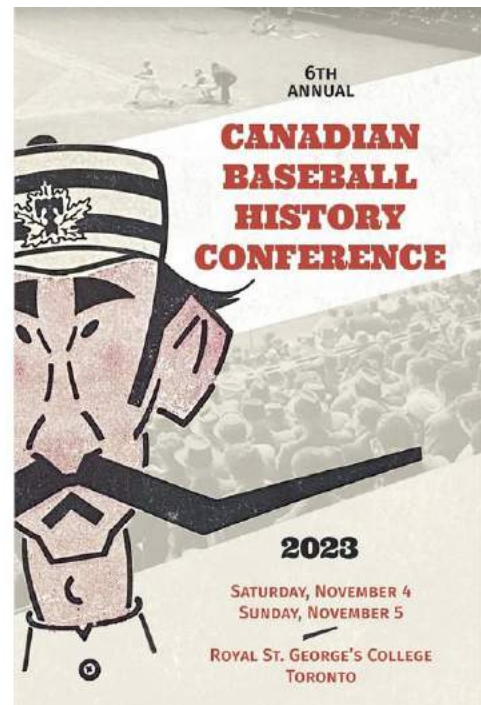




Softball and Swastikas

The Riot At Christie Pits



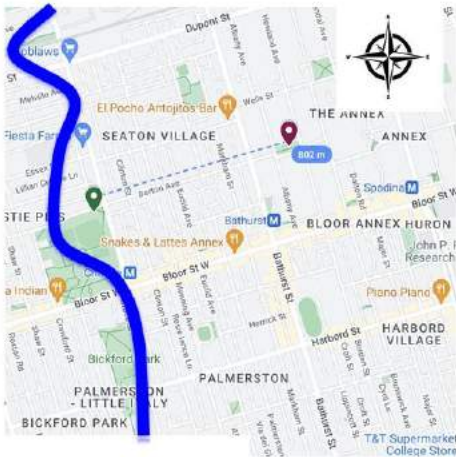
Gordon Downie, lead singer and songwriter for rock band The Tragically Hip, kept notebooks. He'd carry a ringed memo pad and pencil, anticipating moments of inspiration. When he was so moved, Downie would scribble down euphonious turns-of-phrase and interesting historical facts. When it came time to write, his notebooks were a treasure chest of lyrical possibilities. During January of 1998, writing songs for an upcoming album, Downie's notes evoked mounted police, violent thugs and order upended in Toronto. The Tragically Hip's *Bobcaygeon* was in part inspired by the 1933 riot at Christie Pits. Downie had long been aiming Canadiana at young Canadians. He lyrically echoed our history and literature in song. For many of those born to the Baby Boomers, the release of *Bobcaygeon* was their introduction to Toronto's worst incident of civil unrest. "This one asks the question," Downie once said of the song on stage, "evil in the open or evil just below the surface?"

More than six hours of brawls, bloodbaths and beatings were unleashed at the corner of Bloor and Christie streets in Toronto because of tensions built during fifteen years of post-war animus and released during nine innings of junior softball. It was a race riot, it was a lawless free for all, it was a surge which menaced the innocent. It was also the oppressed launching a counterstrike against oppressors whose voices "rang with that Aryan twang" as Downie so

famously phrased it. The riot at Christie Pits permanently scarred the city of Toronto and its perennial branding as tolerant, orderly and just.

From Sandpit to Sandlot

Ball diamonds were a late addition to the landscape north of Toronto's Bloor Street. Garrison Creek ran freely through what is today Christie Pits until the City of Toronto turned the creek into a storm sewer before the turn of the 20th



“...the Christie sandpit was preferable to the sands of Lake Ontario which often included shells, refuse and avian waste.” – *Toronto Daily Star*, 06/05/1906



century. A natural sand mine was then established within the steep creek valley. The Christie Street sandpit was used to combat icy walkways and thoroughfares. The sand was also mined to repair eroded beachfronts, create abrasives, produce cement, and of course, lay baseball infields. There was even a rush on city sandpits during an ill-advised fad which saw people eating sand in order to clean out their stomachs and toughen their skin. To both the municipality and the “sand eaters,” the desert in the Christie sandpit was preferable to the sand from the lakeshore which often included shells, refuse and avian waste. Colloquially and immediately, owing to the multiple digs within the single pit, the city facility became known as Christie Pits, complete with its extraneous final “s.”

In the winter of 1905, the City of Toronto was under pressure to create more civic spaces for families, specifically playgrounds. Mayor Thomas Urquhart told interested parties that converting sandpits was the most convenient and

affordable option. A year later, the city purchased and demolished the two houses bordering the edge of the Christie Street sandpit for a total cost of \$3,020. A plan was announced to convert the pit and its immediate surroundings into a public park. The conversion from pit to playground took time and gruelling work.



“...I have informed interested parties that converting sandpits was the most convenient and affordable option.” – Mayor Thomas Urquhart, 12/08/1905

CITY BUYS SANDPITS.
Two Pieces of Property to be Turned
Into Playground.



“Unemployed” at Work on the Christie Street Sandpits.

**MET DEATH UNDER
CAVE-IN OF SAND**

Piles of sand needed to be hauled out of the pit and dispersed along the city’s beaches. This would be accomplished using shovels and wagons. Grading work would then need to fill holes and flatten earth. A few months into the arduous tasks, James Swan was standing on low ground, shoveling sand into a pile above his head. The mound he’d created gave way, covering him in an avalanche of sand. He was pronounced dead after his comrades pulled him from the debris.

After a year of hard labour, the area was ready to be graded in December of 1907. The city of Toronto allotted \$1,000 so that “the unemployed” and a number of horses could commence leveling the pit floor. The effort was divided into three-day contracts. Men could submit their name into a pool of workers, with 30-50 men being chosen for each 72-hour work period. Demand was so high that hopefuls were routinely turned away. More than 225 names were added to the waiting list. The city announced plans for three baseball diamonds, a swimming pool, a lawn tennis court and children’s playgrounds on site. Another year passed as men toiled in the Pits. By the end of 1908 the city removed the workhorse stables and prepared the park for public use. While grading work was still in progress, the city announced a new name and park designation. The *Daily Star*

editorial board mocked the announcement as premature: “the Christie sandpits will now be called Willowvale Park,” they wrote. “But that willowvale nothing towards making them fit for playgrounds.”



The Christie sandpits will be called Willowvale Park, but that willowvale nothing towards making them fit for playgrounds.

