and images emanate from 1111.

Quiet murmurs of fan cheers and hushed organ music playing *Roll out the Barrel*, a crackling voice droning out, "Onennnnne.....minute." And on evenings even graced with cloudless skies, small puddles of water have

been found, as if a leaky heaven just happened to pick that spot.

One startling discovery produced remnants of some old rusted chicken wire, and a man's stylish dress-hat circa 1950s fashion, cut as if a razor sliced it (similar to the kind owner Lou Pieri threw on the ice to celebrate a Reds hat-trick). Of course, the opposition then (and even now) would defiantly skate over his fine fedora, only to ruin it.

A few more things: echoes have been heard of vendors barking, "Ice cream. Ice cream. Get your chocolate-covered ice cream." And, of course, "Hockey News. Get your Hockey



News," plus "Program, scorecard line-up. Get your line-up for tonight's game." Finally, on most winter Monday mornings, the lot has been found layered by a ghostly film of smoke (not fog), carrying with it a faint odor of cold pizza and stale beer.

Yes, these are the eerie sounds, images and scents of the old R. I. Auditorium. They remain with all of us. So, our newsletter's name: *1111 Echoes*. Reminiscing?

Christmas Night Legends

For those who regularly attended games at the old Auditorium, it was a different era than today. There were few quality programs on black and white TV and the National Football League had limited support and exposure. Sports fans eagerly looked for entertainment and many flocked to the Reds' traditional Sunday night home games.

But it was not just Sunday nights that had become "Hockey Night" in Providence. The Reds also regularly entertained AHL adversaries on important holiday nights like Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. Today, those holidays are rarely scheduled for games.

Longtime followers agree that Christmas night games at the Auditorium were historically wild and unpredictable. The enemy always seemed to play mean spirited, as if they resented having to be on the road. And the Reds, stuffed with home-cooked turkey, played with equal belligerence.

One Christmas night, Kent Douglas, an aspiring prospect with Springfield who later made it to the NHL, decided he would take on Reds' player-coach Ferny Flaman, a man with the reputation of having never lost a fight.

Big mistake. Ferny toyed with his agitator for a few seconds, then gripped Douglas by the seat of the pants and nap of the neck and casually hurled the young upstart into the Indians' net. A few minutes later, with the help of several teammates, the embarrassed Douglas emerged from the entanglement of his skates and the goal mesh. Never again did Douglas annoy Mr. Flaman.

Another Christmas night, sometime in the 1960s, Cleveland was the unhappy visitor. The Barons were lead by the famous Fred Glover, one of the best players in the league, a tough fighter, and who many opponents called "the consummate stick man." Glover kept his stick high to establish his turf and to issue a

visual warning, "Private property. Do not enter."

That evening a Reds' player entered Glover's area and a fight ensued, one that developed into a jolly, holiday bench-clearing brawl involving all 30 players dressed for the game. It took 40-minutes to subdue the brawl and a CPA to record the penalties.

Legend has it, too, that the never-to-be-forgotten journeyman, Jean Baptiste Pusie, became involved in a 1936 Christmas battle. His rival, completely outmatched, suddenly exited the ice, bolted over the players bench, down the corridor (skates on), through the main lobby, out the front entrance and across North Main St. to the North Burial Ground.

Pusie, also wearing his skates, followed in hot pursuit. Folks say that Pusie was the only one to return...but he needed his blades sharpened for the third period.

"Peace on Earth" this Christmas night.



R. I. Reds or Providence Reds?

Both Rhode Island Reds and Providence Reds were the names that referred to the team during its 51-year history. To local fans, the club generally was called the R. I. Reds. Around the rest of the American Hockey League cities it was the Providence Reds.

In researching news releases issued from the AHL office throughout the years, the name Providence was mainly used to note the team's place in the standings, its scoring statistics and schedule. In towns like Hershey stories would read, "Providence Reds visit the Bears tonight."

This identification in part probably stemmed from the fact that the corporate ownership of the team was listed as the Providence Hockey Club.

Locally, though, the team almost al-

ways was called the Rhode Island Reds, the nickname referencing the well-known breed of poultry that is native to Rhode Island and designated as the official state bird.

Therefore, local news articles, radio and television reports would read something like this: "The Rhode Island Reds defeated the Springfield Indians in Springfield last night, 6-3."

Now, the logo: Several logo designs adorned uniforms of the Reds dating back to the early years. In fact, one of the first renderings can be seen in a team photo from 1933-34 where a strutting rooster is shown, underscored with the words "R. I. Reds."

Other various designs followed, but what is the most memorable logo was created by Providence Journal cartoonist

Frank Lanning. The "Fighting Rooster" was introduced to the team's uniform in 1948-49. It must have worked, because the Reds not only finished the regular season atop the AHL's Eastern Division, but also went on to capture the league's Calder Cup.

