Document généré le 25 avr. 2024 23:36

Ontario History

Supervised Places to Play
Social reform, citizenship, and femininity at municipal playgrounds in London, Ontario, 1900-1942

Carly Adams

Volume 103, numéro 1, spring 2011

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065481ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1065481ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)
2371-4654 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Adams, C. (2011). Supervised Places to Play: Social reform, citizenship, and femininity at municipal playgrounds in London, Ontario, 1900-1942. *Ontario History*, *103*(1), 60–80. https://doi.org/10.7202/1065481ar

Résumé de l'article

Au début du XXe siècle, des campagnes furent menées pour l'établissement de lieux destinés plus particulièrement aux loisirs des enfants, parcs urbains et aires de jeux surveillés. À partir des souvenirs recueillis auprès d'adultes ayant utilisés autrefois ces aires de jeux, cet article étudie les problèmes posés par leur établissement, et notamment leur utilisation par les jeunes filles et jeunes femmes, ces lieux leur offrant l'opportunité d'apprendre et de pratiquer différents sports. Les implications aussi bien sociales que morales de ces initiatives menées en vue du développement d'aires de loisirs, et les conséquences de l'aide sociale municipale sur la vie de ces jeunes filles et femmes, sont également étudiées dans cet article.

Copyright © The Ontario Historical Society, 2011

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

https://www.erudit.org/fr/

Supervised Places to Play

Social reform, citizenship, and femininity at municipal playgrounds in London, Ontario, 1900-1942

by Carly Adams

As Cynthia Comacchio suggests, the first half of the twentieth century saw the rise of supervised and structured leisure for youth through organizations such as the Young Women's Christian Associations, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides.[1] Supervised municipal playgrounds also exemplified this flourishing drive towards structured adult-approved places to play. In early twentieth-century Canada, community playground initiatives came as a response to increasing industrialization, urban expansion, and growing commercial distractions, which prompted middle-class social reformers to campaign for urban parks and supervised playgrounds to provide children with appropriate places for leisure activities. The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) and the affiliated local councils, such as the London, Ontario, local council, seeking to protect children from the evils of idleness, played a foundational role in the development and establishment of supervised playgrounds across the nation.

In London, playgrounds were formally established in 1920. These were supervised public spaces where participants aged eight to sixteen could explore the benefits and enjoyment of moving their bodies. Pat Morden, in her study of the history of London's parks and rivers, provides a brief overview of the history of the city's playground movement, using the Public Utilities Commission Annual Reports as the basis for her information.[2] These reports, while useful, tend to fo-

[1] Cynthia, Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920-1950* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier university Press, 2006), 190.

[2] Pat Morden, *Putting Down Roots: A History of London's Parks and River* (St. Catharines: Stonehouse Publications, 1988).

Abstract

In early 20th century Canada, middle-class social reformers campaigned for urban parks and supervised playgrounds to provide children with appropriate places for leisure activities. Drawing on adult memories of participating in playgrounds in London, Ontario, this study explores the issues and complexities of establishing the playground program in London and, more specifically, the opportunities provided for girls and young women to learn and play sport. I consider the implications of social and moral reform initiatives on leisure spaces, and the impact of the delivery of social welfare at the municipal level on the lives of female participants.

Résumé: *Au début du XXe siècle, des campagnes furent menées pour l'établissement de lieux destinés plus particulièrement aux loisirs des enfants, parcs urbains et aires de jeux surveillés. À partir des souvenirs recueillis auprès d'adultes ayant utilisés autrefois ces aires de jeux, cet article étudie les problèmes posés par leur établissement, et notamment leur utilisation par les jeunes filles et jeunes femmes, ces lieux leur offrant l'opportunité d'apprendre et de pratiquer différents sports. Les implications aussi bien sociales que morales de ces initiatives menées en vue du développement d'aires de loisirs, et les conséquences de l'aide sociale municipale sur la vie de ces jeunes filles et femmes, sont également étudiées dans cet article.*

cus on the participation of boys. Building on Morden's study, and drawing on adult memories of participating in playgrounds in London, this study explores the issues and complexities of establishing the playground program in that city and, more specifically, the opportunities provided for girls and young women to learn and play sport. Drawing on Richard Gruneau and David Whitson's claim that 'community' was the level at which society was really experienced, I consider the implications of social and moral reform initiatives on leisure spaces, and the impact of the delivery of social welfare at the municipal level on the lives of female participants.[3] This case study of the history of the playground movement in London explores the degree of influence the local council of the NCWC had in encouraging the municipal government to take up the agenda of the playground movement and looks at the initiatives that were made to establish supervised playgrounds. Although, as Nancy Bouchier surmises, no Canadian city is representative of other urban areas, a province, or the nation as a whole, the focus on London enhances our understandings of social reform initiatives on urban recreation through the specific local context.[4]

This study draws on data collected during a larger study of women's sport experiences as children and young adults in London from 1920 to 1950. As part of the larger project, oral histories of twenty-two women were collected. Fourteen of these women participated in municipal playgrounds in London during the

[3] See Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities, and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993).

[4] See Nancy B. Bouchier, *For the Love of the Game* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 7.

1930s, attending eight different parks among them. All of the women interviewed were Caucasian and born in or around London. Most of them attributed their family's socio-economic status during the time they participated in playgrounds as working-class although some identified themselves as middle-class. Their remembrances offer valuable and rare details about participating in playground activities during this time period. As Neil Sutherland suggests, "...if we are ever going to get 'inside' childhood experiences, then we must ask adults to recall how they thought about, felt, and experienced their growing up."[5] The complexities of these experiences shape how we come to understand and theorize the intersections of sport and community in the past. While these interviewees cannot speak for all children and young adults who participated in the playgrounds in London during the period under investigation, the use of oral histories in this project is based on the idea that significant historical information can be derived from people talking about their experiences. As Paul Thompson suggests, remembrances from women who attended the playgrounds as children will serve as a link between the personal experiences of the participant and the wider social history of which they were a part.[6]

For the female participants, organized play was experienced as what Mona Gleason calls "significant arbitrators of experience."[7] During an era when girls and women in rural and smaller urban Canadian localities had limited access to organized physical activities, playground programs offered acceptable spaces to run, jump, and throw. Playgrounds provided hundreds of girls and young women a space to explore recreational activities, while building lasting friendships and learning new physical skills—experiences that for many young women set the groundwork for decades of involvement in sport. For many of the children and young adults, the playgrounds were stepping-stones to city and industrial sports leagues. Before turning to their stories, I will set the context for their participation by looking at the establishment of the playgrounds in London, and at the community groups involved.