“Two decades after the change, locals were still calling Willowvale Park, ‘Christie Pits.’”
- Staunton, Rosen, *The Good Fight*.

meanders through what is now called Willowvale Park, but is known far and wide to the youngsters as the Christie street sandpits, will soon dis-



“...why change the name from what it has been for two or three generations?”

- The Globe, 07/04/1908

as it has been called since it was owned by the son and daughter of Christy (not Christie) McDougall some 60 years ago or more.”

The name change never did stick. Before the grounds were even officially opened, a reader of *The Globe* submitted a condemnation. “Why change the name from what it has been for a generation?” he queried. Three years after the official name change, it was accepted in Toronto that “what is now known as Willowvale Park is far and wide known to youngsters as the Christie sandpits.” Two decades later, locals in the Annex, Harbord and Christie Street neighbourhoods of Toronto were still calling Willowvale Park ‘Christie Pits.’ In 1983, the City of Toronto abandoned the Willowvale moniker and rechristened Christie Pits officially.

May of 1909 saw the completion of the Pits baseball grounds. The Senior City Amateur League hosted the first reported game there on one of three diamonds ready for play. A team calling themselves the Ideals beat a group of ballplayers known as the Centennials by a score of 16-9. The Adair brothers, identified only by their initials “S” and “B” served as the battery for the Ideals. Teams bearing the monikers Kent, St. Andrew’s, Harbord and St. Peter’s, named for various schools, streets and churches, played baseball and softball in the Pits. After the completion of the first season of ballgames, two local aldermen led debate over

the quality of the grounds. Alderman Dunn expressed regret that more had not been done to improve the quality of grass and infield dirt. He requested an additional \$5,000 so that the diamonds could reach their true potential. Alderman McBride was blunt during his reply: “It is just a sandpit and we can’t spend that much.” City Council voted to defeat Dunn’s request for more funds. McBride, however, was wrong. Christie Pits would prove to be much more than just a sandpit.



“It is just a sandpit and we can’t spend \$5,000” – Alderman McBride.
 “If you knew anything... you’d know we could spend \$50,000 on that park” - Alderman Dunn
 Toronto City Council - 04/22/1910

The work now being done at the Christie street sandpits clearly demonstrates the value of such a splendid piece of property for park and playground purposes. There is not only sufficient space for three or four baseball diamonds but accommodation can be provided for lawn tennis courts, a swimming pool, and a supervised playground. It has been suggested that

Softball in The Pits

In the era before television, entertainment often required a journey. Torontonians living between the city’s two embracing rivers could travel by streetcar to theatres, arenas and newfangled movie houses. If the radio serial wasn’t enough to keep them home, car owners could motor their way into the downtown core and attend any number of spectacles. Circuses, professional sporting events and the last gasps of vaudeville were all enticing Toronto’s ticket buying public. Baseball was one of the greatest forces pulling people out of their homes. Maple Leaf Stadium, home to Toronto’s professional ballclub since 1926, was not the only baseball hotspot which routinely drew crowds in excess of 10,000.

People flocked to Christie Pits to see ballgames. They would then, as they still do now, sit on blankets or place chairs on the most welcoming parts of the grassy slope. The largest crowds turned up for senior men's amateur baseball games, especially during playoff season. With multiple games happening simultaneously in the Pits, members of the crowd could shift from one diamond to another if their original game ended or became laborious. Games featuring men, women and children, both baseball and softball, gained spectators as the days and



"...The Western Sons defeated the Vermonts at Willowvale Park... before a crowd of 10,000 spectators.
- The Globe, 08/15/1933

capacity attendance,

evenings wore on. "Big" crowds were reported, but exact counts were hard to come by in the ticketless and seatless Pits. "Over 10,000" and "capacity attendance" were oft-reported attendances for various ballgames throughout the years. Charity softball matches, especially those featuring the National Hockey League Maple Leafs versus the International League Maple Leaf baseball club, were highly attended events in Toronto each year.

By the end of the Roaring Twenties, at least 21 local softball organizations were recognized by the Toronto Amateur Softball Association. The TASA existed to collect fees, rent and allot diamonds and ensure the amateurism of its softballers. The Exhibition league hosted games in the southwest, the Beaches league operated out east, while the Olympic, Intercounty, Danforth and Eglinton leagues each carved out their own sanctioned territories. The Playgrounds, Churches and Western City leagues were the three TASA outfits operating in Christie Pits. The results of games and exploits of amateur softball players received consistent

coverage in the *Toronto Daily Star*. A few column inches away from the professional baseball results could be found the scores and columns devoted to

THE TORONTO DAILY STAR

HAMMER HERD ON HOLIDAY

TO-DAY'S SPORT CARD

Professional Baseball
3:30—Maple Leaf Stadium, Baltimore v. Leafs.

Amateur Baseball
6:45—Greenwood Park, Arlingtons v. Siberts.
6:45—Wiltonvale Park, St. Mary's v. St. Peter's.
6:45—Vladuet Park, Columbus v. Orioles.
6:45—Hartscourt Park, Royce v. St. James.

Men's Softball
7:15—Davisville Park, Bains v. Columbias.
7:15—Bellwoods Park, Westons v. Canada Laundry.
7:15—Denison Park, Maccabees v. Dominions.
7:15—Dovercourt Park, Cities Service v. Long Branch A.C.
6:45—New Garden, Nutbreds v. Lightfooses and Taylors Beaches v. Native Sons.

Girls' Softball
6:45—Sunshine Stadium, double-header, Silverwoods v. Maple Leafs and Lakelands v. Maple Leafs.
7:15—National Stadium, Canadian

WITH PICK AND SHOVEL



KNOCKS AND BOOSTS SLAMS AND SALVE

By **LOU MARSH**
Sports Editor of The Star

And here we have the official reply to the sport public of the Ontario Hockey Association to the "clean-up

