

Bethlehem Historical Association

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2024



Coach Camp: A Man for All Seasons

By Beth Anderson

The game of tennis has a rich history in the United States since its introduction in 1874. It has been a popular sport throughout the town of Bethlehem for at least a century. One name commonly associated with the sport of tennis in Bethlehem is Mr. Donald M. Camp. Though many other individuals influenced the development of tennis throughout the town, Mr. Camp left an influential legacy.

Mr. Donald M. Camp was born in 1917 in Afton, New York. Afton is a small-town northeast of Binghamton, New York. He arrived in Delmar in 1946, after serving in the US Navy, when he was hired to teach English at Bethlehem Central High School. An article from *The Times Union*, dated June 15, 1946, announced “Donald M. Camp of Sidney, who will become a member of the faculty of Bethlehem Central High School in September, has been appointed program director for the summer recreation project...”. The article went on to state he would also assume a role as assistant athletic director in addition to teaching duties.

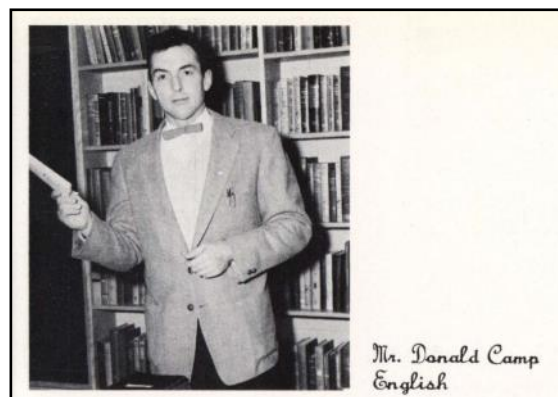
Mr. Camp began his coaching career at BCHS by coaching football and basketball. In fact, his basketball team in 1946-47 won 19 straight games before losing in the Sectionals. His basketball coaching experience culminated in being named Coach of the Year, for the Albany area, in 1950. An Altamont Enterprise article, dated March 31, 1950, had this to say about the coach, “The 31-year-old Camp, twice county tennis champion, is most self-effacing of area coaches. ‘When I think of all the things I’ve learned this season, I wonder how I got by the year before’.”

Mr. Camp is quoted in the article, “You ought to emphasize that I had excellent material and the

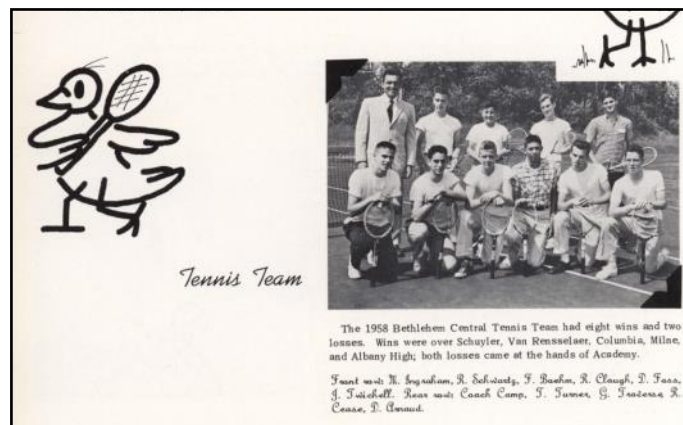
finest group of boys to work with that I ever expect to know.” This concise, yet meaningful, statement by the coach about his players personifies the ensuing self-effacing description. Yet, despite his basketball coaching success, the *Knickerbocker News* would print a surprising article on April 7, 1950.

The article, “BCHS Changes End Cage Reign of Don Camp,” tells the story succinctly. Though the team had compiled an 18-2 season, Mr. Camp was relieved of his coaching duties due to a modification in program and faculty changes. The reader is told that Mr. Camp would still be

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Photos from BCHS 1959 yearbook



Tennis Team

The 1958 Bethlehem Central Tennis Team had eight wins and two losses. Wins were over Schuyler, Van Rensselaer, Columbia, Milne, and Albany High; both losses came at the hands of Academy.

Front row: H. Angell, R. Schickel, F. Bauman, R. Clough, J. Fane, J. Fairhall. Back row: Coach Camp, J. Turner, G. Fontana, R. Coase, J. Grand.

Coach Camp continued from page 1

teaching English while Mr. Donald Farrell would take over basketball coaching duties as well as the assistant athletic director duties. Isn't this story supposed to be about tennis? Be patient while the stage is set.

By the early 1950s, Mr. Camp and his wife had three small children. In addition to his teaching duties, Mr. Camp participated in a few athletic pursuits of his own. Always fit and active, Mr. Camp was a successful area tennis competitor. He was Tri County singles and doubles champion from 1946-1951. It's one accomplishment to play at a champion level in either singles OR doubles, but to be adept at both is quite a feat.

