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Father Of Lacrosse

May 5, 1843

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by *Ronald Wolf*

Today we honour the birth of William George Beers (1843 – 1900), a noted Canadian dentist and patriot, is referred to as the "father of modern lacrosse", the official game of Canada, for his work establishing the first set of playing rules for the game. Some people think it was actually hockey that was the first game of Canadians.



Adapted from an Aboriginal game referred to as baagga'adowe by the Ojibwe people, lacrosse gained popularity throughout Canada in the 1800s.

Dr. Beers is also known for his significant influence on the organization and administration of sports in general.

Beers was involved with the game of lacrosse from a young age. Even as a teenager, he was a member of the Montreal Lacrosse Club. He was selected at age 17 to be a goalkeeper for a Montreal exhibition team.

In 1860, Beers began to make the first written rules of the modern game. Prior to this, all rules of the game needed to be decided prior to each game. Some of the rules established by Beers were the size of and the use of a rubber lacrosse ball, that the lacrosse stick could be any length, but the pocket needed to be flat in the absence of a ball.

In 1867, as lacrosse was growing significantly in popularity, Beers created the *Canadian National Lacrosse Foundation*. In the same year, he formed the National Lacrosse Association, a conglomerate of 29 clubs from Quebec and Ontario which has been used as a model for other national sports associations.

He was also a leading figure in the formation of the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association. In 1869, Beers published a book on lacrosse entitled *Lacrosse: The National Game of Canada*. In 1876, Beers organized a team of Canadian players and Native people players to tour England, Scotland, and Ireland to showcase the sport.

During this trip in 1876, Queen Victoria witnessed an exhibition game and was impressed, saying "The game is very pretty to watch." Her endorsement was enough for many English girls' schools to adopt the sport in the 1890s. Again in 1883, Beers returned to England to showcase lacrosse. This time Beers brought two teams to play exhibition game.

Beers was also successful and notable dentist. Perhaps with lacrosse injuries, players needed a professional dentist. After finishing his schooling in 1856, Beers completed a dental apprenticeship. By the early 1860s, Beers was a successful dentist and began publishing article in journals.

In 1868, he founded Canada's first dental journal, the *Canada Journal of Dental Science*. He also served as dean of Quebec's first dental college at Bishop's University. He held this position for only a short time. Differences in opinion regarding curriculum and concerns over the use of untrained dental assistants led Beers to resign from the position.

Beers was a strong Canadian nationalist. Besides advocating for lacrosse to become the national sport of Canada believing it would serve as "unifying symbol for the emerging Canadian nationality," Beers also defended the country against the Fenian Raids in 1866 and 1870. During the raids, Beers helped establish the Victoria Rifles of Canada.

Some Canadians, who work hard and do right with the universe, are sedum remembered for over 100 years. Beers is remembered for not only Lacrosse, dentistry, but also as a Canadian nationalist. When you think about it, there are those, even time and the ages just can't erase from Canadian history.

Maybe you will be Canadian that time will remember and get published in columns like It's Our History, Our Country.

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