ONCE AGAIN CONGASCO DRAW THIS TIME WITH REDHANDERS

Ulster Lucky to Hold Gas Men in Dominion Cup

Game	Score
Ulster	Three
Gas Men	Two

SOFTBALL SCORES

NATIONAL SOCCER LEAGUE

Game	Score
St. Clair	Two
St. James	One
St. Peter's	Two
St. John's	One
St. Mary's	Two
St. Paul's	One
St. George's	Two
St. Nicholas	One
St. Basil's	Two
St. Anthony's	One
St. Ignace's	Two
St. Vincent's	One
St. Andrew's	Two
St. David's	One
St. Patrick's	Two
St. Francis's	One
St. Joseph's	Two
St. Michael's	One
St. Raphael's	Two
St. Sebastian's	One
St. Therese's	Two
St. Agatha's	One
St. Agnes's	Two
St. Ann's	One
St. Anne's	Two
St. Cecilia's	One
St. Clare's	Two
St. Elizabeth's	One
St. Elmo's	Two
St. Eusebius's	One
St. Eustachius's	Two
St. George's	One
St. Ignace's	Two
St. James's	One
St. Joseph's	Two
St. Lawrence's	One
St. Luke's	Two
St. Mark's	One
St. Mark's	Two
St. Mathew's	One
St. Paul's	Two
St. Peter's	One
St. Raphael's	Two
St. Romanus's	One
St. Saviour's	Two
St. Vincent's	One
St. Wenceslaus's	Two
St. Xavier's	One
St. Yves's	Two
St. Zeno's	One

Despite the fact that they had a strong wind in their favor, the Red-handers (Ulster) lost the first half on the score of 3 to 1, and were 11 times "thrust" into the gutter by the Red-handers.

HELL PUT SEABO "ON THE SPOT"

Henri Deglane, former heavyweight wrestling champion of the world, is back in the game consistent that he can regain that title. His last loss, championship against when one of his Dan's George's flying tackles broke his shoulder, but he declares that he is as good as ever again. He will fight in England, possibly in London, in 1934.

"...a softball team is drawing crowds and causing considerable excitement."
—Toronto Daily Star, 06/24/1933



softball. Even legendary sportswriter Lou Marsh, he of the eponymous modern-day trophy, devoted attention to the sport. Great intrigue was added to the softball coverage in the early 1930s as the TASA sought to eliminate "shamateurism" and unaffiliated outlaw softball leagues from the diamonds of Toronto.

A reader of the sports page could also, at a glance, see the social fissures simmering in Toronto during the spring of 1933. Mixed in among the box scores, listed alongside softball teams called The Native Sons, Businessmen, Aces, Oaks, Lakesides and Zion Benevolent, was a team in the TASA St. Clair League which had named themselves The Swastikas.

Antisemitism in Toronto

Owing to Canada's deliberately Euro-centric immigration policies, the earliest Jewish immigrants to Toronto had been, for the most part, British subjects and merchants. At the turn of the 20th Century, the Jewish population in all of Canada was estimated to be just 16,401. Canada's Jewish population remained small because the country's immigration policy had always been as ethnically selective as it was economically self-serving. It entailed an unofficial descending order of

ethnic preference. At the bottom were Jews and Blacks. The great majority of Jewish immigrants naturally headed to large cities. In these metropolitan centres, they rapidly formed an urban proletariat and began to fill crowded, often poverty-stricken neighbourhoods in Winnipeg, Montreal and Toronto. Toronto's most prominent Jewish neighbourhood could be found one block south of Christie Pits. The nearby Spadina Avenue garment industry employed many Jews who were excluded from other professions in the city. Numerous garment workers resided in homes north of Front Street, south of Harbord Street and west of Spadina. Harbord Collegiate Institute was the local high school in the area. By 1919, there was already a common belief among students that Jews and Italian Catholics were considered unwelcome in Christie Pits by the resident WASP majority.

After the First World War, Toronto's population was not immune to the concoction of antisemitic conspiracy theories and stereotypes infecting the



"Jews in Toronto were not merely considered by many to be excluded from general society by their religion. They were also widely deemed to be a threat to that society." - Robinson, *A History of Antisemitism in Canada*



western world. "No Jews Allowed" and "Gentiles Only" signs could be seen hanging in the windows of restaurants, shops and country clubs across the city. Ontario had laws in place known as Restrictive Covenants. These covenants could prevent the sale of houses and property to anyone who was not Christian. The restrictions, struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1948, were outlawed not because they were discriminatory, but because it was difficult to accurately assess the religion of potential buyers. Jews in Toronto were not merely

considered by many to be excluded from general society by their religion. They were also widely deemed to be a threat to that society.

A pamphlet, later debunked as Russian propaganda, called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, was widely distributed and considered responsible for the rapid rise of antisemitism in Canada. Available first at retailers and libraries, it was further disseminated when Henry Ford distributed 500,000 free copies across Canada and the U.S. via affiliated service stations and his network of auto dealerships. *The Protocols* presented itself as a record of meetings in which Jews from around the world plotted to subvert Christianity and gain world domination. By 1933, pro-Nazi pamphlets, some funded by the German party itself, were being distributed and read in Toronto. Both antisemitic and fascist groups formed in Ontario during that same year. So extensive was Canadian antisemitism that the American chargé d'affaires remarked on "the rapidity of its spread." He informed his superiors in Washington that "Canadians had no desire to have Jews emigrate to their country" and that antisemitism was increasingly "finding expression in private conversations." In 1930s Toronto, one did not need to be a specific devotee of fascism or Naziism to become suspect of Jews. Antisemitism was a common and accepted facet of everyday life.

On March 5, 1933, Adolf Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany. His National Socialist German Workers Party, known as the Nazis, won a minority government. The German political scene was one of chaos. Hitler consolidated support by framing his nationalist movement as a bulwark against Jews and communists. His speeches and statements were loaded with antisemitic untruths. Hitler's words and actions were closely followed by the daily papers in Canada. Within weeks of his election, Swastika Clubs were formed and placing recruitment ads in Montreal and Toronto newspapers. These clubs espoused the political beliefs of their German inspiration. They placed antisemitism at the fore and held the new Nazi flag as their symbol. In April, shortly after Hitler issued the first of his more than four hundred anti-Jewish laws and decrees, André Laurendeau became the first political figure in Canada to formally endorse the Nazi vision. He wrote in a Montreal newspaper that Jews constituted a social danger in Canada. His message was syndicated across the country. By the summer of 1933, Hitler and his policies were being widely discussed and debated on radio, in the newspapers and on the streets of Toronto.

The mere presence of Jews at areas of public recreation, including as softball spectators in the Pits, led to protests against Jewish use of public beaches and parks. The Balmy Beach Swastika Club was formed with the avowed intention of keeping Toronto's largest beach free of "obnoxious visitors." In early August of 1933, the club paraded along Woodbine Avenue, 200 strong, with Nazi flags and Hail Hitler banners. They said the symbol of the German Nazi party was for good

HINT BEACH BAN PART OF VAST PROPAGANDA

Police Summoned

When the Swastika group marched along the boardwalk they sang:

"Oh, give me a home, where the Gentiles may roam,

"Where the Jews are not rampant all day,

"Where seldom is heard a loud Yiddish word,

"And the Gentiles are free all the day."