During the 1950s the Bethlehem Central School District continued to grow, necessitating the building of a new high school. Along with the school's construction came a group of new tennis courts. There were three courts at the existing junior/senior high, but the lack of courts made it difficult for a team's matches to be held at home. Scholastic tennis matches (called dual-meet matches) usually are conducted with several contests being played at once. This cannot be accomplished with only three tennis courts available.

When the new high school on Delaware Avenue opened in 1954, it boasted eight new courts. The team would no longer have to play a whole season of away matches. Despite this great inconvenience, the team was compiling a legacy of wins and was considered one of the tops in the area. In 1957 Mr. Camp would come out of coaching retirement to take the helm of the high school tennis team.

What would follow would be legendary by most coaching standards. Coach Camp would amass numerous successful tennis seasons. He counted among his very best players: John Manne '62, John Stevenson '66, and Bruce Erhardt '70. There were countless other standouts. Coach Camp explained some of the strength of his teams over the years to Ralph Martin of the *Knickerbocker News*... "If I had to give a reason for our success over the years, it would have to be our youth programs. This, coupled with the tremendous enthusiasm and attitude of our kids, has paid us great dividends," said Camp above the murmur of pupils the other day in the school cafeteria."

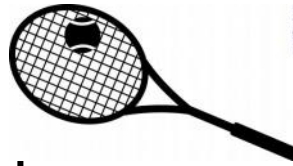
Coach Camp had a hand in the development of the youth programs and taught many kids to play tennis over the years. Mr. Camp also gave private lessons on some of the private courts in town. That was a treat for tennis pupils because those courts were clay courts, a different surface from the hard courts available at the local schools.

Between 1964-1971, Coach Camp's teams had a winning streak of 90 consecutive matches. Ralph Martin, a sports columnist for the *Knickerbocker News*, asked the coach if there were any standout moments of pride as a coach. Martin explained Coach Camp's response, "A year ago Albany Academy was enjoying a banner season, but they wouldn't consider it a success unless they met perennial power Bethlehem. A match was arranged. Just prior to the match, tragedy of the worst sort struck the Camp household. Camp's son was killed in a motorcycle accident. Tom Stevenson took over the team. The Eagles won "one for their coach" by a 5-2 count. "It gave me a big boost, said Camp simply. Further words were unnecessary."

Success came to an end, albeit briefly. On May 11, 1971, an article in the *Knickerbocker News* announced, "Bethlehem Central's 90-game Suburban Council tennis skein came to a halt when a young, but talented, Niskayuna High squad came through with a 4-3 decision yesterday at Schenectady's

Central Park." In his usual self-effacing manner, Coach Camp said, "The kids took the loss pretty hard. We've won a few matches in the past I didn't think we'd win." The coach didn't miss a beat compiling another 44 consecutive match winning streak.

To say that Mr. Don Camp had an influence on tennis in the Capital Region during his lifetime is a gross understatement. In addition to his personal competitive career that saw him win the Albany County Doubles Championship at the age of 52 partnered with a former tennis team standout, John Stevenson, Mr. Camp also served as the tennis professional at several country clubs including Albany Country Club and the Mohawk Country Club. But he was not just an accomplished tennis player. Mr. Camp was an excellent bowler and golfer with three holes in one. He was also an accomplished bridge player and an avid fisherman, and a well-respected English teacher.



Did you enjoy reading about Coach Camp and tennis in Bethlehem? We hope so!

We've been telling you about our upcoming sports themed exhibit for a while now. See the Spring issue for some great photos. We've homed in on an official title **Fun and Frolic: Sport, Competition and Community** and now we need to borrow some specific objects to complete the scene. If you have any of the following, please reach out to Tim Beebe, 518-506-0850, tkbeebe@aol.com.

Baseball related items: Tri-Village Little League jersey (any time period) and a vintage (or reproduction) old time baseball uniform.

Golf related items: a set (or just one or two) of vintage golf clubs, wooden ones would be excellent.

Bowling: we've got bowling balls, but how about a bowling league shirt and shoes?

What other Bethlehem sports and activity memorabilia might you have tucked away? Roller skating? Skiing? Sledding? Hockey? Football? The possibilities are many. We'd love to hear from you.

News and Notes

Newsletter

Save us a stamp? If you would like to receive your newsletter via email and save us a stamp, please let Susan know, SusanLeath2011@gmail.com.

Holiday Open Houses

Do you like decorating for the holidays? We could use your help decking the halls of the museum for our Holiday Open Houses. Please do email or call Susan, SusanLeath2011@gmail.com, 518-209-5855.

