

# It's 75 years for our Thistle -

**I**t was the talk of the town back in December of 1920. The brash new city was to have two new curling clubs, and a little friendly competition was even extended to the opening. A group of men from the Highlands and Norwood managed to throw the first rock in the new Thistle a week before folks across the river in the Strathcona area launched the Granite.

The first club was just four sheets of ice in the machinery hall at the Exhibition Grounds under the planned grandstand. Planning had begun that spring, when a group got together at Stirrock's store on March 26, 1920, to begin the process of forming a club and finding a suitable site for a building. There was talk of it becoming a curling and bowling club, but the bowling never materialized.

The first president was Alderman McClellan, with Highlands developer W. J. Magrath made honorary president. The club hired Scotty Sutherland for \$100 a month to be both caretaker and ice-maker. Men paid \$15 in annual dues, with the "ladies" rate set at \$3.

It cost the club about \$500 to install the equipment and build a waiting room. The rocks were very expensive, purchased second-hand for up to \$50 a pair.

The Thistle ladies started organizing their club when the rink opened. They were first invited over so the men could "assist the ladies in their game." They started regular curling a few weeks later.

With men and women together, the club's social life picked up.

Moccasin dances on the ice were often held at the start of the season and a mixed bonspiel ended the season. A six-piece orchestra charged \$23 in 1921 for the moccasin dance, and the ladies provided a cup of tea or coffee with a sandwich for ten cents.

During the Second World War, the space was taken over by the Royal Canadian Air Force. The members continued to curl, but in reduced numbers, at the Edmonton Curling Club and later at the Alberta Avenue Curling Club. In 1945, male and female members returned to the Exhibition grounds.

Edmonton was in a construction boom after the war, and soon plans were afoot to replace the grandstands. And that meant that by 1952 the machinery building had to go.

A dedicated group of Thistle directors had already set the wheels in motion to find a new home. Mayor Bill Hawrelak, himself a Thistle curler, turned the first sod at the present



Roof collapse, 1984



Thistle Curling Club

location on 114th Avenue and 69th Street in early August, 1952.

In October, hurricane-force winds blew down a considerable portion of the concrete block walls, roof trusses and posts. Then a plumbers' strike in November delayed some work. Still, curlers managed to hit the ice in the new rink on December 20.

The \$85,000 eight-sheet building was state of the art, but still had natural ice. When an artificial ice system was installed in 1954, curlers were no longer at the mercy of weather.