"...I do not like to see the swastika displayed anywhere in Toronto, a place of real democracy. It smacks of Hitlerism and fascism." - Rabbi Sachs, Toronto Daily Star, 08/02/1933



SWASTIKAS AND JEWS CLASH AT BEACH

Racial feeling ran high with a succession of clashes and near riots as the mystic sign of the Swastika was flaunted along the eastern beaches over the week-end. On more than one occasion police squads found themselves hard pressed to cope with the situation as non-Gentiles demanded the emblems be removed from persons wearing them. Now definite assurance has been given that the signs will vanish until the future policy of the organization has been decided upon. (1) Two of the many young ladies who gave their moral support to the Swastika cause by wearing the badges. (2) Not a part of the disturbances, a portion of the crowd watching a young lad being tossed from a blanket. (3) W. H. MacKay, spokesman for the Swastika club, exhibiting a shirt torn when an attempt was made to tear the badge from his clothing. (4) Two active members of the Swastika club.

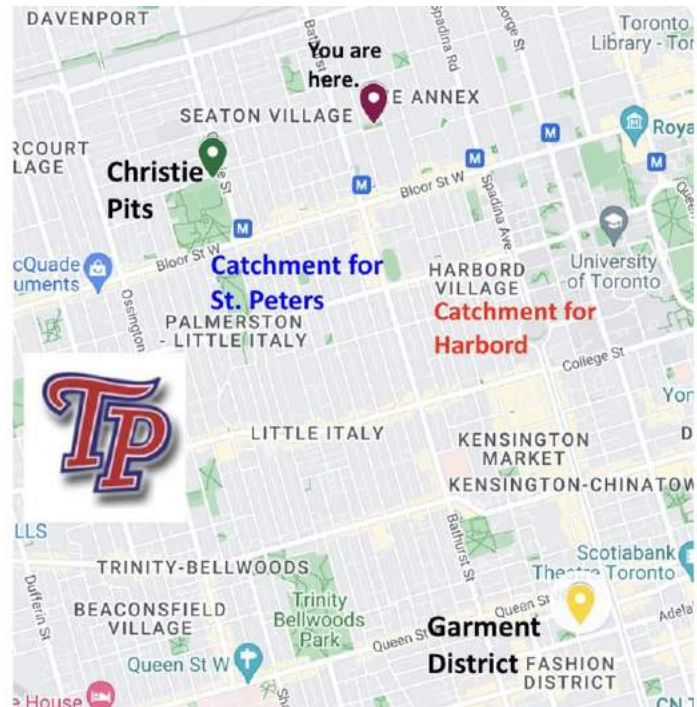
luck, and would help their organization gain its objective. They sang as they marched; "Oh, give me a home, where the Gentiles may roam. Where the Jews are not rampant all day. Where seldom is heard, a lone Yiddish word. And the Gentiles are free all the day." There were a few public voices directly condemning the swastika clubs. Jewish alderman, and future mayor, Nathan Phillips was the most prominent. "The whole principle is all wrong," Phillips said. "I don't think it will gain any prominence in an enlightened city like Toronto. This sort of rot simply won't go." Al Kaufmann, a Jewish resident from nearby Kew Gardens, formed an "up-town gang" to counter the swastikas. He and a number of Jewish youths marched the beach boardwalk looking for members of the swastika club. "We couldn't find any" he said. "If there had been trouble, I think we could have taken care of ourselves." On August 2, 1933 the *Daily Star* ran a story with the headline "Feeling Tense." They reported that for some time, "a real attempt at organizing a fascist movement aimed against the Jews has been in progress." Evil just below the surface was now evil in the open. The swastika banner that had

been so prominently displayed at Balmy Beach would soon be unfurled during a softball game at Christie Pits.

Harbord and St. Peter's 1933 Softball Clubs



"Every time you went to watch a ballgame," a Harbord fan later said, "these guys with swastikas would yell 'Heil Hitler' and all this." - Shaffir, The Riot At Christie Pits



St. Peter's Church has stood at the corner of Bathurst and Bloor Streets in Toronto, six blocks east of Christie Pits, since 1907. It was expanded in 1925 to accommodate a growing number of Catholics in the area. The youth and young adult ministries at the church had been fielding softball teams in the TASA affiliated Church League since games began in the Pits. By 1930, the St. Peter's club had developed a reputation as speedsters. Nicknamed the "Galloping Ghosts," they played a smallball brand of softball, which saw them win games by virtue of their so-called "snappy" style. The team in the Junior division of the Church League were also playing well defensively in 1933. Managed by William Carroll, the team often allowed 3 or fewer runs and occasionally won games in a romp, such as their 11-1 drubbing of Westmoreland to cap their regular season.

By mid-August, St. Peter's had successfully advanced through a series of playdown games. They were recognized by the TASA as champions of the Church League and scheduled to meet the winners of the Playgrounds League, with whom they shared the Pits.

The Playgrounds championship was decided during a best of three series played between teams representing Harbord Collegiate and North Toronto high schools. Harbord, coached by Bob Mackie, swept the series with a convincing 5-0 victory in game 2. Sammy Brookes, the Harbord pitcher, was described as “sensational” by the *Daily Star*. Brookes had been involved in a game earlier that season when the free-hitting Harbord team smashed multiple home runs, including a grand slam, in a 24-run affair over a team from John Dunn Community Centre. The Harbord lads represented a school which first opened in 1892. It was a large and imposing Jacobethan Revivalist structure built three blocks south of Christie Pits. Nearly 90% of its student population were Jewish.



The Playgrounds and Church divisions of the TASA had produced their playoff teams for 1933. The city-wide quarterfinal series was set to begin in Christie Pits on Monday evening, August 14. It would be a best-of-three showdown between the hard-hitting, Jewish boys from Harbord and the speedy, smallball Catholics of St. Peter's. The predominant religious affiliations of each team would come to overshadow their ballplaying abilities during the series. Five days before their first game, an omen appeared just beyond the left field line.