That logo still remains the most graphic symbol of the Reds. Oddly enough, though, the familiar Fighting Rooster is encircled with the words "Providence Reds." As some would say, "Go figure!"

Perhaps, though, the Rhode Island Reds were far ahead of their time in setting the stage for regional fan support. As examples, today we have the New Jersey Devils (hockey), New England Patriots (football), Arizona Diamondbacks (baseball) and Indiana Pacers (basketball).

Again, "Go figure!"

Topper "Tops" Them All

The R. I. Reds Heritage Society was formed early in 2000 and one of its first orders of business in the new millennium was to select the team's "Player of the 20th Century." To do so the group's founders waded through records of more than 600 players who proudly wore the uniform during the team's 51-year history.

In the end, the choice was not difficult. On Saturday night, April 1, 2000, the society honored Zellio "Topper" Toppazzini as Reds' "Player of the Century" in ceremonies at the Providence Civic Center prior to a Providence Bruins AHL game. The richly deserved honor recognized Topper as the greatest Red of them all.

Topper, now 70, is the all-time leading scorer in Reds history. During his 12 years sporting the uniform, he amassed 279 goals, 448 assists and 727 points in 650 regular season games, and another 16-28-44 in playoff action. All are team records.

In 1955-56 the line of Topper, Paul Larivee and Camille Henry spearheaded the Reds to both regular season and Calder Cup championships. Topper earned career highs of 42 goals, 71 assists and 113 points in leading the AHL in scoring and in the playoffs he also added 7-13-20.

Needless to say, he was selected to the AHL's first-team all-star squad. Later, in the early 1960s, the popular right-winger captained the club.

Topper came to a beleaguered Reds team in January 1952. He joined defenseman Pat Egan and forward Jean Paul Denis from the New York Rangers in a trade for forward Jack Stoddard.

The deal immediately energized the Reds who came on strong the rest of the season, only to lose in the Calder Cup finals to Pittsburgh, 4 games to 2.

But the best was yet to come. For eleven more seasons Topper was the man. Who can ever forget #15 with his long, graceful strides that seemed to produce effortless acceleration...and, of course, his rink-length rushes and never-fail breakaways.

Topper was brought up in Copper Cliff, Ontario, but decided to make Rhode Island his home. He and his lovely wife Shirley have raised five children and are proud grandparents of twelve. After the Reds, Topper coached hockey at Providence College and was a highly respected referee for youth and high school hockey in Rhode Island. He was also a successful sales representative for a local automotive parts company.

Criteria for his award were testing. To be considered, a player must have performed in at least eight seasons (15% of the Reds 51 years); must have achieved outstanding career statistics for his position; must have shown himself as a team leader; and must have established himself as a good-will ambassador for the Reds through involvement in local residency and outstanding service to the community.

Topper has excelled in all those categories and truly deserves recognition as the greatest player ever to wear the proud colors of the team — red, white and black.

