

University of Alberta

Gyro Club Playgrounds and Children's Recreation in Edmonton, Alberta:
Outdoor Play, Civic Life, and Urban Reform, 1922-1950

by

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Dedication

To my husband Jose for all his love and support throughout this process. I would not have been able to complete my MA without you. Te Amo Mucho.

To my Mom and Dad. Your wisdom and dedication to life has brought me to where I am as a women, wife and mother. Thank you so much. Los Quiero Mucho.

To my Brother and Sister. For always being there for me when I needed you. Los Quiero Mucho.

Abstract

This study explores the history of the Gyro Club playground movement in Edmonton, Alberta, from the 1920s to the 1950s. Investigating who the Gyros were and how they structured play for children offers new insights to the history of Edmonton's playground movement and social reform in civic development. It probes how children experienced playgrounds and how the City built partnerships with a voluntary sector organization to promote recreation services through more than twenty years.

This work adds to understanding the implications of men's leadership in urban social reform and in the child saving movement. It also presents children's perspectives informed by archival and oral history sources on play in Gyro playgrounds. Furthermore larger shifts were related to voluntary sector and public sector work in urban governance and the lives of citizens.

Edmonton Gyros were typically respectable, educated urban professionals and businessmen who were actively involved in play and nurturing child care, and promoted a distinctive vision of holistic play for children. Childhood memories indicate children actively engaged their own knowledge and practices of play and playgrounds in and beyond structured programs and boundaries. Free play combined with structured play was common among children in Edmonton families through the 1930s. The relationship between the government and the Gyro Club as a key non-governmental agency in the making of the welfare state was complex when it came to the establishment and management of playgrounds. Together they created an integrated system of cooperation and shared responsibilities to support public recreation, yet it was not a simple equation. Tensions between public and voluntary roles were influenced by various factors.

I examine the production of childhood drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of capital and Shirley Tillotson's framework of Canada's welfare state. My research challenges Elsie McFarland's work on Edmonton playgrounds. It also adds to the understanding of childhood and the construction of friendship, urban reform, citizenship, community engagement, welfare state, and men's roles with children.

Keywords: Children, playgrounds, urban play, holistic play, Gyro Club, oral history, governance, welfare state, voluntary and public sector, men's clubs, volunteers

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Edmonton's three Gyro parks are silent now after one of their busiest seasons in record. Gone until next spring are the laughing, shouting children who spent many happy days playing within their safe boundaries. More than 1,000 boys and girls visited the three parks daily for 80 days. At the Gyro parks children can play softball, volley ball, basketball or horseshoe. They have slides, swings, straight bars, merry-go-rounds, seesaws and sand boxes. But all parks do not stop at sport alone. They have branched out into handicrafts to teach children constructive work... Gyro parks have proved themselves one of the city's most valuable institutions.

Edmonton Journal, October 7, 1938

1.0 Project Beginnings

A summer day on August 2011, brought the community together in Edmonton's Tipton Park. Children and adults met to picnic and spend time playing games at a penny carnival themed to resemble the 1920s Gyro playground era. Tipton Park is a living historic site and also the longest remaining Gyro playground in Edmonton, Alberta. This gathering was part of a public playground renewal process to begin connecting the past with the present needs of city residents near Whyte Avenue. I participated with the community in an afternoon filled with games and interactive conversations to build knowledge of the local environment. The City of Edmonton proposed to remove the old wading pool in the Gyro Club playground in Tipton Park and replace it with a spray deck to meet upgraded health and safety standards for playground water features. Similarly, the point of such parks in the early 20th century was to build community by enriching the lives of children through outdoor play under adult supervision. The Gyro Club launched the construction of supervised playgrounds in Edmonton and developed

outdoor play programs for almost three decades. As social reformers, they were part of the Canadian playground movement and advocates of children's welfare. The legacy left by the Gyro Club in Edmonton's supervised playgrounds remains in the memories of many families after 93 years. To better understand the long history of the playground movement, I will explore playgrounds from a local perspective in connection to an enduring men's civic club called the Gyro Club. This research allows understanding the origins of Edmonton's playgrounds and the salient issues of City Parks and recreation partnered with the voluntary sector.

The historiography of the playground movement implies an overview that traces the emergence of multidisciplinary scholarship related to understanding past childhood and play space in cities throughout Canada, the United States, and other countries. I challenge Elsie McFarland's contention that Gyro Club playgrounds slowed development of Edmonton's public municipal recreation delivery system to reinterpret the historic role of the Gyro Club as a non-government men's civic group active in playground provision for children and families in Alberta's capital city. Pierre Bourdieu's theories of capital and Shirley Tillotson's analysis of the civic sector in governance will be central to my reinterpretation framed around three project studies. The overall thesis structure is based on three main research project studies.

1.1 Research Question

To examine the history of Edmonton's Gyro playgrounds my research project engages three main research questions; a) who were the Gyros and how did the Gyros structure play for children? b) How did children experience play in the Gyro playgrounds? And c) What were the roles of the public and private sector in the development of playgrounds in Edmonton? These three questions are related to childhood and the construction of friendship, urban reform,

citizenship, and community engagement which will allow to deepen into to the history of Edmonton's playground movement. I argue that this middle-class group of men produced play as a medium of community development to augment social and cultural capital.¹ They attempted to create a better citizen, which would enhance community development, and bring benefits for the city and the economy.² Supervised playgrounds were one key to building friendship and sense of belonging to their community, and part of the process to change children's social practices. The implications of the leadership of men in urban social reform and in the child saving movement are examined to offer consideration to their active involvement in play and nurturing child care. This research project proposes to contribute to the historical scholarship on supervised playgrounds in Canada, by examining the production of childhood from the conceptual framework of Bourdieu and Shirley Tillotson.

This project augments the literature on supervised playgrounds in Canada, with a historical examination of the Gyro Club as a noteworthy group that approached supervised play in a unique way in western Canada. I will look at the history of supervised playgrounds in Edmonton from the onset in 1921 and the different ways they looked at play. I seek to understand play in supervised playgrounds related to the role of social reform and social control in the city during the years 1920s to 1950s. Investigating who the Gyros were and how the Gyros structured play for children contributes to understanding the history of Edmonton's playground movement. It also opens a window to ask how children experienced playgrounds and how the City built partnerships with a voluntary sector organization to promote recreation

¹ Fran Baum and Catherine Palmer, "'Opportunity Structures': Urban Landscape, Social Capital and Health Promotion in Australia," *Health Promotion International* 17, no.4 (2002): 351.

²James Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *American Journal of Sociology* 94, (1988): 96.

services through longer than two decades. The early years of Edmonton's urban parks and playgrounds are not well studied and this work adds to understanding larger shifts related to voluntary sector and public sector work in urban governance and the lives of citizens.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One provides the opening literature review and overview of the research subject. The following three chapters comprise studies of Edmonton's Gyro playgrounds focused on: a) the Gyro Club and members; b) children and families; and c) municipal government.

Chapter Two will recount the stories of the work performed by the members of the Gyro Club in the Gyro playgrounds. This chapter introduces the origins of Edmonton's early urban social reform and child saving movements. The focus of the study will be on the first three Gyro playgrounds they constructed and were the 'sole operators' for 22 years; Patricia Park opened in 1922, Tipton Park and Kitchener opened in 1924. The six other playgrounds formed part of a different process and did not include the Gyro play programs: Crippled Children's playground opened 1930, Cromdale and Jasper place in 1948 and King Edward, Riverdale and North Edmonton opened in 1949. This chapter is based primarily on archival papers of Gyro Club members, newspaper articles, and City of Edmonton minutes.