A newly formed Willowvale Swastika Club paraded the Nazi banner down Bloor Street on Wednesday, August 9. Five Jewish men, residents of nearby Euclid

Avenue, attacked the marchers who then retreated into the Pits. Sydney Adams, father of one of the Swastikas, dismissed the whole affair as “foolish nonsense and a lot of tomfoolery.”

Harbord vs. St. Peter's: The Riot at Christie Pits

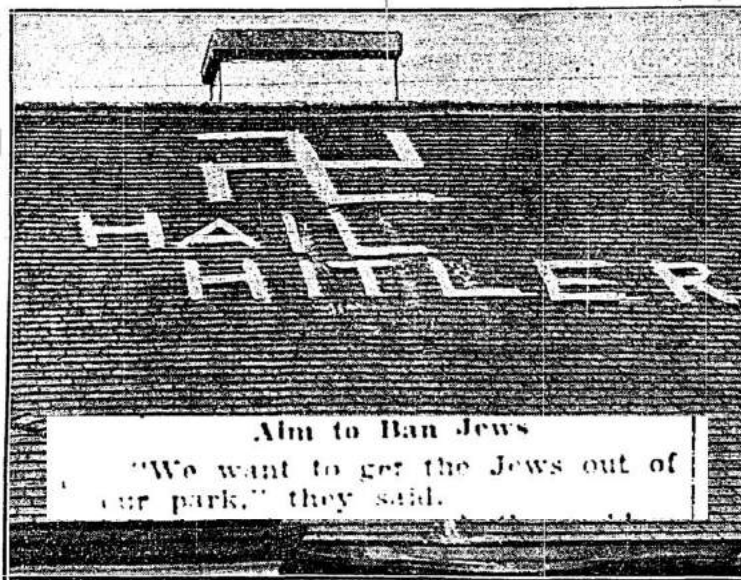
On August 14, over 11,000 people attached themselves to the steep sides of Christie Pits. Most of the crowd, described as one of the largest in the history of the park, came to see the Western City Baseball championship contested between the Vermonts and Native Sons. Several thousand spectators eventually crossed the cataract to see the first game of the Harbord and St. Peter's softball playoff. By this point in the summer of '33, Harbord supporters had become aware of something more sinister in large crowds such as these. “Every time you went to watch a ballgame,” a Harbord fan later said, “these guys with swastikas would yell ‘Heil Hitler’ and all this.”

The *Toronto Telegram* reported that a five-foot-long swastika banner, sewn in white cloth on a black sweater coat, was repeatedly unfurled by some St. Peter's supporters whenever Harbord players came to bat. This continued throughout the game, “amid much wisecracking, cheering and yelling of pointed remarks.” The Harbord players managed to keep their cool, maintain their focus and play well enough to tie the game in the bottom of the ninth inning. The top of the tenth saw no scoring, giving Harbord a chance to end it. Sensing their opportunity, the St. Peter's supporters began flaunting their swastika banner. Shouts and epithets were hurled across the diamond as supporters of both teams found themselves on the verge of violence. With a runner on second and animosities dangerously escalating, a Jewish boy came to the plate for Harbord. He looked, not at the pitcher, but at the symbol of Nazi-fed hatred being held aloft by his own countrymen. When the ball was nearly over the plate, he gripped his bat and swung, not at it, but at them. He connected, hammering a double and winning the game for Harbord in dramatic fashion. Supporters of both teams filled the field as the players themselves retreated from the scene. Spectators, sure that a fight would follow, were surprised to see the two sides screaming at each other as they were pulled in separate directions. A young Jewish spectator told the *Daily Star* “there will be trouble when the teams play here again on Wednesday evening.”

Jewish players repelled by exacting a softball victory. Following the game and a near brawl, some of the fans decided to paint the clubhouse roof. The finished job is shown in this photo.



Monday, August 14, 1933
 Game 1
 11,000 spectators in Pits
 Harbord 5
 St. Peter's 4



ANTI-JEWISH MOVEMENT HITS THE ROOF

Hours after game one, during the early morning of August 15, members of the Willowvale Swastikas returned to the park, with ladders, brushes and white paint. On the roof of the communal clubhouse, in the centre of Christie Pits, they painted a huge swastika above the words 'Hail Hitler.' One of the painters was later found by a *Daily Star* reporter. Although he would not give his name, he admitted to the graffiti job and said, "We want to get the Jews out of the park." William Carroll of St. Peter's was eager to separate the actions of his supporters from those of his players. He stated that hoodlums beyond his control had started a sideshow. He then went on to defend those hoodlums: "Why should St. Peter's supporters get the blame for it any more than the supporters of the Harbord team, or in fact, any other team in the park?"

Game two in the series was scheduled for Wednesday, August 16. Two of Toronto's daily newspapers preceded the second game with written warnings. The *Mail and Empire* quoted "Jewish boys" who said "just wait until the same teams meet again!" The *Daily Star* concluded its coverage of the painting incident by quoting a Harbord fan: "We won't go to the next game to make trouble, but if anything happens, we will be there to support our players," he said. Another anonymous source told the paper that opposition to the swastikas would be more fearsome on Wednesday night. James Brinsmead, a municipal civil servant, visited the Ossington Avenue police station on Wednesday morning and informed constables there of the potential for violence. The police would eventually

dispatch only a single officer to each of the two ballgames in the Pits that evening. Toronto's Chief of Police, Dennis Draper, did not believe the second game of a softball series constituted a serious threat.

Police Warned of Ball Riot

WARRING BASEBALL FACTIONS



Monday, August 14, 1933
Game 1
11,000 spectators in Pits
Harbord 5
St. Peter's 4

Wednesday the same teams meet again.
"Just wait!, the Jewish boys said last night."

person is liable to incite a riot.
Swastika "Provocative"

Trouble Promised

It did not take long for a threat to materialize. Another "crowd of 10,000 citizens" was reported in Christie Pits. The western baseball final continued on the northeast diamond and the second Harbord vs. St. Peter's game took place on the northwest softball field. Before the opening pitch of the softball game could be thrown, an altercation occurred between a member of the Swastikas and a Jewish spectator. The Swastika was hit in the head with a club while the spectator was thrown downhill into the cyclone fence of the backstop. Both men required medical attention.