Social Reform, The NCWC and the Playground Initiative

The emergence of recreational activities for youth was part of a broader social and moral reform movement that gained momentum in Canada by the turn of the twentieth century. By 1900, influenced by social and moral reform schemes in the United States and Britain, a large number of urban middle- and upper-class Canadians were engrossed in social and moral reformation, intent on building foundations for "personal regeneration"

[5] Neil Sutherland, *Growing Up: Childhood in English Canada from the Great War to the Age of Television* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 13.

[6] See Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25-81.

[7] Mona Gleason, "Embodied Negotiations: Children's Bodies and Historical Change in Canada, 1930-1960," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 34 (1999), 113.

and "scientific urban reform" to secure a future of prosperity.[8] In Canada, increasing urban industrialization and immigration, compounded by the prevalence of disease and unhealthy social conditions among the poor and working classes living in cities, prompted the emergence of social organizations intent on curing the evils of the nation and transforming Canadian society. Prior to 1918, most reform organizations, such as the Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada,[9] the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the NCWC, and the Salvation Army were voluntary bodies that operated outside of state control.[10] Many of these organizations consisted mostly of middle- and upper-class women with spare time and a penchant for involvement in social causes. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of the thrust of social reform "focused on the child, for he [sic] formed the nucleus of family life and the elimination of his difficulties was seen to be particularly susceptible to women's specialized talents."[11] Xiabei Chen suggests that this focus on the child was part of a citizenship project, in that "children were thought of as future citizens to be rescued."[12] The playground initiative was part of this aspiration to shape children, specifically boys and young men, into proper citizens.[13]

The NCWC and its affiliated regional councils played a foundational role in the establishment of playgrounds and supervised programs across the country, through the securing of school playgrounds during the summer months and lobbying for municipal government initiatives and interventions.[14] Infused with the language of domesticity and motherhood, the NCWC embraced maternalist rhetoric and ideologies that, by the twentieth century, had emerged among women and social reform groups in Canada.[15] In 1901, at the eighth annual meeting of the NCWC held in London, Ontario, a

[8] See Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), 16-17. See also, Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

[9] This organization changed its name to the Social Service Council of Canada in 1912.

[10] Valverde, *Age of Light,* 51.

[11] T. R. Morrison, "Their Proper Sphere: Feminism, the Family, and Child-centred Social Reform in Ontario 1875-1900," *Ontario History* 68 (1976), 52.

[12] Xiaobei Chen, *Child Saving in Toronto, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 15. The term citizenship throughout this paper focuses on the "obligations and duties of the citizen to their wider community." See Jennie Munday, "Gendered citizenship," *Sociology Compass* 3 (2009), 250.

[13] Citizenship and welfare state democracy was a focus of post-World War II recreation in Ontario as well. For more on this period, the intersections of gender and the politics of recreation and the changes that occurred, see Shirley Tillotson, *The Public at Play* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2000).

[14] See Rosa L. Shaw, *Proud Heritage: A History of the National Council of Women of Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1957), 93; Elsie M. McFarland, *The Development of Public Recreation in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Parks/Recreation Association, 1970), 19.

[15] For more on the maternalist ideologies that infused many women's organizations of this period see Jane Ursel, *Private Lives, Public Policy* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1992), 72. Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Toward Defining Maternalism in US History," *Journal of Women's History* 5 (1993), 10. Linda Kealy, *A Not Unreasonable Claim* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979).

resolution was introduced and passed endorsing playground initiatives:

> Whereas the agitation for Vacation Schools and Playgrounds where children may find organized recreation having become so widespread that it is now known as the Playground Movement, and whereas the establishment of such Vacation Schools and Playgrounds is acknowledged by educators and philanthropists to be desired in every community, and whereas the necessity for such schools and playgrounds to improve the condition of children in the cities of Canada is obvious, therefore be it resolved that this National Council for Women of Canada declare themselves in favour of the establishment of Vacation Schools and Playgrounds and pledge themselves to do all in their power to promote their organization.[16]

This resolution was the result of an appeal by Mabel Peters of Westhill, New Brunswick, encouraging the Council to consider supervised playgrounds and recreational spaces for children during the summer school break as a viable project. Focused on reform and protecting children from the evils of idleness during the summer months, Peters argued that in order for reform initiatives to be successful they must target children: "Train the child correctly and the adult will not need reformation."[17]

The agenda of the Committee on Supervised Playgrounds for Children was carried out through local councils of women, extensions of the national body. Following the 1902 meeting, Peters sent a letter to all of the local councils across the country explaining the importance of the new committee and the role of the local councils.[18] She urged the local councils to appoint a specialized committee to assist in this work and a convener who would sit on the National Committee. By 1903, she had received replies from Ottawa, Toronto, Charlottetown, Brandon, Vernon, and Nelson.[19] By 1910, there were stable supervised playground programs in many major urban cities throughout the country including: Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Regina, and Halifax.[20]

Ursel suggests that the purpose of the reform movement was to push the State into a more active interventionist role.[21]

[16] National Council of Women of Canada, *Report of the 8th Annual Meeting, May 1901,* London, Ontario (Ottawa: Taylor and Clarke, 1901), 152.

[17] *Ibid*, 152-55. This is from a paper written by Mabel Peters, a member of the Saint John Local Council requesting a motion be passed that the National Council of Women include the establishment of Vacation Schools and Playgrounds on their agenda. Peters provided evidence to show that such a movement would improve the condition of children through examples from the Vacation School and Playground Movement in the United States and Europe. The Movement in the United States began in 1878, with the first Vacation school established in Boston in 1885. By 1900, there were Vacation Schools in Cambridge, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Excerpts from this paper can be found in the Council's annual report.

[18] At the inaugural meeting in 1893, seven local councils were organized: Toronto, Hamilton, Montreal, Ottawa, London, Winnipeg, and Quebec.

[19] National Council of Women of Canada, *Report of the 10th Annual Meeting, May 1903*, Toronto, Ontario (Toronto: Geo, Parker, Oxford Press, 1903), 68-69. In Peters' report to Council in 1903, she once again makes reference to the situation in the United States indicating that by 1903 playgrounds had been established in over seventeen cities. She reports that in Canada little progress had been made by 1903.

