

Winterlude

THE STORY



1979 - 1989



National Capital
Commission

Commission
de la Capitale nationale

Canada



Winterlude Festival Association Inc.
Association du festival Bal de Neige Inc.

THE BEGINNING

This superb winter festival is part of an old tradition in Canada's Capital. In the 19th century, when winter closed in on the city and cut it off from the rest of the world, people used to gather for a series of celebrations aimed at passing the winter in a mood of companionship and fun.

In the old days, this meant an almost unceasing round of sleigh parties, curling competitions, sing-alongs, amateur theatricals, toboggan runs and skating to music on rinks throughout the city. For a number of years, the Capital even boasted an Ice Palace as the focal point of wintertime festivities. Then, as the country moved forward into the 20th century and winter became less isolating and forbidding, these splendid customs were allowed to lapse.

In 1979, the National Capital Commission — a Crown Corporation responsible for the management and development of federally owned property in the Capital — conceived and gave birth to Winterlude. In doing so, they gave us back some of our oldest and best wintertime traditions, along with a few new ones!

THE RIDEAU CANAL

The Rideau Canal gave festival planners a marvellous focus for creativity in 1979. This long, man-made channel – now widely known as the Longest Skating Rink in the World – was built for military purposes between 1826 and 1832. The Canal runs right through the heart of Ottawa, and for some time before Winterlude began, the National Capital Commission had been clearing the ice for skating between downtown Ottawa and Dows Lake, some 7.8 kilometres to the southwest.

Thus, even in the years before Winterlude, the Rideau Canal was a centre of wintertime activity in the Capital. For years now, families have been turning out on sunny weekends, pulling their babies in sleighs and teaching their toddlers to skate; teenagers have been meeting their friends in the evening to race to Dows Lake and back; businessmen with briefcases have been skating to and from work along the Rideau Canal. Winterlude was merely an intensification of a wintertime way of life in Canada's Capital.

SENSE OF PURPOSE

Winterlude provides everyone with so many opportunities for fun and entertainment that it is easy to forget the serious purposes that underlie it. In fact, the National Capital Commission conceived Winterlude as a means of preserving and disseminating some of Canada's most valuable wintertime traditions; it also hoped to promote the Capital as a focus of Canadian national identity.

The first festival proved a brilliant success, and it already included a number of events such as Ice Dream – a fabulous village of snow sculptures – that have since become Winterlude traditions. The ice and snow maze that was to grow into Piruvik, a unique wintertime playground for children, was also part of the first Winterlude. Horses plunged over the ice in the very first Molson Trotting Classic, and daredevils with laden trays skidded down an icy slalom course in a prototype of what is now the Perrier Walters' and Waitresses' Race.

COMMUNITY ALLIES

The community threw itself fully into the first Winterlude. Indeed, what still sets Winterlude apart from other winter festivals is the high degree of community interest and support that it generates. Over the years, Winterlude has grown into a vital part of the economic and cultural life of the Capital, and it has developed a correspondingly high level of community participation. In 1987, for example, nearly two-thirds of a three million dollar budget came from a proud and enthusiastic private sector.

A key factor in the growth of community involvement was the 1986 formation of the Winterlude Festival Association. This agency, originally a community-based advisory board, has developed into a much needed channel for community energy. The WFA was mainly responsible for developing the concept of community "Rendezvous" – scattered focusses of Winterlude activity throughout the National Capital Region – and this has virtually doubled the number of Winterlude activities and the excitement and pride generated by the festival.

WINTERLUDE AND THE WORLD

What began as a small local festival in 1979 now draws on a significant national and international pool of competitors, with participants coming from across the country and around the world.

Winterlude first aspired to international stature in 1984 when it hosted 400 Dutch skaters for the famous Alternative Race of 11 Cities, and every year since has seen more and more international competition and participation. Fifteen different countries participated in 1987; In 1988, long-distance skaters came from Europe, the United States and Canada to compete for the first Jack Barber World Championship. Other international events include curling (the Lord Elgin Challenge), barrel-jumping (the World Outdoor Barrel-Jumping Competition), and snow sculpture (the International Sculpture which will be created by Britain in 1989).

Indeed, Winterlude has proven to be more and more a window on the world for Canadians. For example, in 1987, Lansdowne Park created a Swiss Village; In 1988, they produced a program called "Made In Italy"; In 1989, they will feature "The British Invasion" with the same wonderful mix of music, food and crafts.

WINTERLUDE

MASCOTS

The Ice Hog Family – made up of Mr. and Mrs. Ice Hog and their children, Nuomi and Nuoma – are Winterlude's official mascots. You are likely to find them at Piruvik (the wonderful winter playground that also harbours the Ice Hog Habitat), or at any of the official Winterlude sites. Go up and say hello and get a warm hug from these furry Canadian animals!

Legend has it that the Ice Hogs arrived in Canada via the Bering Strait towards the end of the last Ice Age. For many years, they lived in virtual isolation in the very far north, gradually building up a culture that centered on skating. A remarkable feature of this remote culture appears to have been the annual gathering of the Ice Hogs. This is an event that features all kinds of winter games and a feast that lasts for many days. In 1979, the Ice Hogs brought this agreeable tradition south, and they have been an integral part of Winterlude ever since.

THE WORLD OF WINTERLUDE

The World of Winterlude goes far beyond the festival itself. Those who come to Canada's Capital in February will find that the region as a whole offers a wealth of things to see, do and experience. To begin with, there is splendid skiing (both cross-country and downhill) right on the Capital's doorstep. While here, you can take your choice of some ten superior resorts – the nearest one being only 15 minutes from Parliament Hill in downtown Ottawa.

For those who have had enough of the outdoors, the Capital literally brims with shops that range from trendy to traditional, many of them offering Canadian specialties – everything from Inuit art and fine woollens to unique ceramics and wonderful stained glass. Wander down snowy Sparks Street (Canada's oldest pedestrian mall), explore the boutiques of historic Byward Market, or lose yourself in one of our many immense shopping complexes, such as the glittering Rideau Centre.

Winterlude has also given the Capital a chance to develop and demonstrate the quality of its hospitality industry – hotels, nightclubs, restaurants and a burgeoning group of interesting little bed-and-breakfasts where visitors can feel part of the city.

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

If you need help planning your trip, or in arranging accommodation in Canada's Capital, please call 1-613-239-5000 or (toll-free) 1-800-267-7285 (in Canada from central Ontario eastwards to Nova Scotia); or 1-800-267-0450 (from other parts of Canada and continental United States).

ADAPTED SERVICES Visitors with special needs, including seniors or the physically challenged, are especially welcome, and there are hosts and hostesses standing by to help them at all major sites. Services include talking books for the visually impaired, special sledge and wheelchair runners and wheelchair ramps leading down on to the Rideau Canal at frequent intervals. Also, adapted buses will be available to transport the physically challenged on both Winterlude weekends. For information, or for help in planning your trip, please call: 1-613-239-5035 or 239-5120.

RENTALS If you don't own skates, take advantage of numerous rental outlets all along the Rideau Canal. You can also rent a sleigh for the baby.

LESSONS Non-skaters are welcome too! Here's a chance to learn a new skill. Free lessons are offered as part of Winter Experience on Dows Lake. Bring a friend to lean on!

SHUTTLE BUSES It's not hard to get around Winterlude, even though it has spread out into every corner of the National Capital Region. All five official sites and the municipal Rendezvous are linked by a regular shuttle service. You don't have to miss a thing!