

EARLY EFFORTS TO PROFESSIONALIZE LEISURE SERVICES IN CANADA*

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Background and Models

The earliest recorded efforts to professionalize leisure services in Canada occurred in 1912 and 1913 at the annual meetings of the National Council of Women when proposals for both training of playground teachers and supervisors and the development of a national association were discussed. But what resulted from these bold ideas? This paper draws upon portions of the presenter's recently completed primary source historical research (Markham, 1994), which in turn built upon the landmark work of McFarland (1970). Using Burton's (1982) and Sessoms' (1991) models of professionalization the paper details the efforts of groups in Canada between 1913 and 1945 to build a profession wherein there would be both education of the members and advocacy to promote the importance of the field.

Burton (1982) provided a useful typology of three types of professions. In that typology he identified and defined *de jure* professions which are legally recognized, *de facto* professions which, while not entrenched through legislation, do have a process which regulates entry into the field, and lastly *conventionally labelled* professions wherein the member (the professional) "exhibits the character, spirit and methods of a person engaged in a profession, even though, formally, he or she may not belong to an organized and established profession" (p. 1).

Sessoms 1991 discussion of the certification of leisure service professionals noted the essential ingredients involved in creating a profession. For an occupation to become a profession, several things must happen. There must be recognition by the public of its importance to the welfare of the public: a social mandate. There must be acceptance by both those who practice and those who receive the service that the practitioner needs specialized knowledge and training in order to perform the service correctly. There must be the formation of professional organizations which assume responsibility for the control and destiny of the profession.

There must be a body of knowledge and programs of formal preparation to impart that knowledge to those who wish to practice. (p. 21)

Thus, irrespective of a profession's status as *de jure*, *de facto*, or *conventionally labelled*, it should be recognized as socially relevant, its members should have formal training in a specialized field, and it should be controlled by a formal organization with responsibilities both to its members and to the recipients of the service. So....what were the early efforts of those involved in leisure services to build a base of social relevance, to train, to control and to move toward a legislated structure?

The Early Efforts

In 1912 the convenor of National Council of Women's Committee on Vacation Schools and Supervised Playgrounds noted that:

It is the earnest hope of your Convenor that the members of this National Council will sanction petitions to the several Provincial Legislatures for the establishment of departments in the Normal Schools for the training of playground teachers and supervisors to meet Canadian needs in the world-wide playground movement. (Yearbook, p. 48)

The N.C.W. files contain several responses indicating support for the concept of training, but no commitments to engage in training. Undaunted by the lack of training commitments from governments, one year later, in 1913, that same Committee Convenor reported that there was strong support for the "advisability of forming a National Canadian Playground Association" (Yearbook, p. 44). Thus began the slow process of professionalizing leisure services in Canada with discussions about two of the essential ingredients, training and a formal organization. However, planting the idea of training and an organization did not lead to immediate implementation of the idea.

Over a decade later, in 1925, the Canadian Council on Child Welfare's Recreation Division recommended that "an organization be established . . . to function in Canada in a manner similar to the Playgrounds and Recreation Association of America in the United States" (Gettys, p. 50). The P.R.A.A. was the model of the time for education and advocacy. This was the first mention of what would become a ten year quest by the Council to position itself as the leader in professionalizing leisure services in Canada. The early years of the quest included much discussion, but little action. However, as Charlotte Whitton took on the position of Executive Director of the Council, the quest became more proactive. She began to implement plans for a national organization in 1929 through contact with the New York based P.R.A.A. Her goal was both to develop a national organization and to hire staff.

Miss Whitton's bid to communicate with the P.R.A.A. (later named the National Recreation Association) appears to have been carried out in isolation from many of the recreation workers in Canada. While she was trying to arrange a meeting with P.R.A.A. staff, many Canadians were already members of the Association, were honorary members and honorary directors, and were working successfully to organize the first National recreation Association congress held outside the United States. The N.R.A. continued to act, although at an arms-length relationship, as the organization that provided services such as providing publications and field work staff, to Canadian municipalities. This situation of having an external organization providing services to Canadian cities was viewed by the council as being irritating and frustrating, as noted by Miss Whitton when she wanted to find ways and means of financing a national organization and not "be left to exist on the incidental services of United States organizations. We must find some ways and means to finance National Canadian services for them." (NAC, MG28, I10, Vol 8, File 42, 28 Mar 1932). Such a way of financing an organization and national services did not come for another decade, after the end of World War Two.