Chapter Three is a case study of the history of the playground movement. I examine children's experience in the Gyro playgrounds giving consideration to how children constructed their own play. I will argue that supervised playgrounds were a key to building friendship and sense of belonging to their community, and part of the process to change children's social practices. I explore some of the above ideas by looking at how supervised playgrounds influenced Edmonton childhood and children's own experience of play. The complexities of these experiences are suggested by the memories of adults through oral history to interpret a

historical record of ‘play’ from 1930 to 1950. Theory of sense of place is conducted in this chapter in order to understand how adults remember their childhood and how they identified themselves in Edmonton and the neighbourhoods as part of their daily life, in contrast to adult discourses of playgrounds. I will engage Pia Christensen’s theory connected with the idea when children engage in a relatively unconstrained exploration of their local environment they acquire “a sense of local place with the formation of identity and the significant meaning to place.”³

Chapter Four examines the changing roles of the Gyro Club and government in playground operations and program delivery. I will argue that government participation in the playground movement had two relevant phases which influenced the role of governance and bureaucratization of public playgrounds. The first phase of government participation was rooted in the early 1900s when the City was incapable of subsidizing parks for the community. Although they had been encouraging the development of parks with play areas for children, the City could not supply all the needs for playground expenses with slim postwar budgets. As a result, the Gyro Club movement took over the vision to construct playgrounds for children on land donated by the City. The second phase came in the late 1940s during the Second World War; Edmonton became a base of operations for several large projects as wartime helped the city recover from the Depression-era economy. Between the late 1940s and in the beginning of the 1950s, the city boundaries expanded and growth flourished, which led the municipal government become more involved with park management, including the decision to take over the playgrounds that were established up to that time.

³ Pia Christensen, ‘Space and Knowledge: Children in the Village and the City,’ in *Transforming Learning in Schools and Communities: The Remaking of Education for a Cosmopolitan Society*, ed. Stewart Ranson, Jon Nixon, and Bob Lingard, 73, (New York: Continuum, 2008)

Chapter Five brings together the three main studies in a final analysis and reinterpretation to enhance the understanding of social and urban reform through the Gyro Club, Gyro playgrounds, and children's outdoor play in the city of Edmonton. This research is relevant to understanding today's issues in the provision of social services that involve the public sector and private charity volunteer sector, along with business, in the operations of the current neoliberal state. Looking at past relationships between the state and civil society may allow insights to complex relationships and past moments of crisis as well as success.

1.3 Literature Review and Historiography

The playground movement was international in scope. Philanthropists and statesmen invested in playground policies in cities for posterity. Civic reformers and urban planners across Canada and United States advocated for playgrounds believing they improved quality life in urban cities. The main historiographic and theoretical contributions to the playgrounds movement in North America allow to situate the Edmonton Gyro Club in context with other playground developments in other North American cities. Using the work of previous scholars enables to highlight an unusual case study focused on western Canada.

Early scholars of playground history indicated the necessity to liberate the poor from the harsh conditions in the cities. Playgrounds were believed to be the solution to many city problems. Walter Van Nuss and Robert McDonald synthesize this interpretation of playgrounds in terms of Canadian urban history. Van Nuss highlights the contribution of playgrounds to urban health in cities, indicating lack of sunshine and fresh air increased death rates.⁴ McDonald

⁴ W. Van Nus, "The Fate of City Beautiful Thought in Canada, 1893 -1930," *Historical Papers* 10, no.1 (1975): 195.

focuses on the negative impact urban conditions had on children⁵ and how open play spaces were provided to protect and socialize the most vulnerable ones. Similarly early sport historians Allen Guttmann and Stephen Hardy investigated American playgrounds developments with emphasis on hegemony and class relations. While Hardy highlights urban reform intentions to build better citizenship⁶ through playgrounds, Guttmann argued that playgrounds intended to subdue and assimilate rebellious working-class immigrant children in crowded cities.⁷ Elsie McFarland and Susan Markham were early ground breakers with a focus on Canadian playgrounds and Alberta, in particular, as developments in urban history and recreation as social advocacy among key activists. McFarland's administrative and urban history of playgrounds and parks links development of municipal recreation opportunities to clubs and movements wherein women pioneers tackled difficulties as initiators of public recreation in Canada.⁸ More recently gender analysis is a large focus in the history of children, family, sport and play in works as exemplified in the work of Cynthia Commachio, Carly Adams, and Elizabeth Gagen. Adams in particular positions playgrounds in terms of team sport in the lives of girls.

The late 19th century was a period of public discussion about the needs for public space to be used for recreation and play. 'Rational recreation' was positioned as an alternative to socially undesirable behaviour among adults and children. Juvenile delinquency was at first associated

⁵ Robert McDonald, "'Holy Retreat' or 'Practical Breathing Spot'?: Class Perception of Vancouver's Stanley Park, 1910-1913," *Canadian Historical Review* 65, no.2 (1984): 128.

⁶ Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community 1865-1915*, (USA, North Eastern University Press 1990), 104.

⁷ Allen Guttmann, "The Progressive Era Appropriation of Children's Play," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, no.2 (2010): 147.

⁸ Elsie McFarland, *The Development of Public Recreation in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Parks/Recreation Association, 1978), 5.

with the children of the poor however by 1917, it was considered a problem that affected all social ranks. According to historian John Gillis in *Evolution of Juvenile Delinquency in England 1890-1914*, all children were prone toward delinquency.⁹ The inception of the park movement in the mid-nineteenth century was urged by members of the middle class for reform or civic booster purpose, and seen as an antidote to urban society's problems related to moral and physical decay.¹⁰ Under the conditions of industrialization, it was common to see overcrowded cities and poor ways of living for families and children. For this reason, advocates of playgrounds became more vocal after this rapid growth in cities. Playgrounds in North America emerged in early 20th century, according to Ronald Cohen, as reformers were concerned for children's wellbeing and searched for ways to constructively channel the energies of children and youth.¹¹ James Marten notes the beginnings of the movement prioritized a child welfare focus and identified a connection between spare time and delinquency.¹² These concerns for the 'teen years' contributed to the creation of different movements "designed to inspire and preserve the health and idealism of the young."¹³ In Edmonton the volunteer sector established in early twentieth century were concerned for the welfare of children and worked towards different objectives to reach all youth. Nonetheless it is believed that at the same time the youth organizations themselves may have affected the increase anxiety about juvenile delinquency.¹⁴ Stephen Hardy

⁹ John Gillis, "The Evolution of Juvenile Delinquency in England 1890-1914," *Past and Present: a Journal of Historical Studies* 67 no.1 (1975): 96-97.

¹⁰ McDonald, 128.

¹¹ Ronald D. Cohen, *Child-Saving and Progressivism, 1885-1915, in American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (London: Greenwood Press, 1985): 292.

¹² James Marten, "A New View of the Child: Children and Youth in Urban America, 1900-1920," *Romanian Journal of Population Studies* 11, no. 1 (2008): 73.

¹³ Gillis, 97.

¹⁴ Gillis, 113.

emphasizes playgrounds have long been associated with children's welfare and the shaping of the people through recreation and sport.¹⁵ They were also linked with local economic growth, crime prevention, health and physical development.¹⁶ The playground movement followed contemporary understanding of children's needs and a rationale that they were a special type of human being, demanding special forms of moral and physical education.¹⁷

The early 20th century also illustrates the complexity of urban parks history and the diverse discussions in Canadian cities about the purpose of parks and their design. Throughout much of Canada's history, cities were inspired by British and American examples of 'City Beautiful' concepts of town planning and parks development. Canadians were also highly influenced by their closest neighbours the United States. The Americans claim to be the first to begin the playground movement. In 1885, the Massachusetts Emergency Hygiene Association (MEHA) arranged to place a sand garden to provide play area for children in their immediate vicinity,¹⁸ what they considered the first sign of the playground movement. The Chicago settlement house movement, under Jane Addams and others who founded Hull House in 1889, was also a sandbox, playground, and daycare promoter in the era of urban reform. The 1893 Chicago Exposition was influential to reformers. Not only did it feature grand architectural designs for the City Beautiful, it built the first public playground as part of Chicago's progressive

¹⁵ Hardy, 65.

