

Early Efforts to Professionalize Leisure Services in Canada
Manuscript for paper presented at CCLR6, 1990 by Susan Markham

This project links my primary area of research "recreation and parks history" into some of the discussion of the process of professionalization - but not the debate over the pros and cons of professionalization.

Background and Models

The earliest recorded efforts to professionalize leisure services in Canada that I have found in my research occurred in 1912 and 1913 at the annual meetings of the National Council of Women when proposals for both the 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 my recently completed primary source historical research (Markham, 1994), which in its turn built upon the landmark work of McFarland (1970) wherein she converted her doctoral dissertation into the book The Development of Public Recreation in Canada. We have few Canadian classics in recreation, parks and leisure services - McFarland's work is one. Using Burton's (1982) and Sessoms' (1991) models of professionalization the presentation will detail the efforts of groups in Canada between 1912 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 (e.g. medicine, engineering with provincial legislation);
- *de facto* professions which, while not entrenched through legislation, do have a process which regulates entry into the field, (e.g. planning and the CIP); 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*, we can agree that:

- 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. A typical response was the one from the Province of Nova Scotia's Superintendent of Education wherein he agreed that such training should be provided and noted that "as the demand should increase in the future I have very much pleasure in bringing your communication together with my own view, to the attention of the Principal of the Normal College; in order to discover what we may be reasonably able to do under present conditions." (NAC MG28 .I25 V68 f2, 23 December 1912) Manitoba, British Columbia, Ontario and New Brunswick also responded with similar platitudes (NAC MG28 .I25 V68 f2). After many months of delay and, in their words, "careful consideration of the Resolution" Saskatchewan educators came to a conclusion which is familiar to many Canadian policy makers - they "were of the opinion that the question is a national rather than a provincial one and that present conditions in our new Province would hardly justify an expenditure such as would have to be incurred in case provision were made for a complete course of training in our Normal Schools" (NAC MG28 .I25 V68 f2, 17 August 1914). So, there were no commitments to engage in training. Contemporary creators or defenders of recreation degree programs may recognize that situation.

Undaunted by the lack of training commitments from governments, one year later, in 1913, that same National Council of Women Committee Convenor, Mabel Peters, reported that there was strong support for the "advisability of forming a National Canadian Playground Association" (Yearbook, p. 44). However, even though there may have been strong support for the idea, when Mabel Peters died a year later, the idea of a National Canadian Playgrounds Association died with her - at least for a decade.

Thus began the slow process of professionalizing leisure services in Canada with discussions about two of the essential ingredients, training and a formal organization. But, planting the idea of training and an organization certainly 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 beginning 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 as the leadership work in the 1920's was limited to presentations at the Council's national conferences, augmented

by the preparation of a suggested national program for recreation by a Dr. Gettys of McGill University and its publication in a pamphlet for national distribution. The distribution strategy is not known, but it did involve student teachers including those in Nova Scotia in hopes that they would "help to spread the gospel of `a wise use of leisure'" (NAC, MG28 I10, Vol 8, File 42, 16 Mar 1929).

Thus, we finally have evidence of the role that the National Council of Women wanted the Normal Schools to take on 15 years earlier. However, as Charlotte Whitton took on the position of Executive Director of the Council on Child Welfare, 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 contact with the P.R.A.A. started with her attempts to organize a meeting between herself, William Bowie who was the head of the Council's Recreation Division and the P.R.A.A.'s field worker for the north-eastern U.S., Mr. A.R. Wellington. Her goal was not only to develop a national organization, but also to hire staff. The correspondence over next three years between 1929 and 1932 included several references to hiring "an excellent young chap," "a good young chap, with energy and promise," and some young chap who knows something of the work" - not a young woman, but a young man (NAC, MG28 I10, Vol 8, File 42, 11 May 1929, 27 Mar 1931, 8 Dec 1932). The meeting to get assistance in forming a national organization does not seem to have taken place due to the inability of all parties to coordinate their schedules. As well the hiring of a staff person did not occur until 1933.

Miss Whitton's bid to communicate with the P.R.A.A. (later named the National Recreation Association and even later named the National Parks and 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 Association staff, many Canadians were already members of the Association, were honorary members and honorary directors, and were working successfully to organize the first and only National Recreation Association congress held outside the United States.

That conference was viewed by some of the Canadian organizers as part of the move to professionalize recreation services. Credit for this move was taken by one of its organisers, J.J. Syme of Hamilton, as he recounted, somewhat bitterly, in the **Bulletin** of the Canadian Physical Education Association, that:

the...Annual Congress of the National Recreation Association was held in Toronto in 1931, after no small effort on my part to bring it to Canada.

One of the purposes of this move was to arouse interest in the recreation movement and in the formation of a Canadian Association. Why was it not developed? (Syme, 1938, p. 5)

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 communities. One example of the N.R.A. providing consulting work to Canadian communities occurred in 1929 when the City of Hamilton, Ontario used the Association's Mr Wellington to do an "analysis" and provide "constructive criticism" of the City's parks and recreation system.

This situation of having an external organization providing services to Canadian cities was viewed by the Council on Child Welfare 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, in her words, "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). Three years later, 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 actual 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)

Syme later reported that "the opinion expressed at that time was unanimously in favour of forming such an organization." Flushed with the illusion that his idea was a success, Syme wrote an article in the CPEA Bulletin headed "Playground Leaders Consider National Organization" (1937, p. 5). In that article he reported on the meeting at the conference and asked CPEA members to "give the matter of playground organization [their] earnest attention" (p. 5). Alas, a year later, he had to report that "the response was anything but encouraging, giving such reasons as geographical distance; lack of organization; lack of interest locally; work being carried out by volunteer staff and contributions, etc., and in some cases, no response. In view of this, the matter was shelved for the time being" (Syme, 1938, p. 5). In 1939 at the C.P.E.A. conference, the playground directors met to discuss "Recreation on Supervised Playgrounds" with no discussion of a professional organization (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 and physical fitness of men going into the military - that latter topic being a personal issue of Dr. A.S. Lamb, the C.P.E.A.'s first president.

The first significant 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 and mandate 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 PRAC Charter stated that it was charged with the "dominion-wide stimulation of recreation, the dominion-wide extension of parks including municipal, provincial and national parks and recreation activities." Presumably, the stimulation of recreation included the professionalization of recreation.

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. Thus, by applying Sessoms' and Burton's criteria..... The social relevance criterion was present. Formal training was in its embryonic state. Control by an organization was minimal. Legislation was nonexistent. These are the roots upon which the current field is 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, to the debate, and to our future.

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