In the meantime, as Canada struggled through the depths of the Great Depression, two new champions of leisure services were created. In 1933 the Canadian Physical Education Association was formed under the leadership of Dr. Arthur S. Lamb of McGill University (Gurney, 1983). In 1936 the Ontario Parks Association was formed to represent the interests of the parks men of Ontario, under the leadership of A.T. Whitaker of Brantford Ontario, a commissioner of the Niagara Parks Commission. (Drysdale, 1970, p. 18) Unfortunately, all of the early work of the O.P.A. has been lost to us as the early records were destroyed.

While both the title and the early membership of the Canadian Physical Education Association suggest a narrow focus on physical education and physical activity, the operation of the Association embraced a broader clientele. Examples of this can be seen in the conference programs from 1937 and 1939. In 1937 J.J. Syme, Superintendent of the Playgrounds Commission of Hamilton, Ontario chaired a session of the Playground and Parks Section titled "The Why? The What? and The How? of Public Recreation" with agenda item 5 being "Professional organization" with discussion of:

- a. Should there be a Provincial or Dominion organization of recreation workers?
- b. Should such an organization be affiliated with another organization? Or should it be entirely separate?
- c. Annual dues and the amount?
(NAC, MG28 I153, Vol 3, File X-25-3-1937)

In 1939 the playground directors met to discuss "Recreation on Supervised Playgrounds" (NAC, MG28 I153, Vol 4, File X-25-3-1939). The C.P.E.A. played a substantial role in early efforts to professionalize leisure services, however, its role in that regard took a lower priority than its work related to physical education.

The first significant the post World War Two activity in professionalizing leisure services was the creation of the Parks and Recreation Association of Canada, the forerunner of today's Canadian Parks/Recreation Association. While there are no records of the early years of the Ontario Parks Association available, the transformation of the eight year old O.P.A. into P.R.A.C. has well documented by Drysdale (1970) and Markham (1995) from a variety of archival sources. The rationale for the change in name was to reflect the reality of both the O.P.A.'s membership (broader than just Ontario) and its concerns (more than just parks), as noted in a notice of motion at the 1944 meeting:

That the Ontario Parks association extend its objectives and change its name . . . enlarging its objectives to take in all forms of recreation utilizing public parks and playgrounds and buildings and inviting all recreational bodies, including Boards of Education in Canada, to become members on the same basis and at the same fee as already in effect, on a proportional population basis as is in effect for park bodies. (O.P.A. Bulletin, mid July 1944, p. 24 in NAC, RG84, Vol 171, File U125-17 pt. 1)

The resulting organization became one of the leaders in attempting to professionalize leisure services in Canada.

The presentation paper will further describe and explain the roles of the National Council of Women, the Council on Child Welfare, the Canadian Physical Education Association, the Ontario Parks Association and Parks and Recreation Association of Canada. The work of these groups will be described within the context of the social and economic conditions of the time period, including but not limited to wars, economic expansion and depression. As the professionalization of leisure services in Canada did not occur in isolation, links with and the impact of the United States based organizations, the P.R.A.A. and the N.R.A., will be explored as will the impact of the international recreation congresses held in conjunction with the 1932 and 1936 Olympics.

Was There Professionalization?

If professionalization requires that a field be recognized as socially relevant, with members having formal training in a specialized field, and being controlled by a formal organization with legislated responsibilities both to its members and to the recipients of the service, it can be concluded that leisure services were partly professionalized in the early years. The social relevance criterion was present. Formal training was in its embryonic state. Control by the organization was minimal. Legislation was nonexistent. These are the roots upon which the current field was based. There are of course discussions about the degree to which present day practitioners have achieved professional status (Burton, 1982) and debates regarding the relevance of professionalization (Sessoms, 1991), however, an understanding of the early efforts to professionalize is essential to the discussion and the debate.

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