¹⁶ Howard Palmer, and Tamara Palmer, *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), 99.

¹⁷ Hardy, 92.

¹⁸ Jerry G. Dickson, "The Origins of the Playground: The role of the Boston Women's Clubs, 1885-1890," *Leisure Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6, no.1 (1983):83.

quest for social justice and in response to the problems of modern cities.¹⁹ By 1905, Chicago had developed fourteen small playgrounds, combining beauty and utility.²⁰ In Canadian cities, playgrounds were soon considered a place for good government and building citizenship among young immigrants, whom, it was assumed, did not feel at home and did not yet assimilate as Canadians.

Academic research has contributed insight toward an understanding of the playground movement and the contemporary relationship between play spaces and children's play. Canadian scholarship has contributed to an understanding of a socio-historical perspective of children's play connected to summer camps, 'fresh air,' outdoors, and playgrounds.²¹ These open spaces for recreation and playgrounds were part of the social welfare movement, which scholars, such as Mariana Valverde, also linked to the 'social purity movements' that considered moral reform a campaign to 'raise the moral tone' of Canadian society.²² Therefore, both adult supervision and sport activities would help shape the people in order to become a thriving city. And most importantly, they shaped the environment of children who were considered the most vulnerable. Before the welfare state of Canada was well established, the private sector expressed public responsibilities for the well-being of its citizens.²³ There are also parallels with the Community Chest movement, which began as a private fundraising initiative to provide a public

¹⁹ Benjamin McArthur, "The Chicago Playground Movement: A Neglected Feature of Social Justice," *The Social Service Review* 49, no. 3 (1975): 376.

²⁰ McArthur, 375.

²¹ See Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood Antimodernism and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009)

²² Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 17.

²³ Shirley Tillotson, *Contributing Citizens: Modern Charitable Fundraising and the Making of the Welfare State, 1920-1966*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 1.

service that the government eventually took over in the post-war period. The Gyro Club of Edmonton had an intimate relationship with the welfare state and implemented new policies for public welfare provision.

This study charts how playgrounds in Edmonton have shifted through history. It focuses on interpreting the conditions under which playgrounds emerged in early 20th century and understanding the men who were part of both construction and development of the playground movement, and how they interacted in and with the community. Most importantly, this study analyzes the first three supervised playgrounds, considered the backbone of Edmonton's early playground system and still persisting today as public urban parks. The major purpose of the entire study is to analyze the history of the Edmonton Gyro Club as a significant landmark in the development of Edmonton's supervised playgrounds and municipal recreation systems within a complex matrix of relations between the public and private welfare state as it existed prior to the 1950s.

1.4 The Development of Community Through Playgrounds

The North American playground movement began to a large extent in the 19th century in United States as a concern for public space where streets were seen as the worst possible venue for public expression, one they feared would encourage violence and chaos.²⁴ Social reformers solution to these problems was to provide public spaces for this rapidly growing population. Parks and playgrounds were part of a large network of urban reforms intentions to have safe places for immigrants and working class children to play and inculcate proper social behaviour.²⁵ During the same period, urban planning grew in importance and became essential

²⁴ *Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, Sage publication edited by David Goldfield, (2007): 626.

²⁵ *Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, 576.

in modern industrial capitalist cities. ‘City Beautiful’ was a progressive reform movement created by a range of American designers,²⁶ emerged from the necessity to improve aesthetics in large-sized industrial cities. They led to attempts to instil beauty, order and grandeur in urban environments through architectural principles. The British ‘Garden City’ movement also informed urban reform with attempts to bring fresh air, health, green space, and sunshine into city planning. Such improvements had a social impact among the urban poor and working classes, including children.

The playground movement began in a period of American history that saw industrialization as a problem and the formation of new urban society considered inhospitable for children. The vast majority of American scholars agree that parks developed community in the city,²⁷ but at the same time inculcated proper behaviour and instilled citizenship among new immigrants who would accept the established values of the dominant society. One of the early scholars of American playgrounds, Stephen Hardy, argued in *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation and Community 1865-1915* that parks offered an escape for all ages and that playgrounds were a counterattack to urban social threats through the impressionable substance of youth. The campaign for playgrounds was directed to preserve the community that was divided by the mosaic culture of immigration and urbanization.²⁸ According to historian Hardy, shaping the people through recreation and sport was a need for “humanizing society and restoring that fellow feeling and identity that had seemingly vanished from American life.”²⁹

²⁶ *Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, 150.

²⁷ See Hardy, Gagen, and Adams

²⁸ Hardy, 103.

²⁹ Hardy, 104.

Playgrounds were seen as the heart of the city where children could play and have fun under supervision in a safe outdoor space. Internationally, reformers widely believed that social transformation would be achieved most effectively through the child.³⁰ According to Elizabeth Gagen, playgrounds created the ideal environment to coax children through proper developmental stages and establish the correct gender identities. As a response to the conditions in the cities private philanthropic sources began to establish supervised play areas in the larger cities.³¹ Robert MacDonald observed city parks and playgrounds in Canada were constructed as a means of social reform³² premised on beliefs that urban conditions had negative effects on children and youth. Stephen Hardy noted local neighbourhood citizenry accepted playgrounds in the United States as a safeguard to financial and emotional investment in cities, but as also a weapon of social order.³³ James Marten argued child welfare advocates attempted to reform and assimilate the lives of immigrant and migrant children in American cities through institutions and organizations dedicated to improve education, health, and recreation.³⁴

Supervision was seen as an ideal strategy to influence the development of the child. Xiabei Chen argues that the making of an individual is understood as a process, and therefore, the character of a child is a product of influences over time.³⁵ These ideas tend to focus on the

³⁰ Elizabeth Gagen, "An Example to Us All: Child Development and Identity Construction in Early 20th-Century Playgrounds," *Environment and Planning* 32, no. 4(1999): 600.

³¹ *Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, 576.

³² McDonald, 128.

³³ Hardy, 98-101.

³⁴ Marten, 67.

³⁵ Xiabei Chen, "'Cultivating Children as You Would Valuable Plants: The Gardening Governability of Child Saving, Toronto, Canada, 1880s-1920s,'" *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16, no.4 (2003): 478.

intervention of the child in the early years whereas the formation of habits and customs would become fundamental to instil citizenship, fellow feelings, and sense of place. On the other hand, this case study shows that children roamed around the neighbourhood, which indicates unsupervised free play. Pia Christensen in her study *Place, Space and Knowledge: Children in Village and the City*, argues that “children construct an emplaced knowledge of their local environment, full of personal and social meaning built up through their everyday encounters with it.”³⁶ Children must travel through their local environment in order to get to the playground and in this way create a sense of place and identity with their environment. The case of Edmonton children’s play suggests how it also linked to a sense of citizenship.

1.4.1 Childhood as a Vulnerable Stage

The concept of childhood as a vulnerable stage with needs validated the necessity to regulate health and socialize children. Child saving raised concerns about urban life and unsupervised youth. In mid-19th century, child-saver reformers sought to reconstruct Canadian childhood by removing the “experience of work from children’s lives and offer in its place a lengthy period of nurture through play and schooling.”³⁷ School extension became mandatory as a form of child protection legislation,³⁸ and policies related to the welfare of Canadian children started to emerge. In 1893, John Joseph Kelso began as Ontario’s first Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children with responsibilities for overseeing all voluntary child-

³⁶ Christensen, 72.

³⁷ Robert McIntosh, “Constructing the Child: New Approaches to the History of Childhood in Canada,” *Arcadiensis* 28, no.2 (1999):126.