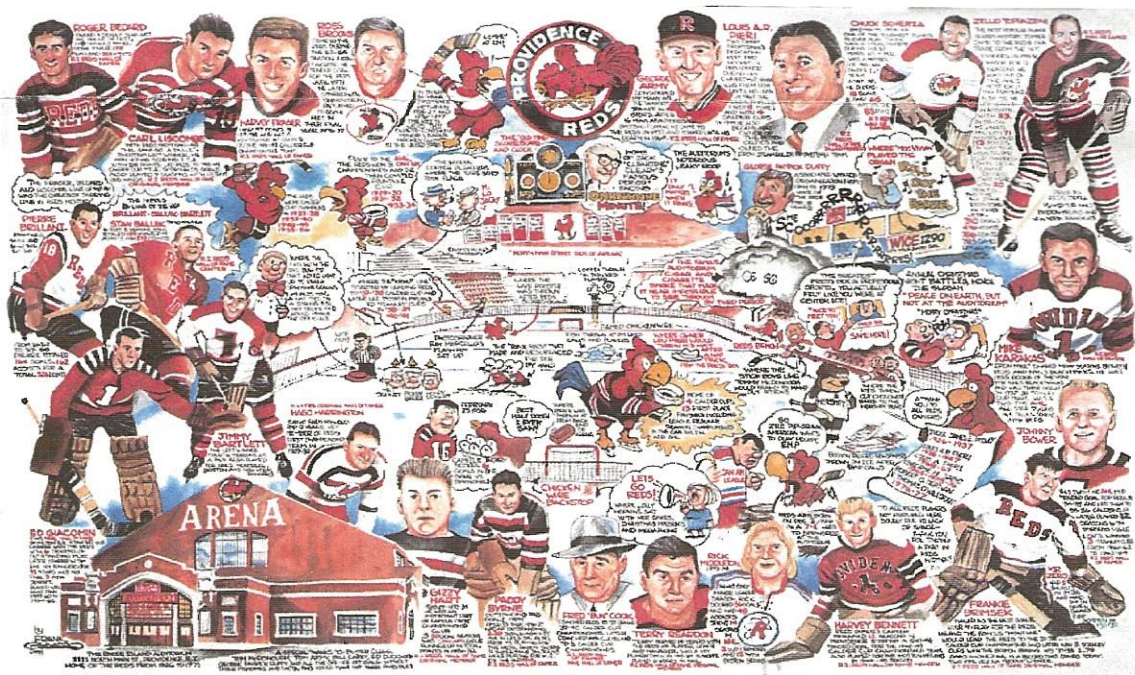


Reds Historical Poster

Frank Galasso, a young native of Rhode Island, has for the first time ever captured on canvass a pictorial history of the R. I. Reds.

The featured sports cartoonist of the *Providence Journal* and *New York Post* has made available to the public authentic, limited-edition lithograph posters of this marvelous, colorful rendering. Actual size is 36" wide by 24" deep and suitable for framing.

To order yours, simply fill out the order form found on the insert page of your *1111 Echoes* newsletter. Cost is \$19.95 each poster, plus \$4.95 shipping and handling.



Scherza and Duffy Named "Tops 2001 Award" Winners



Charles "Chuck" Scherza and George Patrick Duffy, both Pawtucket residents, have been voted recipients of the "Tops 2001 Award," named in honor of Zellio Toppazzini, "Player of the Century."

The award is the first in a series of annual presentations planned by the R. I. Reds Heritage Society to recognize persons who have contributed outstanding service to the Rhode Island Reds hockey club and to the local community.

Chuck, age 77, began his pro career with the NHL Boston Bruins and New York Rangers before joining the Reds for 10 seasons (1945-46 through 1954-55) as a versatile center, left winger and ace penalty

killer. He even filled in as goaltender several times.

George Patrick, now 80, became the Reds' team publicist in 1945-46 after serving in the U. S. Coast Guard during World War II. Over the next twenty-five years he became the popular "Voice of the R. I. Reds" on radio. Old-time fans still recall his memorable, protracted description of each and every Reds' goal, "He scorrerrres!"

As a player, Chuck was among the most durable ever to wear a Reds' uniform. He played in 649 games, second by only one to Zellio Toppazzini, and appeared in sixty or more games in each of his ten seasons. Overall, in regular season play, he scored 139 goals, 297 assists for 436 points—fourth highest in team history.

His most productive campaign came in 1947-48 when he helped lead the Reds to the American Hockey League's Eastern Division title with 18 goals, 65 assists and 83 points. The next year, 1948-49, he was given the task of a role player, serving as player-coach Terry Reardon's top penalty killer while the Reds captured both the division and Calder Cup titles.

Meanwhile, George was making his mark with the Reds as one of the most visible publicists and radio broadcasters in the AHL. He was noted for his fabled overnight journeys by automo-

bile to such distant places as Buffalo, Cleveland and Cincinnati, only to turn around after a game and head back to Providence for a Sunday night game. His non-stop energy and promotion of hockey made him an esteemed figure in the league.

Chuck's hockey career ended tragically in 1958-59 when as player-coach of the North Bay Trappers he was accidentally hit by a stick in his left eye, a blow that cost him the eye's vision. Ironically, he later became a respected linesman for AHL games in Providence. In fact, league officials praised him as one of the most accurate and dependable in the circuit.

Youth, high school and college refereeing came next. "He was always in charge and respected by the young players," says Russ McGuirl, a veteran referee of 17 years who often partnered with Scherza. "If play got too rough, he could be very stern, or at other times very fatherly. Whatever it took, things never got out of control and the kids learned important values of sportsmanship from Chuck."

While at the old R. I. Auditorium, George Patrick was a jack-of-all-trades. Besides hockey, he also served as publicist for the building and all its events, including basketball, boxing, stage shows, ice shows and circuses.

Today, even as an octogenarian, he continues to be an active volunteer in sports. In winter he coaches boys' varsity high school basketball and in summer different levels of youth baseball where he recently recorded his 600th career victory.

Chuck and Anne, his wife of 58 years and both natives of Western Canada, settled as permanent residents of Pawtucket in 1952. There they raised five children and today enjoy eight grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

George, born and raised in Pawtucket, has been married 57 years to his high school sweetheart, Helen. The couple raised five children and is blessed today with ten grandchildren and one great-grandchild.



R. I. Reds Heritage Society
P. O. Box 167
Barrington, RI 02806
(401) 247-2666

Next Issue

The next issue of *1111 Echoes* will come out in March or April 2001. It will include updates on the whereabouts and goings on of former players, news about plans for a reunion barbecue next summer, and more interesting articles on the team's wonderful 51-year history. Stay tuned!