[20] Elsie M. McFarlane, *The Development of Public Recreation in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Parks/

The NCWC managed operations strictly on a volunteer basis; ultimately they wanted municipalities to take over both the organizational and financial responsibilities of the playgrounds.[22] Indeed, Shaw suggests that by 1911, "the idea [for supervised playgrounds] had been accepted so extensively that the purpose was almost accomplished for Canada. That purpose was educating public opinion and enlisting the support of municipal authorities."[23] While progress was slow, by 1920 a comprehensive legislative framework was in place in dozens of cities across the country, including London, with provisions for supervised playground programs. By this time most supervised playground programs received operating grants from their local municipalities.[24]

The Formation of Supervised Places to Play in London

By the 1920s, London was taking the form of a modern city. Surrounded by thriving agriculture and with a growing population that had reached 69,742 by 1929, London was the commercial centre of Southwestern Ontario.[25] Urban planning and municipal reform were central in city activities.[26] In the early twentieth century, the establishment of playgrounds in London came as a result of the broader social reform movement and, more specifically, the efforts of local reform-minded organizations such as the London branch of the NCWC, that sought to protect children from the evils of idleness and environmental vices that their members felt plagued urban life at the turn of the century, by providing supervised playground spaces and summer activities.[27]

The local council in London had a considerable degree of influence in encouraging the municipal government to take up the agenda of the playground movement. The London Local Council of Women was established in 1894.[28] The Council made its first attempts toward educating the municipality about

Recreation Association, 1970), 20.

[21] Jane Ursel, *Private Lives, Public Policy* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1992), 71.

[22] This was also the case in the United States. Playgrounds were established by small women-led committees such as the women's philanthropic organization, the Playgrounds Committee, in Cambridge MA. See Elizabeth A Gagen, "An example to us all: Child Development and identity construction in early 20th-century playgrounds," *Environment and Planning A* 32 (2000), 606 and Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood, "Turn of the Century Women's Organizations, Urban Design, and the Origin of the American Playground Movement," *Landscape Journal* 13 (1994), 125-38.

[23] Shaw, *Proud Heritage,* 93-94.

[24] *Ibid*, 94-95.

[25] For more on the history of London see Frederick H. Armstrong, *The Forest City: An Illustrated History of London, Ontario* (Windsor Publications, 1986) and Orlo Miller, *A Century of Western Ontario* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1949).

[26] Armstrong, *Forest City,* 163.

[27] For information on the playground movement in London and the provision for public bathing, see Robert S. Kossuth, "Dangerous Waters: Victorian Decorum, Swimmer Safety, and the Establishment of Public Bathing Facilities in London (Canada)," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 22 (2005), 796-815.

[28] For more information on the London Local Council and Harriet Ann Boomer see, Joan Kennedy,

the value of establishing supervised playgrounds in the early 1900s. As a result, the London city council, specifically the mayor, supported this initiative, although progress was slow. Peters, in her report at the annual meeting of the NCWC in 1904, recounts that the mayor, Sir Adam Beck, recommended the establishment of playgrounds to the city council.[29] Beck encouraged council to procure land for recreational use stating:

> I feel satisfied that London will find...that playgrounds for children will prove to be one of the strongest factors in the development and up-building of not only the physical strength of the children, but their morals, and will prove a means of keeping them away from vices which before were almost a part of their lives. It must, of necessity, be a gradual work. If one such playground, fully equipped, could be opened as a demonstration of the great benefit and blessing it would be to the children, especially those whose parents are not able to provide for them amusements at the command of the well-to-do.[30]

However, despite the mayor's vocal support of the project, municipal monies were not invested in the initiative for almost two decades.[31] In 1919, the Social Service Council petitioned the London city council for the development of supervised children's playgrounds.[32] The city council, following a public plebiscite, approved the request, placing control over this venture under the Public Utilities Commission (PUC)—the rationale being that playgrounds fell under the authority of public parks, and parks were the responsibility of the PUC.[33] With a $10,000 operating grant from the City, and the establishment of a Playground Department within the PUC, the first

1989, The London Local Council of Women and Harriet Ann Boomer, Master's Thesis, The University of Western Ontario.

[29] National Council of Women of Canada, *Report of the 11th Annual Meeting 1904*, Winnipeg, Manitoba (London: C.P. Heal, 1904), 63.

[30] London City Council, *20th Meeting Council Proceedings 1904* (London, Ontario, 1904), 192. This speech was also printed verbatim in *The Free Press* (London). See Playgrounds For City Children," *The Free Press*, 17 August 1904, 6.

[31] For information on the development of the municipal parks system in London see Robert S. Kossuth, "Spaces and Places to Play: The Formation of a Municipal Parks System in London, Ontario, 1867-1914," *Ontario History* 97 (2005), 160-90. There is evidence that initiatives took place throughout the early 1900s but none of these resulted in a playground program. For example, in 1903, the Local Council of Women's Committee on Playgrounds petitioned the Civic Improvement Society, a non-governmental group, to incorporate playgrounds in their work. See National Council of Women of Canada, *Report of the 12th Annual Meeting 1905*, Charlottetown, P.E.I (Toronto: W.S. Johnston & Co, 1905), 100. Pat Morden suggests that, by 1904, the Civic Improvement Society took up this suggestion and petitioned owners of vacant land to allow children to play on it. Morden also suggests that a Playground Association, funded by private donations existed in the city from 1908 to 1912 and provided opportunities for youth in swimming and skating. See Morden, *Putting Down Roots,* 49.

[32] E. V. Buchanan, *London Water Supply: A History*, (London, Ontario: London Public Utilities Commission, 1968), 7. See also National Council of Women of Canada, *1921 Yearbook*, (Ottawa: 1921), 156. The Social Service Council was the London branch of the organization formally known until 1912 as the Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada.

[33] "Playgrounds To Be Under Parks," *The Free Press*, 2 January 1920, 4.

playgrounds of the season opened on 23 June 1920.[34]

Based on the PUC reports throughout the 1920s, the playground program in London expanded rapidly and received considerable support from the municipality. In the inaugural year, 764 boys and 646 girls attended the playgrounds regularly.[35] By the end of the 1921 season, there were eight playgrounds in operation and the total visits of boys and girls from the end of June until the end of August reached 99,511.[36] The playgrounds were located in all areas of the city with no particular emphasis on one region over another (see Map 1). Playground advocates hoped government-run playgrounds would offer children of poorer means something to do during the summer months. The playgrounds were open to children of all backgrounds and socio-economic means. Activities such as picnics, hikes, crafts, swimming, track and field events, basketball, baseball, tennis, and various other schoolyard games comprised the program. In his 1923 annual report, E.V. Buchanan, general manager of the PUC, assessed the success of the playground initiative, stating, "London has as good a playground system in proportion to its size as any city in Canada. The playgrounds are now an established fact and past the experimental stage, and no doubt the City Council will see its way clear to increase the appropriation in the future."[37] By 1926, the Playgrounds Department operated fourteen playgrounds, and employed a staff of thirty-five supervisors and lifeguards.[38] Female and male supervisors offered activities for children aged eight to sixteen from morning until dusk during the summer months.