³⁸ Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950*, (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 24.

welfare programmes in the province.³⁹ He believed that the only way to improve the conditions in Canadian cities was to raise the standards of home life and ensure every child attained self-respecting citizenship.⁴⁰ Alberta followed with the Children's Protection Act on February 25, 1909, and Robert B. Chadwick was appointed the Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children for the Province of Alberta.⁴¹ According to historian Robert McIntosh, the history of childhood has been reconstructed through studies of adults, thus the history of childhood becomes the history of the efforts of others on the behalf of children.⁴²

There was limited tolerance for unsupervised street play in the nineteenth -century,⁴³ and it was considered a fact that children were prone to cruelty and aggression whereas part of their upbringing was to restrain and redirect those impulses.⁴⁴ Child welfare reformers sought to restore childhood in American children.⁴⁵ Social practices became a concern to civic reformers. The need to tame and domesticate the young in the early years of children's lives became relevant to teach lessons about manners and customs.⁴⁶ Internationally, reformers widely

³⁹ Craig Heron, "Saving the Children," review of *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* by Joy Parr, *Arcadiensis* 13 no.1, 168-175 (1983), 170.

⁴⁰ Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth-Century Consensus* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier, 2003), 17.

⁴¹ Baldwin Reichwein, "Looking Back: Child Saving in Edmonton 1900-1971," *Unpublished work* (2009): 3-4

⁴² McIntosh, 128.

⁴³ Collin D. Howell, *Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 10.

⁴⁴ Kay Hymowitz, *Ready or Not: What happens When We Treat Children as Small Adults* (San Francisco: Encounter books, 2000), 6.

⁴⁵ Marten, 69.

⁴⁶ Grant Jarvie and Joseph Maguire, *In Social Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 189.

believed that social transformation would be achieved most effectively through the child.⁴⁷ In Canada, service clubs became increasingly popular with the incursion of American and British organizations and civic clubs.⁴⁸ In the last decade of the nineteenth-century, Canadian volunteers were active participants in social reform movements.⁴⁹ “Community Chests” enabled various charitable programs amid a larger social shift towards a welfare state in Canada. They were charitable fund-raising organizations that collected money from local businesses and workers to be distributed to community projects. Similarly, many voluntary sector organizations in Edmonton promoted charitable projects and programs. Different civic agencies for children’s welfare in Edmonton, including local Community Leagues, YWCA, YMCA, Kinsman, Kiwanis and the Gyro Club,⁵⁰ developed philanthropic programs to promote good values and develop a social hierarchy to improve city life. Churches also stimulated organizations and initiatives for children and youth, such as the Canadian Girls in Training (CGIT) for Protestant faith groups.

1.5 Edmonton Gyro Playgrounds

Edmonton’s Gyro Club was celebrated by the press as the city’s “most valuable institution” because it provided community children with opportunities for friendship and supervised play programs including games, sports, handicrafts, drama, and reading. Supervised activities provided rational recreation to educate the younger generation under a watchful eye

⁴⁷ Gagen, 600.

⁴⁸ Donald Wetherell, Irene Knet, *Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945*, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina 1990), 104.

⁴⁹ Janet Lautenschlager, *Volunteering in Canada a Traditional Canadian Value*, (Ottawa, Multiculturalism and Citizenship, 1992), 10. <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/heritage/compartne/pdfdocs/tradval.pdf>

⁵⁰ For example, see Ron Kuban, *Edmonton’s Urban Villages: The Community League Movement*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), *passim*; City of Edmonton Archives, David Howell Private Collection, Fort Edmonton Research Report, FEPR 86, Gyro Park Proposal, Accession #A80-5, 1974, n.p.

outside the home. Police were called to subdue trouble-making youths in Edmonton,⁵¹ but public playgrounds were seen as prevention to socialize children and prevent disorderliness. Social reformers commonly believed that properly directed play, recreation, and nurturing were important when it came to problems with children and youth.

It was common to see women leading the social reform movements. The first playground was established in Boston in 1885, by a group of wealthy women; Massachusetts Emergency and Hygiene Association (MEHA) who condemned Boston's neighbourhoods for being 'slum' and suggested public play areas for children based on the public park system in Berlin, Germany.⁵² They opened a small sand box garden on public school property. In Canada, it was a similar scenario whereby the playground movement was also led by women in cities such as Montreal and Toronto. Members of the National Council of Women and Local Councils of Women were considered the principal advocates for social reform and played a foundational role in the development and establishment of playgrounds in Canada. Edmonton's Local Council of Women was formed in 1894; it was addressed by the NCW's national president, the Countess of Aberdeen, a year later. Its second Local Council was organized in 1908 and committed to legislative reform causes – such as federal divorce law, property rights, parental rights, and widow's pension – with leadership from Judge Emily Murphy, well known as the first female magistrate in the British Empire.⁵³ Church-based women's societies also worked toward poor relief for adults and children in Edmonton's early years.⁵⁴ Although it was vocal, the women's

⁵¹ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, *Edmonton Journal*, May 23 1938, n.p.

⁵² *Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, edited by David Goldfield, 576-577.

⁵³ Emily Murphy, *Clubs Women Records* (Edmonton Branch of the Canadian Women's Press Club, 1916): 15-16.

⁵⁴ Murphy, 15-16.

Council was not a principal actor involved with implementation or delivery of early supervised playgrounds in Edmonton, which left an opening for the local Gyro Club as male social activists committed to children and civic reform.

Male leadership in child saving movements was not unusual, but the active involvement of men in play and nurturing child care has not been fully studied. In earlier work to examine changing social constructs of fatherhood, Kerry Daly indicates that historical analysis demonstrates how over the past two centuries a shift occurred “in the way fatherhood roles has been conceptualized, with new expectations that fathers became a new “nurturant father.”⁵⁵ Cynthia Commachio argues in her later study ‘*A Postscript for Father’: Defining a New Fatherhood in Interwar Canada* that with the impact of the Great War new ‘family experts’ were shaping a new parenting partnership with mothers “displacing the hapless patriarch once and for all.”⁵⁶ What was the role of men and fathers understood to be in Edmonton between the wars?

The case of Edmonton’s Gyro Club playgrounds has not been examined closely, yet the Gyros were active building playgrounds and producing holistic playground programs for the provision of early recreation services to the public. Elsie McFarland linked the typical development of recreation opportunities in Canada to service clubs and social center movements.⁵⁷ McFarland’s early work proposed that Edmonton’s Gyro playgrounds slowed the shift toward adequate public recreation services run by City of Edmonton; she credited the Local Council of Women and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues for vocal political

⁵⁵ Kerry Daly, “Reshaping Fatherhood: ‘Finding the Models,’” *Journal of Family* 14, no. 4 (1993): 511.

⁵⁶ Cynthia Commachio, “‘A Postscript for Father’: Defining a New Fatherhood in Interwar Canada,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 78, no.3 (1997): 388.

⁵⁷ Elsie McFarland, “The Development of Public Recreation in Canada,” 41.

advocacy demanding public sector delivery of more playground sites and services to serve overwhelming needs. Gyro playgrounds were, nonetheless, the most visible supervised summer playground spaces for Edmonton children for decades and male leaders served a key role. Playground advocacy ultimately involved implementation as well as lobbying to pressure for playgrounds, thereby multiple stakeholders were mutual participants in the civic movement for neighbourhood playgrounds and children's social services.

The educational investments of the Gyro Club in its diverse playground programs included the accumulated cultural knowledge that could lead to benefits such as gaining status and acceptance among the community. I explore social and cultural capital in the Gyro Club and Edmonton's supervised playgrounds as it was invested and generated through distinctive practices of play.

The Edmonton club aimed to generate young Gyro citizens. Gyro men reproduced their values through social relations, but they also generated play spaces and practices as shared social and cultural capital to achieve their ideal of a better city and contribute to modern social reform through the lives of children.