During the second inning of the game, the first major incident of violence took place. A group of Willowvale Swastikas approached an area of Christie Pits that was lined with 1,000 Jewish Harbord supporters. The Swastikas began to yell "Heil Hitler" in unison. Incensed, a group of the Harbord supporters lunged at the chanters and told them to "shut up!" When the Swastikas persisted, a sawed-off lead pipe appeared and various members of the hate group were struck with it. A brawl ensued, with batons, more pipes and other concealed weapons being exposed. Blood flowed freely as the fighters moved up the north hill towards Pendrith Avenue. They eventually brawled away from the Pits and found

themselves fighting in nearby backyards. The softball game, which had paused to watch the fracas, resumed. The single police officer assigned to the neighbouring baseball game ran across to support his softball associate. Order was temporarily restored.

With the game tied after three innings, more cries of “Heil Hitler” rang out. Four Jewish youths drew sawed-off lead pipes and headed for two men they believed to be leading the Nazi sympathizers. Supporters rushed to the assistance of both groups of fighters. Three additional police officers, having arrived by motorcycle, joined the original patrol duo and helped diffuse the skirmish. The atmosphere remained tense, but without incident, as St. Peter’s took a late lead. Harbord prepared for their final at bats in the ninth, down by a single run. It was not yet dusk as St. Peter’s secured a 6-5 victory by catching a deep fly ball from the last Harbord batter.

As the crowd of thousands milled about after the game, two young men unfurled a large white blanket bearing a startling black swastika. In the words of the *Daily Star*, “a mild form of pandemonium broke loose,” and in the *Telegram’s*, “the sign stood out like a red flag to a bull.” The antagonists bearing the flag were rushed by Jewish youths. One of the flag bearers was knocked out cold and another scurried away. The swastika flag itself was captured and torn in a pique of vengeful satisfaction by Walton Street resident Murray Krugle. What followed next was described as a “general inrush” of male youth who began to fight with fists, then with boots and eventually with bottles, pipes, broomsticks and baseball bats. The “Bloor Street War” was underway. The first bike pedalling recruiters feverishly cycled to adjacent neighbourhoods pleading for reinforcements.

As word of the fighting spread, Jewish back-up arrived by car and pick-up truck from areas southeast of the Pits near Spadina Avenue. Next, carloads of Italian Catholics arrived from directly south of the Pits on College Street. The handful of police on site attempted to intercept the rolling cavalries, but were quickly and badly outnumbered. Vehicles carried not only fighters, but their weapons as well. A seven-foot-long piece of lumber with a spike driven through it was later found in an abandoned truck near the war zone. Brawling continued unabated for an hour before mounted and then motorcycle police arrived in tandem. Their authority and presence did not immediately quell the rumble. The fighting merely tapered for another ninety minutes. Just before 10:00pm, the battle poured out

of Christie Pits and onto Bloor Street as thousands of brawlers blocked the roadway. Streetcar bells and automobile horns added to the cacophony. Shortly after 10:30pm, the assembled police force was finally large enough to end the teetering assaults.

Fists, Boots, Piping Used in Bloor Street War

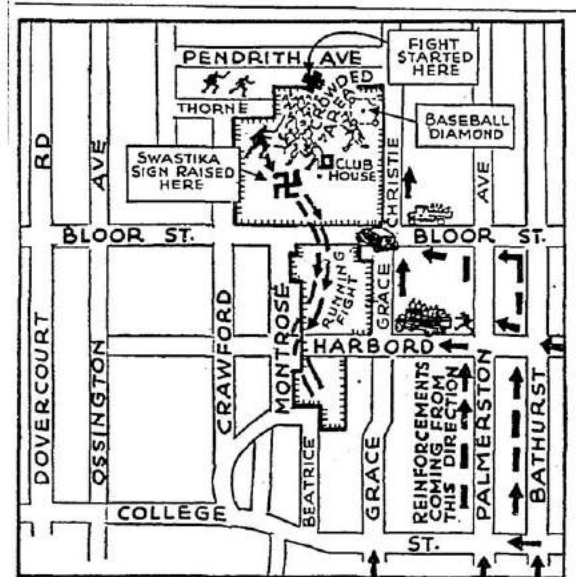
TO-DAY'S SPORT CARD	
Pro. Baseball	
2.00—Maple Leaf Stadium, Newark vs. Leafs (two games).	
Amateur Baseball	
5.00—Goodyear Field, Oshawa Dukes vs. New Toronto (senior play-off).	
6.15—Willowvale Park, Vermonts vs. Native Sons (senior play-off).	
6.15—Viaduct Park, Columbias vs. Riverdale Grads (senior play-offs).	
Men's Softball	
7.00—Dovercourt Park, Cities Service vs. Coplands (senior).	
7.00—Bellwoods Park, Community House vs. Canada Laundry (senior).	
7.00—Parliament Field, Beavers vs. Dukes (intermediate).	
6.30—Willowvale Park, St. Peter's vs. Harbord (junior play-off).	

"Hail Hitler" Is Youth's Cry; City in Turmoil

Trucks Loaded With Jews
and Italians Rush
to Scene

POLICE ARE CALLED

Willowvale Park Fracas
Spreads to Bloor
and Clinton



WHERE HITLER'S "CROOKED CROSS" STARTED RACE RIOT



Monday, August 14, 1933
Game 2 (Harbord leads 1-0)
10,000 spectators in Pits
Harbord 5
St. Peter's 6

The peace did not last. During the initial fighting, Joe Goldstein, a Jewish teenager was chased across the Pits and knocked unconscious. He was carried first to the nearby home of his sister-in-law, and then by police escort to hospital. Goldstein was badly injured, but his wounds were not life threatening. Rumours began to spread around Jewish neighbourhoods that Goldstein had died. Organization took only a few minutes and soon truckloads of shouting Jewish youths, armed with anything they could lay their hands on, were speeding back towards the softball grounds. Several of these trucks, each jammed with about 25 young men, were met by a column of police on horseback. The trucks broke through and soon found a large group of swastika-wearing enemies. The two groups attacked each other with black jacks, broom handles, stones, steel and lead pipes. Hundreds of fighters who had already exhausted themselves and their original quarrels jumped right back into this new fray. The police were helpless. An eight-block section of Toronto, including one of its largest parks and the city's main northwestern thoroughfare, was entirely lawless and out of control.

Both sides were accused of reckless irresponsibility during the riot. One eye witness said he was horrified to see "a gentleman, past middle age, who was taking no part in the violence, struck on the head with a baseball bat." Joe Brown, a young witness to the fight, said he was walking home from the Pits when five youths jumped out of a passing car and assaulted him with clubs. A 21-year-old named Solly Osolky rushed in to help a fallen youngster on Bloor Street and was attacked for his efforts. "They belaboured me with their clubs," he added. David Fischer had been a spectator at the ballgame. "I was preparing to go home," he said. "Some fellow then hit me over the head and started to shout Hail Hitler."