Protection, Citizenship and Community Through Play

Irene Brownlie, born in 1925 in London, Ontario, remembers with clarity going to the Kensington Park playground on the corner of Oxford and Wharncliffe streets in London for the first time. It was the morning of 1 July 1933 on the west side of the city. Other kids on the street where Irene lived decided they were go-

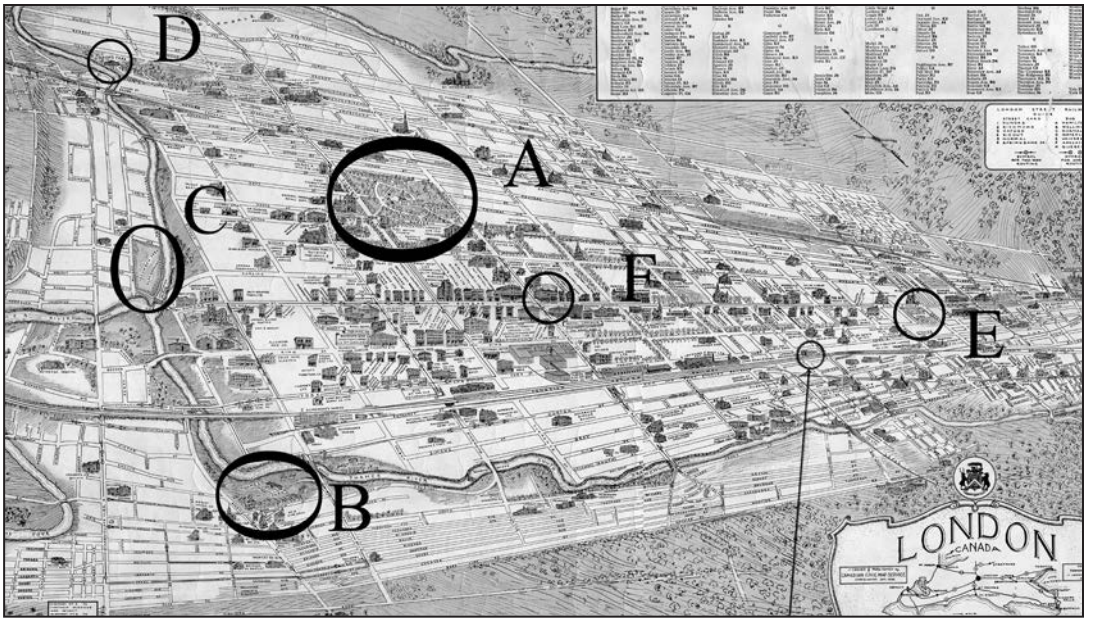
[34] See *42nd Annual Report* (London: Public Utilities Commission, 1920), 68; Buchanan, 7. Three playgrounds operated for the summer, including Thames Park, Queen's Park, and Burkett's Flats, with six appointed supervisors, one male and one female for each playground: Olive Wood, Muriel and Edna Lancaster, Robert Arnett, Malcolm Campbell, and W. Mace. During these first years of operation, Major G. Mel Brock, Director of Athletics of Western University, supervised the Playground Department.

[35] Public Utilities Commission, 1920, 68.

[36] *43rd Annual Report*, (London: Public Utilities Commission, 1921), 80. The eight playgrounds in operation by this time were: Alexandra School at Colbourne and York Streets; Birkett's Flat's, Chelsea Green; Bottrill's Field, Wharncliffe Road and Oxford Street; Lord Roberts School, Princess Avenue; Queen's Park, East London; Riverview School, Wharncliffe Road South; Tecumseh Avenue School, Tecumseh Avenue; and Thames Park, Ridout Street South.

[37] *45th Annual Report* (London, Ontario: Public Utilities Commission, 1923), 64.

[38] *48th Annual Report* (London, Ontario: Public Utilities Commission, 1926), 76. Extending programs into the winter months—for boys at least—a combined playground-public schools hockey league was also established in 1926.



MAP 1*: London, Ontario, 1936. A: Victoria Park; B: Tecumseh Park; C: Thames Park; D: Gibbons Park; E: Queen's Park; F: The Public Utilities Commission. Courtesy of the Regional Collection, the University of Western Ontario.*[39]

ing to the playground so, after gaining permission from her mother, Irene joined her neighbourhood friends and went to see what the excitement was about. These programs were the focus of Irene's summer vacation for eight years of her life from age 8 to 15. She remembers the anticipation each year as the start of the playground season drew near: "I could hardly wait for the parks to open in the summer. And it was great...July the 1st was the opening day and you could hardly wait to go down and meet your supervisor."[40] She recalls, "I loved every minute of it."[41] Shirley Fickling remembers first attending Gibbons Park in South London on Dundas Street in 1937 when she was 12 years old. She has fond memories of learning to play baseball and tennis and playing records on the big Victrola on rainy afternoons with other children and the female supervisor. Supervisors organized the activities, taught new sport skills, and took care of the children while they were at the park. Reflecting on this time in her life, Shirley recalls:

> I remember I'd get up in the morning, my mom would say to me 'Now, you know we'd have...breakfast now, when the dishes are done and...you make your bed and you do all

[39] I have added the circles and numbers for identification purposes. These are not a part of the original map.

[40] Author's interview with Irene (Wedderburn) Brownlie and Audrey Robertson, 12 December 2004, London, Ontario, notes in possession of author.

[41] Brownlie and Robertson interview.