Children's memories of play suggest their outlook on experiences of play on Gyro playgrounds and indicate that the hegemony of adult social control over play was incomplete. Practices promoted in Edmonton Gyro playgrounds were invested through strategies to build relationships among playground participants and the larger community, which aimed to promote social life and better connected neighbourhoods. Parks and playgrounds attempted to develop community in the city,⁵⁸ whereby playgrounds were seen as places that shaped neighbourhood

⁵⁸ Hardy, 87.

environment and hence engaged civic life. The Gyro Club ultimately prompted the City of Edmonton to absorb playgrounds and supervised play programs into government-operated municipal services after World War II. These playground spaces remain a legacy of mid-20th-century social reform movements and the work of men in Edmonton's Gyro Club as an active non-government organisation involved in child saving and urban parks.

1.5.1 The Gyro Club: A Place for Men in Children's Lives

The Gyro Club was a well-known service club that repositioned middle-class men in business and professions as active agents in children's play in the interest of child welfare through community service and social reform in Edmonton. Xiaobei Chen argues that the class basis of most child saving reformers was upper and middle class. Her study of the child save movement in Toronto indicates that it emerged in English-speaking Canadians at the turn of the twentieth century as a means to build a Christian citizenry.⁵⁹ Like many other play organizers, the Gyro members hoped to contribute significantly to society's present and future stability.⁶⁰

Edmonton's Gyro Club asserted a place for men in the day-to-day lives of children proposing there was an importance in the roles of men in children's play and care, which was a form of social capital through social practices of civic clubs. This case study is different compared to other cities because the Edmonton Gyros were a volunteer sector private agency in charge of the construction and operation of playgrounds that remained linked with children's summer programs for longer than two decades. In other cities, the private charity volunteer sector primarily participated with the construction of playgrounds and then handed infrastructure over to the City for operations and management. It was not typical to see men running play

⁵⁹ Chen, 15.

⁶⁰ Cohen, 293.

programs for most cities where more typically men served in the leadership and women carried out summer programs with children. In Edmonton, it was not until 1947 that women were hired to be in charge of summer programs in the playgrounds. Gender roles in the childrearing practice were undergoing changes in the first decade of twentieth century. The Gyro Club followed these new trends in emerging ideologies of childhood promoted by the new experts and educational professionals.

1.6 Methodology

This research project proposes a qualitative methodological approach that combines archival research and oral history. The aim of the combined approach is to investigate social constructions of play that will allow a better understanding of social processes of the playground movement, moreover it will delve into life experiences in a more holistic way from multiple perspectives. My research design is molded by the two methods just mentioned which are responsive to the context and the participants. This type of qualitative research should allow explaining and setting in the context in which the Gyro playground arose in Edmonton.

When analyzing archival documents or similar traces of the Gyro Club of Edmonton it will be possible to address the social phenomena of the playground movement and therefore understand an urban local perspective of recreation. The objective of the oral history interviews proposed in this project is to collect information to augment the historical understanding of the playground movement in Edmonton. Life stories of individuals who were part of the Gyro Club, and children who experienced the programs will help understand the Gyro Club institution and how they structured play. A discourse analysis will be focused on how individuals narrate their own lives; they will be asked to talk about their own stories and reflect on their childhood experiences with the Gyro playgrounds. In this study, I have conducted extensive archival

research at City of Edmonton Archives, Provincial Archives Canada, and Glenbow Archives of Calgary

1.7 Towards the Understanding of Playgrounds in Edmonton

Gyro men engaged playgrounds strategically to build relationships among citizens. Gyro playgrounds were structured spaces of social relations.⁶¹ They were intended to enhance relations for liberal democratic citizenship. We will see what these objectives entailed in the lives of children and adults in the complex system of relationships needed to support the emergent welfare state. Children's play was a field of urban social practice shaped by the institution of playgrounds and supervised outdoor play programs that promoted forms of social and cultural capital. Play programs embedded in community social networks aimed to improve civic life and allow better connected neighbourhoods as well as fostering cultural and economic capital. What did Edmonton's Gyro system invent in the playground? What did playing in the sandbox or otherwise mean for children? And how was the city a part of the story? For answers we turn to the origins of the first Gyro playgrounds in Edmonton.

⁶¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 110.

CHAPTER TWO

Edmonton's Gyro Club and the Playground Movement 1920-1940

2.0 Introduction

Today Edmonton's playgrounds offer children an outdoor play space in neighbourhood communities throughout the city. The Gyro Club legacy in Edmonton's supervised playgrounds began with three play spaces constructed by 1924 that remain in the memories of many families. The point of such parks was to build community by enriching the lives of children; as well, neighbourhoods were enabled to connect and create sense of place through play. Patricia, Kitchener, and Tipton playgrounds provide community places where citizens enjoy activities in open public space. They have also brought neighbours together in communities to enrich social interactions and local identity. Playground renewal is a current focus for neighbours involved in community-development processes to redevelop parks. Who will run it, pay for it, and who will enjoy the outcomes are perennial questions in Edmonton's City parks and playgrounds.

The Gyro Club initiated Edmonton's first three supervised playgrounds and summer play programs that became an urban institution central to the lives of children and families. Outdoor spaces for play, education, health, and social services among children and youth were linked to building character and behaviour through public standards. By the 1920s, the Gyro Club playground movement positioned middle-class men in business and professions as leading actors in children's play in the interest of child welfare through community service and social reform in Edmonton. This chapter examines who the Edmonton Gyros were and how play was structured for children at Gyro playgrounds based on a creative play culture for physical and cultural literacy. I explore this distinctive case further to analyze Edmonton playgrounds as early social and cultural capital investment from 1921 to 1944.

Social reformers commonly believed that properly directed play, recreation, and nurturing were important when it came to problems with children and youth. Gyro men believed the playground movement presented an opportunity to enfranchise the participation of local children as citizens, but also to keep them under surveillance and to re-moralize those who went astray. Who were the Gyros and how did they structure play for children in Edmonton playgrounds from 1920s to the 1940s? Playgrounds operated within the network of family and community that constituted ‘play’ as a form of developing social practices and social connectedness that played a role in citizen well-being and happiness.⁶² I argue that this middle-class group of men produced play as a medium of community development to augment social and cultural capital.⁶³

Edmonton was a young city with rapid urban settlement and infrastructure development in the early 1900s. Demands for public recreation space and healthy “open air space” for children rose with a growing urban population.⁶⁴ In the early 1920s, Edmonton faced inadequate provision of public parks for children’s play and City Council encouraged the formation of a local Gyro Club to lead playground development. Gyro Clubs played a prominent role supporting local civic and cultural life. Varsity friends in Cleveland, Ohio, had formed the original Gyro Club as a men’s civic group in 1912 and it soon spread to other cities in North America. The fifth Gyro Club and the first in Canada formed in Toronto. Local Gyros aimed to be good citizens and supported various causes, valuing duty to neighbours as part of the

⁶² Blake Hendrickson, Devan Rosen, and Kelly Aune, “An Analysis of Friendship Networks, Social Connectedness, Homesickness, and Satisfaction Levels of International Students,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35 (2011): 285.

⁶³ Fran Baum and Palmer Catherine, “‘Opportunity Structures’: Urban Landscape, Social Capital and Health Promotion in Australia,” *Health Promotion International* 17, no.4 (2002): 351.

⁶⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, RG.8.10, Box 2, File 15, Parks Committee Report 1912: Petition letter to the mayor and Commissioners of the City of Edmonton, July 1912: *This land is beautifully situated on the slope of hill commanding a full river view, adjoining to the enlarged ‘Alex Taylor School’, the grounds of which are so limited that it is demanded in the health of the children, that it should be dedicated as open air space.*

responsibilities of citizenship.⁶⁵ Middle-class Edmonton men founded the fifteenth Gyro Club on July 29, 1921. They focused on playground construction to support the pressing local needs of children and families.⁶⁶ A year later, the Gyros funded and opened the city's first Gyro playground, Patricia Park, in August 1922. They continued fundraising to build two more new playgrounds – Kitchener Park and Tipton Park – two years later. Supervised play programs and staff were also provided by the club.