Fighting continued in and around Christie Pits after 11:30pm. Injuries, fatigue and a growing police presence began to divide the uprising into smaller and smaller battles. An unruly crowd of rioters again blocked Bloor Street causing the police to devise a new tactic. The motorcycle brigade would charge towards groups of fighters. When they were close enough to be effective, the officers would turn their exhaust pipes towards the combatants, spreading heavy, choking fumes throughout the crowd. By midnight there were fewer than 200 people within 100 yards of the park. Occasional fist fights persisted. The police patrolled Christie Pits and the streets around the ball diamonds until the riot was officially declared over at 1:30am, a full six hours after it started.

THE TORONTO DAILY STAR, THURSDAY, AUGUST 17, 1933

SIX HOURS OF RIOTING SCORES ARE INJURED

SIX HOURS OF RIOTING FOLLOWS HITLER SHOUT SCORES HURT, TWO HELD

MANY ARE INJURED IN PARK RIOTING

The following are the known injured in last night's riots at Willowdale Park:

Injured
John Goldstein, age 16, 111 Bellwoods Ave., scalp laceration, treated at Toronto Western hospital.
Al Zolner, 20, 112 Elmhurst Ave., head and groin injuries, admitted to Western hospital.
Dave Fisher, 21, 46 Spadina Ave., head injuries, treated at Western.

Jewish-Gentile Ball Game Is Marked By Disorder As Swastika Flag Raised

LEAD PIPE WAS USED

Six Constables Only on Hand Though Impending Clash Was Forecast

Monday, August 14, 1933
Game 2 (Harbord leads 1-0)
10,000 spectators in Pits

Harbord	5
St. Peter's	6

Outsiders Are Blamed
Residents in the vicinity of Willowdale Park or "Christie Pits" as it is more commonly known, were loud today in their condemnation of the riots of last evening, which arose out of the display of the Hitlerite swastika emblem.



Somewhat miraculously, no fatalities occurred during the riot at Christie Pits. Osolky, Brown, Fischer, Goldstein and two men named Al Eckler and Louis Kotick were reported to have been the worst of the injured. They all suffered cuts, abrasions and trauma about the head and neck. A few had broken bones. Most were released from hospital within a day. Undoubtedly, countless other streetfighters kept their injuries to themselves. Only two arrests were made during the entire riot. Russel Harris of Bloor Street was held on a charge of vagrancy, later dismissed. He'd been caught with a fishing knife. Magistrate Browne advised Harris to leave his knife at home unless he was scaling fish. Jack Roxborough was held on a charge of carrying offensive weapons. He'd been seen wielding a metal club above his head. He was given the option of paying a \$50 fine or serving two months in jail. His punitive decision has been lost to history.

Police Question Other Members Of Alleged Gang

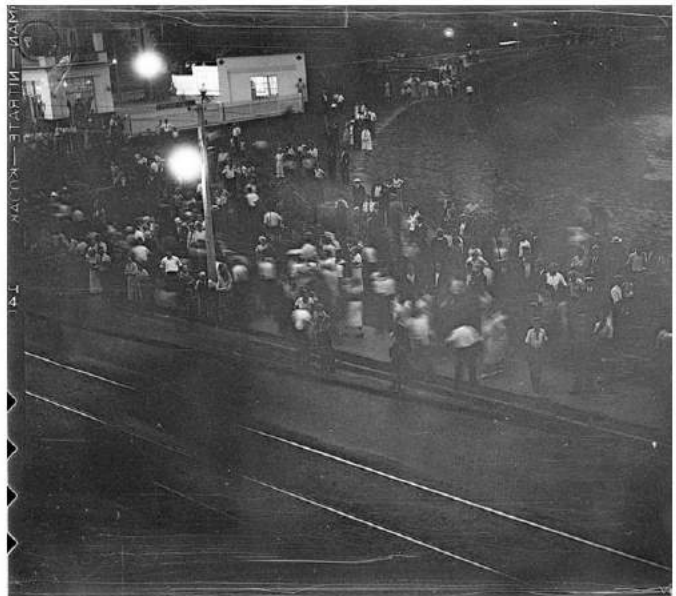
**Arrests to Be Made of All
Shown to Have Part-
icipated**

OTHERS GIVE SELVES UP

**Trouble Claimed to Have
Been Started Deliber-
ately by Youths**



"No more league games will be played in Christie Pits until the present trouble has been cleared up." - Jack Turner, President Toronto Amateur Softball Assoc.



Following the riot, Jack Turner, secretary of the TASA, announced that no more league games would be played in Christie Pits until the present trouble had been cleared up. The managers for both Harbord and St. Peter's teams denied responsibility for the riot and stated that none of their players had participated in the disturbance. Both teams would need to continue the series with new bats, owing to the fact their original equipment had been stolen and weaponized by the mob. The TASA scheduled the third and final game in the series for Wednesday, August 23 at Conboy Soccer Stadium. Conboy Stadium was an enclosed field with grandstand at the corner of Ossington and Dupont, about

twelve blocks northwest of Christie Pits. They also announced that the game would be a ticketed affair. The TASA thought the cost of admission, and the park being a privately-owned enclosure, would keep away the undesirables. A squad of police from the Ossington Avenue division surrounded the stadium and kept a strict watch on all points of entry into the enclosure. They also forced a number of onlookers on a nearby rail bridge to vacate their unsanctioned seats. A few hundred others were said to have watched the game from nearby factory rooftops and household windows.