> these things and then you can go to the playground.' Well I'm telling you, you never saw anything get done so fast in all your life![42]

Irene and Shirley were part of a group of girls and boys who flocked to city parks each summer to participate in organized playground programs. These reminiscences suggest that during the first half of the twentieth century playgrounds offered children social spaces to play where physical movement and abilities were explored and developed. Joining municipal playgrounds was a life-defining experience for many women like Irene and Shirley.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, girls, women, boys, and men learned to relate to one another, negotiated social spaces, struggled for authority and power, and celebrated lifestyle and community values through sport and recreational practices. The experiences of females and males in sport were appreciably different, in terms of access to rewards, opportunities to participate, and the cultural norms associated with physical activity itself. In this sense, sport reproduced a gender order through which specific femininities and masculinities were learned, appreciated, celebrated, and criticized.[43] M. Ann Hall suggests that sport in Canada has been viewed by many as a "masculinising project," where boys learn to be men.[44]

In the United States following the First World War, female physical educators took a collective stance on the female athletic programs at schools and colleges in the United States. A similar though less widespread movement also emerged in Canada influenced by events across the border. In 1923, the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation of America hosted a conference, where the decision was made to "...end all organized league competition for girls and women in favour of recreational sports programs." [45] In Canada, some physical educators supported the notions of their American colleagues while others appear to have been sceptical. In both countries, there was a movement to end strenuous sport for women, and a push for mass participation in non-competitive activities. The rationale behind this movement was that "strenuous, highly competitive athletics undermined women biologically and socially."[46]

---

[42] Author's interview with Shirley (Youde) Fickling, 28 April 2005, London, Ontario, notes in possession of author.

[43] R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 134-39.

[44] M. Ann Hall, *The Girl and the Game* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002), 1. For more on the history of women's sport and recreation practices in Canada see Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 94-145 and Helen Lenskyj, Out of Bounds (Toronto, ON: The Women's Press, 1986). For an American perspective see Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

[45] H. Gurney, "Major Influences on the Development of High School Girls' Sport in Ontario" In *Her Story in Sport*, ed. R. Howell (New York, NY: Leisure Press. 1982), 276.

[46] S. Twin, *Out of the Bleachers: Writings on Women and Spo*rt (Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1979), xxvii. Physical educators endorsed the notion of 'play days' whereby regional schools came together for a day of athletic games. The focus of these games was not on winning but on physical fitness,

By the 1930s many girls and women were actively involved in recreational and competitive sport; yet, common beliefs pervaded about appropriate activities for young girls such as those espoused by the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation of America that girls and women should not subject their bodies to strenuous activities. Helen Brulotte provides an example from this study. Born in November 1923, Helen recalls having trouble getting permission from her mother to attend the Queen's Park playground.

> She wouldn't let me go play ball. She didn't think girls should play ball. Then it just happened one time. She used to let us go swimming, once a week to the Thames, because there was no swimming pool out east then.... We'd go for the whole afternoon and we'd get kind of tired of swimming, so I went out, there were kids playing ball. So I started playing and the supervisor, she said where do you live? And I told her, out east London. And she said would you play ball for Queen's Park, and I said no I don't go over there. She said well you could go over there, you can play ball, go and play for them. So I come over and told my mother and she says you're not going over there to play ball, girls don't play ball. And I said well they must, the supervisor told me you know. So luckily I had this older brother of mine. Peter says Mom for heaven's sake let her go. So she did.[47]

Activities such as swimming were appropriate, but Helen's mother did not think girls should play sports such as baseball. Many people felt that softball and other strenuous sports was not an appropriate use of leisure time for young girls. Victorian notions of the body and the gender order have had a lasting effect on girls' and women's participation in recreation, leisure, and sport.

Gagen, in her study of early-twentieth-century playgrounds in the United States, suggests that boys' playground activities focused on team games and competitions in an effort to teach characteristics that would prepare them for manhood and their future roles as active citizens.[48] In contrast, playground activities attempted to instill in girls characteristics appropriate for their future social role, "to care, protect, and keep home."[49] According to Gagen, girls' activities at playgrounds in Cambridge, MA, consisted of industrial work

health, and cooperation. Hult indicates that the notion of 'play days' in the scholastic setting lasted for approximately ten years, when it was replaced by 'sport days' whereby women competed on school teams against other schools; a winner was declared but not celebrated, and coaching was not provided to the athletes. See J.S Hult, "The Story of Women's Athletics: Manipulating a Dream 1890-1985," In *Women and Sport: Interdisiplinary Perspectives*, eds. M. Costa and S. R. Guthrie (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 90. The adoption of play days and sport days was widespread in the United States but limited to specific areas in Canada. Between 1933 and 1934, Toronto and district schools withdrew from interschool competition. Of the 200 schools in Ontario at this time, it is estimated that 25 withdrew their women's programs from interschool competitions. See Gurney, "Major Influences," 478. These philosophical notions of appropriate sport for women impacted all realms of women's sport well into the 1930s.

[47] Author's interview with Helen (Gorman) Brulotte, 11 April 2005, London, Ontario, notes in possession of author.

[48] Gagen, "An example to us all," 607.

[49] *Ibid*., 610.

including basic sewing skills, knitting and crafts, and drills that focused on dance, song, and games.[50] In London, while there was a similar emphasis on activities that prepared girls and boys for their future social roles, sport and physical activities were also an important part of their playground experience. The playground philosophy for girls was to train them for their future social role as wives and mothers and part of this philosophy included promoting physical activities that would strengthen their bodies. City playgrounds offered competitive sport opportunities for girls including baseball and track and field. As early as 1921, a playground baseball league was organized with eight girls' teams and eight boys' teams. Figure 1 is a photograph of a girls' softball game in 1921. The crowds in the background suggest that the girls' games were popular among playground participants and attracted a fair number of spectators. Indeed, the women in this study attribute learning sport skills to the playgrounds and their sport competitions hold a central place in their recollections. In her interview, Irene Brownlie recalls being taught new sport skills, such as how to do the running broad jump and high jump and how to play baseball, by male and female supervisors. Looking back on her life, she fondly remembers the playground as the place she learned to run, jump, and throw and use her body in new ways.

Figure 1: *Girls' softball game 1921. Public Utilities Commission, 44th Annual Report (London, Ontario, 1922), 3.*[51]

Although both boys and girls participated in the same sport competitions, embedded in the structure of playground activities was the idea of sex segregation—an ideology that has permeated sport since its inception. Jennifer Hargreaves suggests that most separatist philosophies were a reaction to dominant ideas about the biological and psychological predispositions of males and females.[52] Shirley Fickling recalls, "the girls had their own teams and

[50] *Ibid*., 611.

[51] This is one of the few pictures I have gathered that shows girls or women actively competing in sport. The majority of the photographs I have collected through the larger project are posed shots of players or teams.