Children's health, safety, and physical development concerned social reformers living in Canadian cities. They worried the working class lived in overcrowded spaces, often in poverty with a high incidence in crime, disease, and drunkenness.⁶⁷ Playgrounds were proposed to address these problems through prevention and education as places where health habits and social customs were taught⁶⁸ according to the dominant British-Canadian middle-class standards. Before the local Gyro Club appeared in Edmonton, supervised playgrounds were practically unheard of and children usually played unsupervised in the streets.⁶⁹ Initially, Edmonton Community Leagues organized and provided early winter and summer sports programs for residents in local neighbourhoods.⁷⁰ The National Council of Women had generated child-saving efforts across Canada that encompassed advocacy for safe supervised playgrounds and 'summer

⁶⁵ Glenbow Archives of Calgary, Gyro Club of Calgary Fonds, series 11, M8734, unprocessed records (1920-1950); *Gyro International Gyro*, (1932): 3.

⁶⁶ Donald Wetherell and Irene Kmet, *Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945* (Regina: University of Regina, 1990), 8.

⁶⁷ Elsie McFarland, "The Development of Supervised Playgrounds," in *Recreational Land Use: Perspectives on its Evolution in Canada*, ed. G. Wall and J. Marsh, 272-298, (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982), 273.

⁶⁸ McFarland, "The Development of Supervised Playgrounds," 292.

⁶⁹ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Clipping Files, Edmonton Journal August 20, 1925.

⁷⁰ Elsie McFarland, *The Development of Public Recreation in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Parks/Recreation Association, 1978), 42.

schools.’ By 1913, several athletic associations were already established in Edmonton and eager for space to play sports⁷¹ and for children’s playgrounds,⁷² and the City owned twenty-two parks for public use.⁷³ Two had playground equipment for children: one in an old school grounds and one in an old hospital grounds.⁷⁴ But these provisions fell short for a rapidly growing population. By 1919, the Local Council of Women in Edmonton exerted pressure on the City to provide playgrounds and swimming pools for children.⁷⁵ Hazards such as drowning in the North Saskatchewan River and traffic accidents highlighted a need to supervise and protect children. The City responded by building three outdoor pools in the early 1920s and encouraged the organization of a men’s service group – the Gyro Club – to implement playgrounds.

One of the unique features about Edmonton’s Gyro Club work was that it directly operated playgrounds for twenty-four years, until they were handed over to the Edmonton Recreation Commission in the late 1940’s. Authorities related to the parks commission looked highly on their work.⁷⁶ Other clubs in Canada provided and equipped playgrounds for their municipalities to operate.⁷⁷ The Edmonton Gyro Club warrants a closer look as a distinctive case of playground development work and an important one for understanding the roles of men and

⁷¹ City of Edmonton Archives, RG.8.10, Box 2, File 21, Parks Committee Report 1913: Letter April 19 1913 Re Athletic Grounds: Meeting to consider the matter of allotting to the various Athletic associations.

⁷² City of Edmonton Archives, RG.8.10, Box 2, File 21, Parks Committee Report 1913: Letter October 9th 1912.

⁷³ City of Edmonton Archives, RG.8.10, Box 2, File 21, Parks Committee Report 1913: Letter May 5th 1913: *Names were suggested for the parks owned by the city subject to approval of the council.*

⁷⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, RG.8.10, Box 4, File 30, Parks Committee Report 1914: May 4 1914, *Re Parks Expenditure: Athletics fields and playgrounds.*

⁷⁵ McFarland, “The Development of Public Recreation in Canada,” 42.

⁷⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files Edmonton Journal, October 8, 1932.

⁷⁷ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, Edmonton Journal, October 8, 1932.

private charity in the voluntary sector involved with children's play and playground advocacy. Gyro Club emerged as the key non-government organization (NGO) in the production of Edmonton's playground spaces and culture. This paper analyzes how and why the Gyro Club took a lead role in urban social reform. Ideals of citizenship, civic life, and modern progress were constructed and controlled through children's playgrounds, yet, at the same time, a distinctive Gyro culture of creative outdoor play for children emerged that developed social and cultural capital shared by the public.

2.1. Playgrounds as a Social Space and Capital

Bourdieu's concept of social practices suggests a non-monetary form of capital that builds relationships and improves the economy. Social capital is the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition."⁷⁸ Social capital focuses on the strengths of relating to others and how important social networks are to improve the economic capital of a city. Social networks are not a natural given. They must be constructed through investment strategies.⁷⁹ Cultural capital refers to non-financial assets that promote social mobility.⁸⁰ It is considered socially the most determinant educational investment, which Bourdieu also recognizes as 'the domestic transmission of cultural capital.'⁸¹ The Gyro Club's educational investments in playground programs include the accumulated cultural knowledge

⁷⁸ Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 51.

⁷⁹ Alejandro Portes, "Social Capital: The Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology," *Annual Review Sociological* 24 (1998): 2.

⁸⁰ Chris Barker, *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (SAGE publication, electronic source, 2004): 27.

⁸¹ Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 48.

that can lead to benefits such as gaining status and acceptance among the community. Sense of belonging is particularly important for children. I apply the ideas of social and cultural capital to the Gyro Club and Edmonton's supervised playgrounds as it was invested and generated through distinctive practices of play that have been little studied.

Gyro playgrounds were structured spaces of urban social relations.⁸² They were intended to build liberal democratic citizenship. Gyro men engaged playgrounds strategically to build relationships among citizens. Play programs embedded in community social networks aimed to improve civic life and allow better connected neighbourhoods as well as fostering cultural and economic capital. Bourdieu sees social practices as a process through which we live out our daily lives.⁸³ He posits social practices as a dialect between individual and society, whereby the individual interacts with the social world at the conjunction of social and cultural capital. Children's play was a field of urban social practice shaped by the institution of playgrounds and supervised outdoor play programs that promoted forms of social and cultural capital.

2.2 City Parks and Urban Reform

Rapid urban growth and a rising number of families led to considerations about children and urban social reform in Edmonton during the progressive era in the early 1900s. Diverse immigrants arrived in western Canada's cities in search of a better opportunity. English-speaking Canadians of British ancestry were established as the dominant ethno-linguistic group. This dominant group of reformers and boosters feared for their community, thus urban growth at any rate needed reform to handle society and develop the ideal environment. These beliefs shaped

⁸² Pierre Bourdieu, translated by Richard Nice, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press): 110.

⁸³ Grant Jarvie and Joseph Maguire. *Sport and Leisure in Social Thought*. (New York: Routledge, 1994):186.

urban reform movements related to public health and the social welfare in cities. Notions of social hierarchy and hegemonic control based on social Darwinism held Anglo Saxons and the British at the apex of biological evolution and human achievement.⁸⁴ In western Canada, it was assumed by the dominant group that assimilation to its middle-class British-Canadian norms would benefit the nation.

Public parks in the late 1800s were originally designed as places for the family to walk and relax. Children were supervised by their own parents, mainly by the mother, while the father was removed from a direct role in the care of children. During the ‘Reform Park Era,’ recreational activities were seen as a necessity, especially for children and women of the “wage-earning families” that could not afford to travel. Parks also played an important role in helping immigrant neighbourhoods that were overcrowded and influenced by “crime-producing tendencies.”⁸⁵ Such community parks contributed to physical and mental well-being and social capital outside the family. This concept is based on the social relationships that existed among parents and the parents’ relations with the institutions of the community.⁸⁶ Parks and playgrounds brought significant benefits to the city. There was a striking correlation between overcrowding and high mortality rates, attributed to the lack of sunshine and fresh air that was typical in urban poverty.⁸⁷ Social reform was a gendered arena in late-19th-century Canada where men were in charge of order and prepared for business skills that drove the economy, and elite women helped guide men to make better moral decisions in the governance of a community that

⁸⁴ Baum, 78.