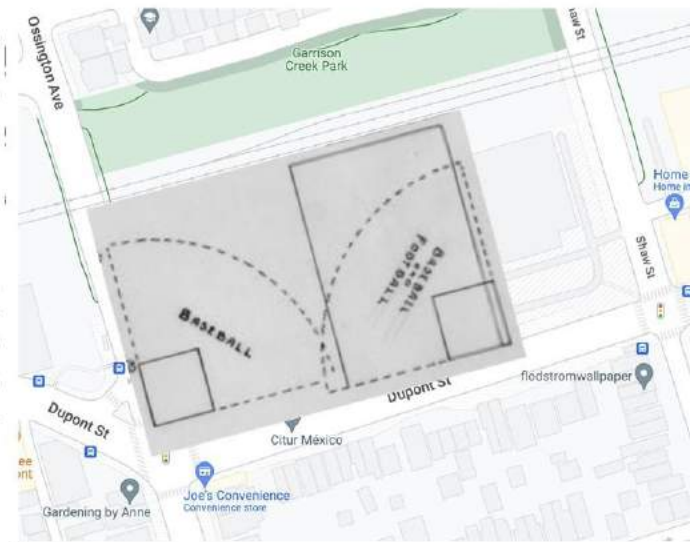
**FLARE-UP POSSIBILITY
DRAWS CURIOUS CROWD**

**But Riot Is Not Repeated
When Softball Teams
Meet Again**

The possibility of another flare-up between Jews and Gentiles drew a crowd of the curious to Conboy Park last night, where St. Peter's Church, interchurch champions, and Harbord, Playground titleholders, were playing off the final game of their T.A.S.A. playdown series.



Monday, August 23, 1933
 Game 3 (Series Tied)
 71 paying spectators in Conboy Stadium
 Harbord 3
 St. Peter's 4



Only 71 loyal spectators paid to see the rubber match inside Conboy Stadium. It was described as one the finest exhibitions of softball ever witnessed in Toronto. The game went into the bottom of the 11th inning when “Red” Burke hit a walk-off home run to give the series to St. Peter’s by a score of 4-3. After losing a heartbreaking game, the Harbord team, “like true sportsmen, shook hands with the winners and wished them good luck in their future games.” St. Peter’s would go on to lose to a team known as the Millionaires. The Millionaires were then bested by a team sponsored by the Cities Service oil and gas company (today known as Citgo). The Cities Service team claimed their trophy as Junior Softball Champions of Toronto during a ceremony held at the Royal York hotel on October 19, 1933.

The Aftermath

After the riot, the swastika symbol was cast in even darker shadow throughout the city of Toronto. The Balmy Beach Swastika Club knew enough to abandon the symbol and change their name within 24 hours of the riot. At an emergency meeting, they were conciliatory, voting to allow both Jews and gentiles to serve together on a new committee devoted to cleaning and protecting the beach.

MUST NOT FLAUNT SWASTIKA

GENTILES AND JEWS FORM BEACH COMMITTEE

**New Organization
Will Take Place
Of Swastika Club**

**THOUSANDS IN PARKS
WAIT WATCHFULLY**



"The repeated and systematic disturbances in which the swastika emblem figures provocatively, must be investigated and dealt with firmly," Mayor William Stewart,

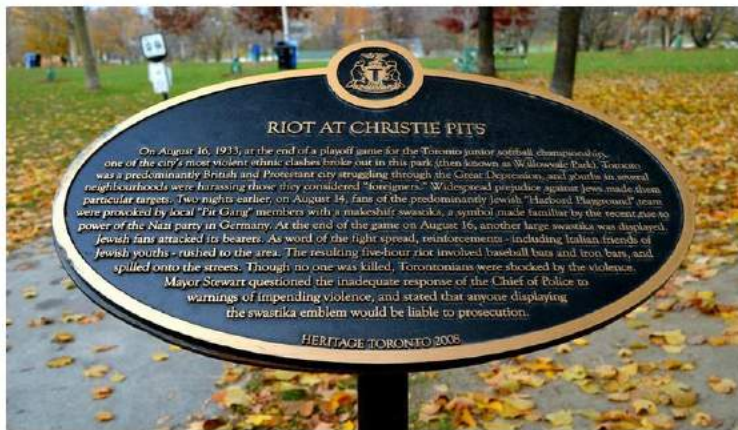
**T.A.S.A. Junior
Millionaires..... 8 St. Peter's 1**

Other swastika clubs persisted but declined in favour and fidelity as the decade wore on. By 1936, Toronto's newspapers were entirely free of their mention.

Toronto Mayor William Stewart met the media a few hours after police had regained control of Christie Pits. He warned all citizens that people displaying the swastika would be liable to prosecution. "The repeated and systematic disturbances in which the swastika emblem figures provocatively, must be investigated and dealt with firmly," said the mayor. "The responsibility is now on the citizens to conduct themselves in a lawful manner." Toronto Police made three more arrests related to the riot on the Friday following. 17-year-old Jack Pippy, 18-year-old Charles Boustead and 21-year-old Earl Perrin were charged with unlawful assembly. In the Crawford Street garage owned by Pippy's parents, police found the white paint and paraphernalia used to smear the swastika on the Pits clubhouse.

When senior baseball returned to Christie Pits two days after the riot, the police presence was noticeable inside the park. About 100 teenagers mingled in the vicinity of the Pits, many of whom were said to have weapons and pieces of pipe concealed inside their coats. Though police stated the boys were looking for trouble, they found none as “calm prevailed in the swastika war zone.” Police experienced little trouble, claiming that most of the youth had been drawn to the park out of curiosity. Both Harbord and St. Peter’s continued to field teams in the Christie Pits softball league for decades to come. There were no further overt incidents of antisemitism involving the two teams.

Six years and twenty-five days after the riot at Christie Pits, Canada declared war on fascist Nazi Germany and its swastika flag. By 1945, more than 10% of Canada’s total population had joined the army. Over 1.1 million Canadians suited up and shipped out. Toronto supplied 2,000 recruits within 48 hours of the declaration of war and over 70,000 more as the conflict endured. Given the high number and youthful demographic of the rioters in Christie Pits, it would be reasonable to assume that many answered the call of king and country. The economic realities of the area around the riot zone make it even more likely. More than sixty men who died fighting for Canada during the Second World War lived in the immediate vicinity of Christie Pits.



“There were a lot of heads broken. There was a tremendous confrontation, and I would definitely say we won. We were proud.” - Joe Goldstein

In 2008, the city installed a permanent plaque near the Bloor Street entrance to Christie Pits. It reads in part: "On August 16, 1933, at the end of a playoff game for the Toronto junior softball championship, one of the city's most violent ethnic clashes broke out in this park." 88-year-old Joe Goldstein, the boy whose rumoured death reignited the riot, was present for the plaque unveiling. Another living Jewish witness to the riot, who wished to remain anonymous, remembered that August night quite clearly. "When we got to the Pits, it seemed to me that half of the Jews and half of the goyim of the city were there," he recalled. "There were a lot of heads broken. There was a tremendous confrontation, and I would definitely say that we won. We were proud. I think for a week we were higher than a kite."

Stephen Dame
November 2023