[52] See Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's*

the boys had their own teams."[53] This was a naturalized part of the playground program. Reports from the early-twentieth-century playground movement in London suggest that there were differing objectives in terms of opportunities provided for boys and girls. For boys, the playground was a place to protect them from the 'problems' of society and social delinquency and prepare them for a 'proper' life as productive workers and providers. In contrast, the playgrounds were social spaces where the decency of girls was protected from the presumed 'evils' of society, thereby preparing them for life as wives and mothers. Highlighting these differing objectives, Buchanan reported in the 1930 Christmas Edition of *The Echo* newspaper: "The man who has played football for the team, and in the proper team spirit, when a boy, is not likely to take advantage of a fellow worker, and the woman who has indulged in games in the proper spirit when a girl will undoubtedly create the right atmosphere in the home in which she is mistress."[54] There is no mention of women as workers, although by this time, young single women were increasingly finding paid employment opportunities in the city.[55]

One of the goals of the municipal playground in London was to protect children from what social reformers called the 'evils of idleness' that they felt plagued urban life during this period. In justifying the expenditure of the time and money on the provision of playground programs for children, Gerald Goodman, Chief Male Supervisor of Playgrounds wrote:

> There is no doubt that we are succeeding in our endeavour to create in children the proper spirit of play. To lay the foundation for a full and splendid manhood or womanhood is our first consideration. We are trying to make their play so educational and interesting that they have no time or desire for mischief-making or vandalism. The fact that since the opening of the St. Julien Playground not a single juvenile court case is reported from this district, is significant, and this alone is worth considerable [sic] to the citizens of London.[56]

This goal and rationale for the playground, as a place to instil certain 'appropriate' behaviours and characteristics in children, still existed well into the 1920s and 30s, buoyed by the blatant emphasis on moral reform and crime prevention among the lower classes. In the rhetoric of social and moral reform, in 1930 Buchanan wrote:

> The playground movement may be looked at from a sound business point of view. Any community to prosper must have citizens

Sports (London: Routledge, 1994), 30. For an argument against discrimination between sexes in sport, see Torbjorn Tannsjo, "Against Sexual Discrimination in Sports," in *Values in Sport*, ed. Claudio Tamburrini and Torbjorn Tannsjo (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2000), 101-16.

[53] Author's interview with Shirley (Youde) Fickling, 26 April 2006, London, Ontario, notes in possession of author.

[54] Buchanan, *The Christmas Echo*, 10.

[55] See, Veronia Strong-Boag, "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," *Labour* 4 (1979): 131-164.

[56] *49th Annual Report* (London, Ontario: Public Utilities Commission, 1927), 74.

> who are sound not only in body but in character. To care for the sick and feeble and to contend with the criminal or delinquent are the most costly charges on a community today. It costs us $439.00 to support a boy for a year in one of our reformatories, and this is just about the annual cost of one of the smaller playgrounds where hundreds of children play and are kept out of mischief. The less that is spent on recreation and health the more must be spent on charities and correction...Habits formed on the playground will most probably be retained in later life.[57]

The life-lessons learned through playground programs deeply impacted participants' behaviours as young women. Audrey Robertson, born in 1929 and a participant at the Thames Park playground in the late 1930s recalls, "I feel that if I hadn't got into the sports, or the playgrounds and that, that I don't know where I would have ended up.... It really saved my life in that sense."[58] She attributes the playgrounds with steering her away from the 'evils' of society and towards more socially-defined, respectable activities. Born in 1928, Irene Brownlie's sister Doreen Bugler, a playground participant in the mid 1930s, reflects:

> I do think that playing sports gives you a certain dedication to life. I think you know people are depending on you and you feel you should stand up as much as you can, do whatever you can to make it right for the team. I think that all the kids that ever played sports all turned out to be good parents and good workers.[59]

Faye Rennie, born in 1923 and a playground participant at Thames Park in the early 1930s suggests, "It was something to do. We had no money.... and I can honestly say that out of the baseball group I think there was only one girl that got pregnant. What I mean is, we were too busy and I think it was good for young people."[60] The support of the supervised playground initiative suggests that sport and organized physical activity were perceived to foster 'appropriate' public behaviour in both boys and girls. While the playground program provided varied opportunities for physical activities and sport, the program's overall emphasis was on social skills, activities that reflected the future roles of Canadian children and taught them essential life lessons. London's municipal playground programs focused on creating and moulding particular kinds of citizens and the underlying philosophies were deeply entrenched in gendered notions of citizenship.[61]

Another goal of the municipal playground was to produce 'good' citizens

---

[57] E.V. Buchanan, "Supervised Playgrounds in London," *The Christmas Echo*, December 1930, 10.

[58] Brownlie and Robertson interview.

[59] Author's interview with Doreen (Wedderburn) Bugler, 25 April 2005, London, Ontario, notes in possession of author.

[60] Author's interview with Yvonne (Wright) Travers and Faye (Wright) Rennie, London, Ontario 26 April 2005, London, Ontario, notes in possession of author.

[61] Focusing on the post-war period, Tillotson suggests that gender is connected to citizenship through public recreation services that are offered. She argues that if "citizenship practices can be shaped through recreation services, and if these (like private leisure pursuits) are structured on gendered lines,

by creating a sense of community and loyalty among the participants. For boys, playground leaders hoped that this would translate to national loyalty and an understanding of the duties of citizenship. Elizabeth Gagen argues that "[t]o inspire a sense of belonging that could be transferred to national loyalty, each boy had to feel allegiance to the playground as a territory and to his fellow members."[62] For girls this focused on being good citizens and mothers. Loyalty and community, for both boys and girls, was developed through the individual playgrounds. In London, one strategy for instilling allegiance to the park among the participants was the designation of colours. Irene Brownlie recalls:

> What they would do, each park had a colour, Kensington Park was purple, Gibbons was blue, different colours, and they would give you one yard of material, and you took it home and gave it to your mother, and she had to make you shorts, and she also had to keep a piece about three inches wide, to go across from shoulder to waist, like the Olympics. And you were also to make a big flag with a big white "K" [for Kensington Park] on it. Every park had a flag and they would march everybody in the group around Tecumseh Park, and then if you won an event you got up on the podium with your flag.... It was great. And of course the parents all came out and cheered you on you know.[63]

This system of colours allowed participants to recognize each other and develop loyalties and feel a sense of belonging to the playground they attended.