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Historian's Corner

By Bill Ketzner

Bethlehem's Historic Markers: People, Places and Purpose



Every two years in October, Bethlehem Public Library offers its gallery space to the Town Historian, to promote and actively encourage public interest, understanding, and appreciation of our common history over the course of our town's 230-year run. Historic markers immediately came to mind for this opportunity, since an updated inventory of Bethlehem's historic markers is (slowly) underway, and a maintenance program for old and damaged markers is badly needed.

Enter BHA trustee Tim Beebe – fellow history buff, shutterbug and willing accomplice – and together we set out to create a responsible, inspired and thoughtful display of the many types of markers one can find in Bethlehem, across the wonderful diversity of our hamlets. I don't think either of us was awfully surprised to find it was harder than it looked; if time, money and gallery space were no barrier, we would have captured and curated every last one!

Indian filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani once described editing as a meditative process, but for us it felt like dropping off beloved family members at an orphanage. Tim's collection offered *so many* great scenes from Bethlehem's past, each with a different sponsor or champion, and a fascinating story to tell! That got me thinking about the origins of the historic marker

concept, and how it evolved in New York State to inform the work we're looking at now.

To be sure, recognizing people, places or events of historic significance with commemorative signs was not an American invention. This distinction lies with 19th century England, with our own tradition beginning when the Antiquities Act of 1906 was enacted by Congress. This law authorized historic landmarks and structures as national monuments.

By the 1920s, state historic marker efforts became popular. New York State's first program launched in 1926 to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the American Revolution, and it was this effort that created the instantly recognizable blue and yellow signs we see on roadsides today, in Bethlehem and across the state. Many states still oversee their original marker programs, but placing landmark signage in the Empire State now rests primarily with local governments, historical societies and other not-for-profit organizations.

In many circumstances, this lack of state oversight makes historic marker inventories and maintenance efforts challenging to undertake, for without state standards – and absent a local entity officially designated to establish such guidelines – what are we looking for? What is the definition of "historic marker?" What is the difference between signage pointing to something "historic," as opposed to something that is just plain old? And who decides which is which?

Until such questions are answered, more practical considerations (Who does the work? What are the costs? Who will pay for it?) must wait. This vagueness, however, gave Tim a great deal of flexibility. His vision – by curiosity and camera's eye – was allowed to capture the delightful variety of materials, shapes and colors used to commemorate our rich history, and humbly point to people, places and events that made significant contributions to the complex character of our town, state and country over time.

This exhibit runs at BPL through October 31, 2024, after that it can be seen at Bethlehem Town Hall through the holidays. I also encourage you to visit these compelling sites at your leisure – many are nary a stone's throw away!

Wendy Brandow

1935-2024

As a charter member, Wendy Brandow, was a fixture at the Schoolhouse for almost 60 years. She held every elected office at least once. It seemed she was always there, quietly busy. She wanted to be useful and just did whatever needed doing. Among our many fond memories is Wendy's long tradition of making and serving the punch at the Silver Tea.

Wendy, however, would shrug off attention to focus on the task at hand. She also knew the importance of encouraging new members and keeping an open mind to their ideas. A tiny, unimposing woman, she was staunchly independent and could be counted on to speak up in support of whatever she believed to be the right thing.

One new idea that Wendy did *not* embrace was "that darn machine", the computer. She really loved the telephone and enjoyed little more than making calls to line up the Sunday hosts or secure donations for the bake sale.

Wendy's last job was delivering the mail, something she insisted on doing even after she moved miles away from the post office in Selkirk. She dependably drove around, often with a dog on the seat next to her, to put mail under door mats and later call to let us know it was there.

A bad fall and subsequent health issues finally forced Wendy to curtail her duties, but she never gave up her intention to return to them. The last phone call she placed to us was made to say that she was "ready for a challenge." Sadly though, time ran out. Our challenge now is to live up to the wonderful example the irreplaceable Wendy has set for us. BHA is better for having had Wendy Brandow as a devoted member - and how we do miss her.



Karen Beck

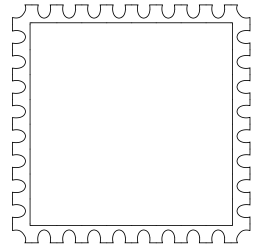


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Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum

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*Live for Today Dream for Tomorrow
Learn from Yesterday*

EVENTS Calendar

Tuesday November 5

Election Day Bake Sale

At the Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum
All day while the polls are open and the treats last!

Wednesday November 20, 7 p.m.

Pressing Matters: The History of the Hay Press

Historian Jon Palmer speaks at the Bethlehem Public Library.
Registration required. Call the library at 518-439-9314 or
Bethlehem.LibraryCalendar.com

Sundays December 8 and 15, 1 to 4 p.m.

Annual Holiday Open House

Celebrating Joyous Traditions

Looking ahead to **2025**

Our Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum opens again for regular
Sunday hours on February 2.

Victory Gardens are the topic of our February 19 talk.

The museum will be open with special children's
programming during the February school vacation week.