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## SPREADING "THE GOSPEL OF 'A WISE USE OF LEISURE'"

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### **Introduction/Background**

This presentation builds on previous work about leisure in a time of severe social and economic conditions that looked at the purposes for leisure – was leisure for social, economic or military preparation purposes? (Markham, 1994 & 1995) - and asks what else was happening in Canada in the 1920's and 1930's to get leisure onto the public agenda? The work of two organizations linked by a common thread, promoting leisure and recreation, will be identified and reviewed, adding a few more pieces to the jigsaw puzzle that is Canadian leisure history. The organizations that will be reviewed are the Canadian Council for Child and Family Welfare and the Nova Scotia Department of Education - one non-governmental advocacy/professional group and one government department linked with the teacher training program at the Normal College.

### **Methods/Sources**

The research for this presentation uses historical tools and techniques to search for and analyze secondary and primary source documents. The primary source documents were found in the three archival collections in Canada and the United States - these are noted in the reference list. Secondary source background materials were acquired through the usual library collections.

### **Results**

The organizations described in this presentation were not high profile ones in the daily news. However, they toiled away, chipping away at the problems that they had taken on, doing good works, attempting to get the attention of decision makers – attempting to get leisure and recreation onto the public agenda.

Canadian Council on Child Welfare (CCCW) spearheaded discussion and action about leisure in Canada the 1920's and 30's through its Education and Recreation Section. The Council and its Executive Secretary, Charlotte Whitton, worked with the Playgrounds Association of America to develop a national association, advocated for leisure services for the unemployed, convened a national Round Table on Leisure, and tried to get adequate recreation opportunities for men in the Unemployment Relief Camps (Markham, 1994).

The Education and Recreation Section's 1925 progress report related its belief in the right to play and its beliefs that play leads to physical, mental, moral and social fitness (what we in 2008 would call well-being). It contained 25 recommendations including one promoting the establishment of an organization similar to the Playground and Recreation Association of America. This was the first documentation of what would be a ten year quest to position the Council in a leadership role concerning national recreation services in Canada. However, 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 Dr. Gettys of McGill University, and its publication in a pamphlet for national distribution. The complete distribution strategy is not known, but it did include student teachers such as those in Nova Scotia who were being urged to "help to spread the gospel of 'a wise use of leisure'" (letter from Dora Baker to Charlotte Whitton, 16 Mar 1929, NAC, MG28 I10, Vol 8, File 42). Discovering this letter from Dora Baker, Assistant Director of Rural Education for the Province of Nova

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Scotia, sent my research into a another new direction to find out what was going on in the education system in Nova Scotia that led to this mutual interest in leisure?

What I found was that spreading this "gospel of leisure" in Nova Scotia was already a well established practice in the education system through the Nova Scotia Department of Education's Rural Education Division. Teacher training was carried out at the Nova Scotia Normal College in Truro by staff members such as Dora Baker and Loran DeWolfe who were also involved in the provincial department's Rural Education activities. What they called "rural education" and "rural science" is what we today would call "rural community development," with the school being viewed as "social force" and the "leaven of community betterment" (Norman, 1989, p. 62). Mr. DeWolfe and Miss Baker organized early community recreation training as part of teacher training and through the regular publication *Rural Science Bulletin*, communicated their ideas to teachers, administrators and politicians in articles advocating "The School as a Community Center," "Play in Country Schools," and "Physical Education." One regular column, "The Play Corner," began in 1919 "advocating the development and training of the play instinct in our school children through organized and supervised games during the recess, noon hours and other leisure hours" (Baker, Oct 1919, p. 250). This column with articles about and advocacy for recreation, play and physical activity, including quotes from Joseph Lee and other eminent people, continued well into the 1930's.