Encouraging allegiance and fostering a sense of belonging was also accomplished through sport competitions. Participants were encouraged to compete for their playground in various sporting events in both team and individual sport activities. On Friday evenings, the playground program offered weekly contests at Thames Park where children, boys and girls, from all of the parks gathered for competition.[64] The women in this study vividly remember these weekly contests. Irene Brownlie recalls:

> So they used to have track meets in August every Friday and they would hold them at Thames Park. And all the supervisors from the different playgrounds, and I think there was about eight at that time, they would go through the grounds and grab on to anybody that could run and jump and show them how to do these things. Like how to do their start, cause they always shot the gun, they didn't say 1,2,3 go, they shot the gun and scared you to death, but anyway, they showed you how to do your start, then they would take you over and show you how to do running broad jump, they showed us how to do high jump, and then they would show you how to participate in a relay.[65]

Reflecting on the weekly track and field

---

then citizenship cannot escape being marked by gender. See Tillotson, *Public at Play*, 7. For more on gendered citizenship, see also, Munday, "Gendered citizenship," 249-66.

[62] Gagen, "An example to us all," 608.

[63] Brownlie and Robertson interview. Gibbons Park was located on the Thames River at the corner of Victoria and Talbot streets. Kenzington Park was located in West London near The Forks of the Thames River.

[64] Each Saturday *The Free Press* reported the results of the weekend meets. For example, see "Playground Sports," *The Free Press*, 31 July 1920, 10.

[65] Brownlie and Robertson interview.

Figure 2: *End of the year track and field meet at Tecumseh Park. Public Utilities Commission, 46th Annual Report (London, Ontario, 1924), 57.*

meets between the playgrounds, Doreen Bugler, recalls:

> I remember getting ready for the... track meets on a Friday night... we couldn't have anything too heavy because we'd have to run and jump. So I always remember a nice ham sandwich and tomato juice.... [W]e walked, even when we lived down on Oxford street there and we used to walk across the Oxford street bridge and... right along the break water, all the way down to Labatt Park.[66]

These weekly meets developed a healthy sense of competition among the various playgrounds in the city and gave the participants something to look forward to and train for throughout the week. At the end of August, to conclude the summer programs and showcase their abilities and new skills, all of the children from the various playgrounds, both boys and girls, joined together at Tecumseh Park for the year-end track and field meet. Figure 2 shows a group of young girls lining up for the opening ceremony at the end of the year track and field meet at Tecumseh Park. Each participant is wearing the required shorts in their designated colour and the matching band across their chest. Helen Brulotte recalls how important this event was at the end of the summer: "they ran it really like an Olympics. Oh gosh. It was just really, to be a part of it was great. And then before it started they always had the big parade around... all the kids paraded around... we used to have to practice that days and days on end."[67] As Gagen suggests, the development of children could be monitored and promoted through this public display of play and competition during the weekly and end of the summer athletic contests.[68] In London, the physical abilities of both boys and girls were publically displayed in this way.[69]

The Depression had a significant im-

[66] Bugler interview.

[67] Author's interview with Helen (Gorman) Brulotte, Pat (Gorman) Belliveau, and Audrey Robertson, 11 April 2005, Dorchester, Ontario, notes in possession of author.

[68] Gagen, "An example to us all," 606.

[69] Early American leaders in the parks and recreation movement urged that playground activities of girls over the age of eight should be hidden from public view. For example, in 1911 Kennard Beulah ar-

pact on people's lives not only in terms of work but also their leisure time, and the resources available for the provision of recreation and sport activities. While those who had lost their jobs as a result of this global economic crisis faced new burdens associated with "enforced leisure," opportunities for sport and recreation diminished in the city.[70] The economic downturn in London during the Depression influenced the London playground programs in two important ways. First, program resources decreased, and, second, unemployed individuals between the ages of seventeen and twenty flocked to the playground area; yet, there were no, formally organized, activities for individuals in this age group. Although playground programs attempted to curtail services in a way that would least affect the participants—for example by closing the smaller playgrounds with the lowest participation numbers—ultimately, the economic crisis necessitated budget reductions of "non-essential" expenditures.

Through budget cuts the playgrounds in London survived the Depression years, albeit in a reduced form. The 1930s marked a decrease in the resources dedicated to the playground initiative, similar to many other publicly funded services during the era. By the end of the 1920s, the emphasis of the NCWC and the local councils was no longer on establishing playgrounds and creating opportunities for recreation across the country, as the "pioneer period for organized recreation had passed."[71] The emphasis shifted from securing and lobbying for playground facilities and programs to ensuring the quality of the leadership, organization, and services provided.[72]

By 1933 only seven playgrounds were open for seasonal activities, a drop from fourteen in the previous year. The playgrounds not operated were those with smaller attendance records. As Goodman explained: "Strict economy was necessary to operate this number of playgrounds with the funds available, and the program was considerably curtailed."[73] The bulk of the program reductions tended to be the social and cultural activities first, such as the handicraft work, and athletic badge testing work, while the emphasis was on retaining a full sports program. This decrease in playground programs reflected the general decline in social service offerings in Canada. The Depression era strained the available financial reservoirs in all areas of society with funds being relocated to essential services.

There was a gradual shift away from children to concern over youth and young adults and their leisure time. In terms of social and moral reform, the PUC play-

gues that there were three dangers for girls that needed to be guarded against and kept from public view: overexertion, self-exploitation, and self-consciousness. See Kennard Beulah, "Playground Activities for Girls between nine and fourteen," *American Physical Education Review*, XVI (1911), 513-14.

[70] Susan Forbes, "Gendering Corporate Welfare Practices: Female Sports and Recreation at Eaton's During the Depression," *Rethinking History* 5 (2001), 66.

[71] National Council of Women of Canada, *1930 Yearbook* (Ottawa, ON, 1930), 101.

[72] *Ibid*., 102.