⁸⁵ Comacchio, 34.

⁸⁶ Coleman, 113.

⁸⁷ W. Van Nus, “The Fate of City Beautiful Thought in Canada, 1893 -1930,” *Historical Papers* 10, no.1 (1975): 195.

would link welfare to the economy. Women worked quietly behind their husbands for the welfare of the Victorian Canadian city. Their presence was held to purify the moral atmosphere and inspire good behaviour. Women activists led the way in the drive for social reform and playgrounds. Unlike men who overtly pursued political, administrative or economic goals, elite women were seen to work for explicit objectives related to social, cultural, domestic and family affairs where they leveraged advocacy for public parks and children's welfare. Notably Lady Hingston and other well-educated philanthropic women influenced the ideals of Canada's playground movement as forerunners of the Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association (MPPA), formally launched in 1902.

The playground movement was a model that emerged from Chicago in 1893, where the first public playground was built in response to the problems of modern cities.⁸⁸ Chicago settlement houses and early social work geared to social justice stimulated interest in community interventions such as playgrounds for newcomers. The beginnings of the playground movement prioritized a child welfare focus and identified a connection between spare time and delinquency.⁸⁹ Guttman argued that civic reformers and boosters in American cities thought playground movements would help 'clean up' the city and transform it to an efficient and organized place without unruly immigrant children causing havoc and overturning vendor carts

⁸⁸ Benjamin McArthur, "The Chicago Playground Movement: A Neglected Feature of Social Justice," *The Social Service Review* 49, no.3 (1975): 376.

⁸⁹ James Marten, "A New View of the Child: Children and Youth in Urban America, 1900-1920," *Romanian Journal of Population Studies* 11, no.1 (2008): 73.

in crowded streets.⁹⁰ The child was seen as a means of broader urban-social salvation as well as the production of normative gender identities.⁹¹

By the turn of the century, concern for less fortunate children and families led to the playground movement that predated the development of an extensive public recreation system in Canada.⁹² NCWC members were principal actors when it came to the development of playgrounds. In 1901, at its eighth annual meeting, the National Council discussed the importance of establishing vacation schools and playgrounds to improve conditions for urban children.⁹³ NCWC members pledged to make supervised playgrounds possible and promoted training throughout Canada; however, they were not interested in constructing and running playgrounds. Local Councils of Women formed playground committees across Canada to raise awareness and they established playgrounds in school grounds during summer months and hired the staff to supervise children, often local female school teachers.⁹⁴

The impact of urban life and modernity on the daily lives of children, especially those left behind for long hours while their parents served in the capitalist labour force and wartime industry was seen as a major problem. Children had long hours of leisure time and nothing to do, thus it was feared the ‘streets’ became ‘teachers’ of values and behaviours. British-Canadian social reformers considered children vulnerable to the urban multicultural surroundings and in

⁹⁰ Allen Guttman, “The Progressive Era Appropriation of Children’s Play,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, no.2 (2010): 147.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Gagen, “An Example to Us All: Child Development and Identity Construction in Early 20th-Century Playgrounds,” *Environment and Planning* 32, no.4, (2000): 600.

⁹² McFarland, “The Development of Public Recreation in Canada,” 19.

⁹³ McFarland, “The Development of Public Recreation in Canada,” 19.

⁹⁴ Susan Markham, “Early Efforts to Professionalise Leisure Services in Canada,” *Avante* 11, no.1 (2005): 17.

need of protection.⁹⁵ Playgrounds were a place that inspired a sense of belonging that could be transferred to national loyalty and foster a common identity.⁹⁶ They could help build character, transmit traditions and construct ideals that would help build a better nation.

Urban reformers used playground structures and play programs to restore childhood, redeem order, and oppose child labour. Edmonton Gyros as reformers, structured play in ways that maintained social control and imposed hegemonic British-Canadian values that promoted a liberal democratic model of the productive Gyro citizen in a modern urban city. Their intention was to give opportunities to children to enfranchise their participation as citizens, but also to control future generations. As reformers, they trusted playgrounds would strengthen family ties and create bonds between immigrant neighbours, leading to assimilation and social integration.⁹⁷ In 1914, J.J. Kelso, Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children of Ontario, wrote “A Plea for Recreation and Playgrounds.” He explained a common rationale for playgrounds: “Idleness leads to wrong doing. Busily and pleasantly occupied, and with leaders interested in their welfare, the boys will usually be found responsive to good influences.”⁹⁸ It was believed that supervised playgrounds were directly related to lower rates of delinquency, especially among boys, but also to positive reinforcement for the most needy children whose lives often lacked the reassuring presence and nurturing attention of adults. They sought to protect children by inculcating values, behaviour, and patriotism. According to Mariana Valverde, these actions

⁹⁵ Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism, and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 7.

⁹⁶ Gagen, 608.

⁹⁷ McArthur, 388.

⁹⁸ John Joseph Kelso, *Playgrounds, One of Canada's Greatest Needs: A call to Service for the Children of the Future; a Plea for Recreation and Playgrounds* (Toronto: Parliament Buildings, 1914), 8.

revealed discourses of moral reform directly related to class relations of the emerging urban and capitalist social formation, a process through which race, gender and class were intertwined.⁹⁹

There was also a demand for green areas to be set aside for public use that could alleviate urban congestion.¹⁰⁰ Civic reformers and boosters examined the way social organization could positively affect the functioning of economic activity in order to build a better country.

Playgrounds were widely used by planners as a strategy to beautify the city and increase land values along with a tax base.¹⁰¹ The drive to tame and domesticate children in their early years became relevant to teach lessons about manners and customs. Social practices and social connectedness became a concern among civic reformers in order to improve neighbourhood connections and trust among citizens, which can be closely related to social capital. It was the Gyros intention to instill a sense of place and attachment where children bond and feel proud of their playgrounds. Social capital is inherent in the structure of relationships among people.¹⁰² The role of ‘place’ in social connectedness also determines levels of social capital.¹⁰³ Bourdieu’s concept of social capital lends understanding to how playgrounds contributed to community in Edmonton.

2.3 Edmonton Gyro Club and Urban Reform

⁹⁹ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: The Canadian Publishers, 1993), 10-16.

¹⁰⁰ Robert McDonald, “‘Holy Retreat’ or ‘Practical Breathing Spot’?: Class Perception of Vancouver’s Stanley Park, 1910-1913,” *Canadian Historical Review* 65, no.2 (1984): 129.

¹⁰¹ Ocean Howell, “Play Pays: Urban land Politics and Playgrounds in the United States, 1900-1930,” *Journal of Urban History* 34, no.6 (2008): 980.

¹⁰² Coleman, 100.

¹⁰³ Baum, 351.

Edmonton's rapid growth led urban reformers and civic boosters to focus on city planning and urge municipal government to develop infrastructure to benefit public health in urban environments.¹⁰⁴ Community associations and service clubs delivered early recreation, such as outdoor ice rinks.¹⁰⁵ In 1917, the first community league arranged with the City for a block of land for recreation in Jasper Place. By 1921, ten community leagues initiated the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues.¹⁰⁶ Even though there was a well-organized structure in Edmonton, playgrounds were not a strong focus, and therefore the lack of playgrounds emerged as a public concern. The Women's Institute and the Local Council of Women urged Edmonton City Council to provide more playgrounds and swimming pools as they raised concerns about the risks of unsupervised youth and hazards such as drowning in the river. In 1921, the City constructed three outdoor pools and assisted the creation of the Gyro Club, a men's service club that responded to the need for supervised playgrounds.¹⁰⁷

The Gyro Club in Edmonton decided to improve the city and promote citizenship by building playgrounds. According to the *Edmonton Journal* in 1925, the community was astonished. City of Edmonton had been encouraging the construction of parks and play spaces for children, but could not afford to invest in recreation facilities because of tight postwar budgets. Edmonton's Parks Department had merged into the Engineer's Department as a war economy measure; leadership to build playgrounds had to come from other civic groups

¹⁰⁴ Markham, 1.