From where did Mr. DeWolfe and Miss Baker get the ideas that they implemented in Nova Scotia? Loran DeWolfe, Director of Rural Education, was influenced by the writings of American educators of the time including Harold Foght author of *The American Rural School* and *The Rural Teacher and His Work* (Norman, 1989, p. 61). His reading influenced his philosophy of education and curriculum development – in his words "curriculum should be planned for the greatest good to the greatest number. Both work and leisure must be considered....A well-educated person is equipped for work and leisure" (DeWolfe, 1958, p. 49). Dora Baker, a Nova Scotian, spent her early university career in South Dakota ("Dora Maude Baker, 1924), and very likely had direct contact with the rural education programs being advocated by Foght. South Dakota universities were being urged and funded by the state legislature to focus on rural education and teacher training (Bartusis, 2001, p. 105). Foght was President of Northern State College in Aberdeen South Dakota after being responsible for rural education for the U.S. Department of Education (Bartusis, 2001, p, 106). I recognize that the link between Miss Baker and Dr. Foght's work is not a direct one, but the educational climate which she experienced in South Dakota very likely included exposure to the ideas of rural education. Foght was certainly no stranger to the Canadian scene as he had been hired by the Saskatchewan Government in 1917 "as a disinterested expert" [consultant] to advise the provincial government about "educational conditions...with special reference to rural schools" (Foght, 1918, p. 6).

Both Loran DeWolfe and Dora Baker were founders of what would later become the Nova Scotia Federation of Home and School Associations (*CHSF History*). Working at the community level with Women's Institutes and teachers who organized "community clubs," they promoted recreation and community development. Miss Baker continued her work in various positions related to rural education and home and school organizing until 1954 (*One Hundred Years*, 1955, p. 32).

The proposed illustrated presentation will focus on the linkages between education and recreation/leisure. The ideas of Harold Foght and the work in Nova Scotia and elsewhere of Loran DeWolfe and Dora Baker will be reviewed to show how they implemented in the

education system and in the community what the Canadian Council on Child Welfare was advocating - spreading the gospel of "a wise use of leisure."

### **Discussion**

The notion of promoting leisure and recreation is not new. Nor are these organizations the only ones that were advocates for recreation and leisure. Markham (1994, 1995, & 1998), Markham-Starr (2005) and Markham-Starr & Delamere (2005) chronicled the work of others including the National Council of Women, the Young Men's Christian Association, the BC-Pro-Rec agency, the Calgary Leisure Time League, the Montreal Day Shelter, and individuals such as Mabel Peters, Margaret Marshall Saunders, Charlotte Whitton, William Bowie, Jan Eisenhardt and Hugh Plaxton. However, these two, somewhat intertwined, organizations succeeded in getting the "gospel of leisure" into several forums - the teacher training system, the education delivery system, and the community.

This presentation will deal with two settings not addressed by previous researchers - the education system and the rural community. Promoting recreation and leisure through the education system is an idea that has not received much attention. Even McFarland's ground breaking *Development of Public Recreation in Canada* (1970) focussed on leadership training after, not before, the Depression years. The rural community has likewise been ignored as most of the leisure history researchers have focussed on either urban centres, provincial or national organizations, or national parks. Up to the 1931 census Canada's rural population exceeded its urban population and in Nova Scotia the rural population exceeded the urban population until World War Two (Statistics Canada, 2005). The proportions in other provinces differ, but the main point is that Canada was largely a rural country and that has been ignored by leisure historians. This presentation will begin to remedy that situation by investigating the situation in Nova Scotia. Work on other provinces will follow.

### **Actual or Potential Applications**

While the study of the advocates in the early years of our field may be considered by some to be esoteric, irrelevant and impractical, I assert (as I have done for several decades) that understanding those advocates and their work to spread the message of the field is essential to appreciating and working in all four of the conference sub-themes:

- Where were the early leisure settings? And perhaps more importantly, from where did the impetus to establish such settings come?
- What leisure experiences were promoted? Why? By Whom?
- Who were the potential and actual users or participants? Why were they targeted? By whom?
- Why and how was the service delivered? And why were particular sectors involved or not involved?

Most generally accepted definitions of "professions" include the notion that an understanding of the history of the field is essential to those who want to call themselves professionals and to be part of a profession. This is certainly applicable to both recreation and leisure practitioners and scholars. The study of our history is essential to understanding the current state of recreation and leisure services - in the words of an oft-cited cliché "you can't know where you are going if you don't know where you have been." Our scholars and practitioners need an appreciation of the base from which we have proceeded so that we can appreciate why we have taken the directions that we have. The role of organizations such as the Canadian Council on Child Welfare and the Nova Scotia Department of Education and the ways

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that they used to get their message onto the public agenda are an important part of that base.

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### Archival Collections for Organizations

- Canadian Council of Child Welfare
- National Archives of Canada (NAC)
- Nova Scotia Department of Education
- Acadia University Library Special Collection
- Northern State University (Aberdeen, SD) Archives