[73] *55th Annual Report* (London, Ontario: Public Utilities Commission, 1933), 62.

ground reports indicate a growing concern over the idleness of individuals between the ages of seventeen and twenty and suggest that recreational services were desperately needed during this period to provide amusement and entertainment during a time of decreasing industrial production and increasing unemployment. Certainly, by the 1930s, the leisure time of young adults between the ages of seventeen and twenty had become a new issue of concern for the Playground Department. In 1932, Goodman recommended that for the 1933 season the Playground Department should "attempt to secure a small appropriation for organized activity" for boys aged seventeen to twenty.[74] However, there was no recommendation made for programs for girls in this age group. By 1933, little had been done to remedy the situation, and it remained a primary concern for Goodman:

> Each year the problem of dealing with girls and boys between the ages of 17 and 20 becomes more acute. The playgrounds are crowded with boys and girls of this age and something must be done to occupy the time and minds of this group. Leagues should be formed and additional equipment provided, as the situation is become [sic] serious. This age group cannot find employment and congregate on the playgrounds all day and evening.... I would urge that the age limit on the playgrounds be raised or these youths be taken care of separately.[75]

By 1936, there were adult men's leagues for baseball and soccer in the city.[76] However, while offering recreational activities for boys and men over the age of sixteen, these leagues posed a problem for the city's recreation program. The men's leagues used the recreational spaces designed as part of playground areas and, thus, interfered with scheduled playground activities and drew the youngsters' attention away from the playground activities. No effort was made for women over the age of sixteen in terms of municipally organized recreation during this period. For women, apart from working as playground supervisors, there were few sporting opportunities organized by the city. Using public money for women's sport was apparently not seen as an appropriate use of municipal resources. In search of alternatives, many women turned to industrial sport opportunities. Yet, by the mid 1930s, as company resources for the promotion and sponsorship of sport teams were no longer feasible, the industrial sporting opportunities for working women disappeared as well.[77]

It was not until 1942 that the city developed softball and basketball leagues for young women over the age of 16.[78]

[74] *54th Annual Report* (London, Ontario: Public Utilities Commission 1932), 62.

[75] *55th Annual Report* (London, Ontario: Public Utilities Commission, 1933), 63.

[76] See *56th Annual Report* (London, Ontario: Public Utilities Commission, 1934), 60; *57th Annual Report* (London, Ontario: Public Utilities Commission, 1935), 58.

[77] See "Girls Get Busy On Civic Holiday," *The Free Press*, 3 August 1935, 16. There is no mention of organized women's softball in the city from 1936 until 1942. See, *64th Annual Report* (London, Ontario: Public Utilties Commission, 1942), 38. For more information on industrial softball opportunities in London, Ontario see Carly Adams, "I just felt like I belonged to them": Women's Industrial Softball, London, Ontario 1923-1935," *Journal of Sport History*, (forthcoming Spring 2011).

[78] For more information on city softball teams for women in London post-1942, see Carly Adams,

In 1942, as an extension of the playground softball leagues, the London Girls' Major Softball League was created. Helen Brulotte recalls the creation of the league: "Most of us were coming up to sixteen or so and there was no place, cause you only went to the playgrounds until you were sixteen. And he [Bill Farquharson] figured there were a lot of good ball players around. So that was when he started the four-wards league."[79] Open to girls and women aged thirteen to twenty-one across the city, the league played its games at Labatt Park.[80] As an alternative source of revenue for the park, the women's league was welcomed as a fruitful replacement to circumvent the effects of the Second World War that led to the diminishment of the men's leagues. The inaugural league consisted of four teams, each one representing a ward of the city: The Shamrocks from the Southeast, The Cardinals from the Northwest, the Eagles in the South, and the Royals in the East. Many of the women interviewed for this study went on to play for one of these city teams.

Figure 3: *Maypole Dance, circa 1920, PUC Collection, The University of Western Ontario Archives, RC42067.*

"Softball and the Female Community: Pauline Perron, Pro Ball Player, Outsider, 1926-1951," *Journal of Sport History*, 33 (2006), 323-43.

[79] Brulotte, Belliveau, and Robertson interview.

[80] Originally called Tecumseh Park, the Labatt family rescued the baseball grounds from financial difficulty in 1936, renaming it and donating it to the city along with a $10,000 cheque for improvements. See Morden, *Putting Down Roots,* 47-49.

Final Thoughts

The London playgrounds were established as a result of the broader social reform movement of the early twentieth century. The efforts of local reform-minded organizations such as the London branch of the NCWC, that sought to protect children from the evils of idleness and environmental vices that their members felt plagued urban life at the turn of the century, successfully convinced the London municipal government to take up the playground initiative. But throughout the 1920s and 1930s city playgrounds were more than protective spaces for children during the summer months. For the girls and young women involved, the playground offered a place to develop lasting friendship that, for many, became life-long. Doreen Bugler recalls the importance of these friendships:

> you were growing up with the children and you were competing year after year. And you made some really good friends. Especially when you got involved in something like the relays. You had to have three other kids that could run as fast as you could [laughter] and we used to practice that over and over because you didn't want to make a slip with the baton. That was fun.[81]

Shirley Fickling attributes learning to play ball to "going to the parks."[82] For many women, learning to play softball and other sports at the playgrounds led to decades of sport involvement. Primarily through playground programs girls and women were first exposed to organized sports once only accessible to males.[83] Mona Gleason suggests that in adult memories of growing up, "the body is remembered as the site through which acceptable self-identities and the priorities of the larger social order were mediated and negotiated."[84] Women like Shirley who spent their summers at London playgrounds under the care of City-paid supervisors remember sport and competitive recreational opportunities as an important part of their self-identities as children and young adults. The municipal playground was an important space for girls and young women, a place to play where exploring the movement of their bodies, and testing the boundaries of physical abilities was appropriate and acceptable.

On the playgrounds girls and young women were also forced to negotiate philosophies that meant to shape children into 'proper' young women and men—philosophies that were deeply

[81] Bugler interview.

[82] Fickling interview.

[83] It is important here to recognize the agency of these children in the development of their playground experiences. Gagen suggests that previous work on playgrounds, specifically within the American context, "has presented the movement as something created *by* adults *for* children, and in doing so has reduced children to passive historical characters who respond to or acted within an imposed framework. Gagen suggests that it is important to acknowledge "children's contribution to the production of space," See Elizabeth Gagen, "Too Good to be True: Representing Children's Agency in the Archives of Playground Reform," *Historical Geography*, 29 (2001), 53-55.

[84] Gleason, "Embodied Negotiations," 112.

embedded in gendered notions of citizenship. Through playground programming, girls and young women learned about gender segregation—that boys and girls should not compete against one another in sport—and to move their bodies in gender-appropriate ways. They also learned about what were considered socially appropriate activities for boys and girls and what sociologist Jennie Munday calls "citizenship as duty."[85] They learned about loyalty to their playground community and by extension to the state and most importantly expectations for 'good' citizenship. The oral histories of women's experiences as children at municipal playgrounds offer insight into Ontario's past beyond archival documents and meeting minutes, and place women's experiences and "women's words" central to our understanding of the municipal playground movement in Canada.[86]

---

[85] Munday, "Gendered citizenship," 251.

[86] Taken from, Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991).