¹⁰⁵ McFarland, "The development of Public Recreation in Canada," 41.

¹⁰⁶ McFarland, "The development of Public Recreation in Canada," 42.

¹⁰⁷ McFarland, "The development of Public Recreation in Canada," 42.

interested in reaching out to the community. The Gyro Club answered the call¹⁰⁸ as noted by the *Edmonton Journal* in 1925:

It was a great thing for the children of Edmonton when the local Gyro club, looking around for a suitable objective, decided upon the establishment of playgrounds as an enterprise most worthy of its attention. Supervised play was a thing then practically unknown, and children playing in the streets were the usual order.¹⁰⁹

Construction of playgrounds and supervised play was considered a worthwhile idea because it would help shape character, improve the mental and physical health, develop habits of cleanliness,¹¹⁰ and above all, create bonds of friendship and citizenship among children. Gardens were another means by which children established a sense of responsibility and ownership to their place of play. Gardens allow mobilizing and empowering the children with the net result being a sense of pride in making aesthetic changes¹¹¹ in their playground.

Edmonton's Gyro Club looked forward to modern progress. Their motto was Power, Poise, and Purpose explained as "The Power of friendship in human relationship. Poise, steadiness of friendship at all times and Purpose to keep the balance of friendship active in our daily lives."¹¹² It emphasized friendship and bonding with similar people empowered as an exclusive group. These young men would take care of each other and ensure access to jobs, business opportunities, and the shared values that brought them into social engagement as a fraternal group. A sense of brotherhood and protection forged an association with its own rules.

¹⁰⁸ City of Edmonton Archives, Fort Edmonton Park Research Report, Acc#A80-5, October 1974, 4.

¹⁰⁹ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, *Edmonton Journal* August 20, 1925.

¹¹⁰ McArthur, 386.

¹¹¹ Jonathan Kingsley, and Townsend Mardie, "'Dig In' to Social Capital: Community Gardens as Mechanisms for Growing Urban Social Connectedness," *Urban Policy and Research* 24 no.4, (2006): 527.

¹¹² About Gyro: "An Introduction to Gyro International", http://international.gyro.ws/history_2.htm.

The local Gyro Club's "Constitution and Bylaws" were typical of Anglo-Canadian clubs that modelled civic reform and citizenship. Objectives in the Constitution were a starting point for community projects and social development:

- Promote the spirit and friendship between individuals, provinces, states and nations.
- To foster the ideal service, awaken and maintain interest in public affairs, citizenship, good government and civic community affairs.
- By the interchange of ideas to increase the interest and enthusiasm of Gyros in their respective occupations.¹¹³

To become a club member, men had to meet certain qualification standards, otherwise they were not accepted. Membership consisted of three classes: Active, Associate, and Honorary. Active members had to be adult males of good character and good business and professional reputation, who were not less than 21 or over 45 years of age. When a member turned 45 years old, he could apply to the board to become an Associate Member. The club's officers consisted of a president, vice-president and secretary-treasurer, and the board of directors. Both officers and directors were chosen at an annual meeting. Nine committees were struck to organize club work, coordinate leadership, and marshall business skills. Children in need of play space emerged as the major focus of club interventions to invest cultural and social capital to produce a better city according to Gyro ideals.

Edmonton men structured and engaged Gyro citizenship within their own club much as they reached out to the broader community. The Programme Committee was in charge of scheduling lunch meetings once a week to schedule and use structured time wisely. A Social

¹¹³ Provincial Archives Alberta, Nelles Buchanan Fonds, Accession #89.387, SE, file no.18, *The Gyro Club of Edmonton Constitution and Bylaws*.

Committee arranged social functions for members and the community. A Membership Committee consisted of the Chairman and five secret members who were completely changed every six months and appointed by the president. It was responsible to investigate the character, business qualifications, and general standing of nominees for membership. It also prepared updated lists of city businesses, occupations, and professions as information presented to members at meetings. The Educational Committee interpreted the “Gyro Spirit” and instructed Gyros on duties, responsibilities, and privileges. Notably a committee was charged with leisure activities for local Gyros. The Extension and Sports Committee led sports and games among members and arranged games between the Gyro Club and other Edmonton service groups. An Attendance Committee offered carrots and sticks to record compulsory attendance, promote attendance with a contest, and issue warnings of approaching delinquency. As a fraternal group, philanthropic brotherhood was considered an obligation: members of the Sick Committee visited any sick Gyro and encouraged other members to visit. The House Committee was responsible for the distribution and collection of identification buttons, song sheets for sing alongs, and any other paraphernalia required at meetings for music and fun characteristic of Gyro style. The Objective Committee was charged with the maintenance and operation of children’s playgrounds, and an *ad hoc* Carnival Committee planned the major annual fund-drive event to support them.¹¹⁴ Structured rational recreation in respectable fraternal association was a hallmark of the Gyro Club.

Edmonton Gyros were typically respectable, educated urban professionals and businessmen who could afford time for community work, initiation fees, and dedication to the

¹¹⁴ Provincial Archives Alberta, Nelles Buchanan Fonds, Accession #89.387, SE, file no.18, *The Gyro Club of Edmonton Constitution and Bylaws*.

Club. They committed to set an example in public and private life by taking the Gyro Pledge: “At this our first founders day meeting I again pledge myself to Gyro and all that it stands for in my public and private life. I pledge myself to be faithful to the principles of Gyro and loyal to its organization as an international body and in particular to my own club.”¹¹⁵ Although professed to friendship, it was nonetheless an exclusive men’s group that required certain social status and screening.

With regard to occupation, Edmonton’s first Gyro men were concentrated overall with 81 percent in business and commerce, 10 percent in health professions, and three percent in law through the 1920s decade.¹¹⁶ Successful managers, salesman, and owners of companies suggest the active involvement of commercial men as boosters in civic life as well as the potential business advantages of Gyro fraternity. Health care professions, such as physicians, surgeons, dentists, and optometrists, promoted outdoor play space to improve children’s health. Lawyers and judges among the club saw juvenile delinquency problems in the courtroom and the repercussions of not having supervised play with proper ‘expert’ instruction. Reverend Kenneth C. McLeod, an ordained Presbyterian minister who served as Superintendent of Neglected Children in the Government of Alberta, was a noteworthy Gyro member professionally committed to child welfare and social reform. Key ongoing leaders participated actively on the Board of Directors and served as club presidents. Reginald Henry, a prominent businessmen who founded the Gyro Club with Harry Fuller served as president in 1921; Charles McDonald, salesman in a life insurance company, in 1922; Judge Nelles Buchanan, an Alberta court judge,

¹¹⁵ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1921-1925, *First Annual Founders Day Program*, October 16th 1923.

¹¹⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, the occupational analysis is based on the Gyro Club membership records located in the Scrapbooks from 1921 to 1931.

in 1923; Alex Mitchell, auditor of Alberta Government Telephones, in 1924; James Fred Dewey, superintendent of McDerimid Studios Ltd. for photo engraving, in 1925; Robert Muir, a financial agent, in 1926; and William Hardy, associate professor of classics at the University of Alberta, in 1927.



Fig. 1: Members of the Gyro Club at the Official Opening of Gyro Playground No. 3: Tipton Park, June 21, 1924.

Left to Right: Ancus Douglas (Chairman Playground Committee, Ted Mitchell (Sports Committee), Alex Mitchell (President), Bob Muir (Secretary), and J.W. Clifton (Chief Supervisor Gyro playground). Source: City of Edmonton Archives /File EA-211-1/G.H. Rennie #A74-63.

When the Edmonton Gyro Club was formed on July 29, 1921, with a total membership of 49 men, the first objective they discussed was to provide playgrounds for children.¹¹⁷ Lack of space to play was a public concern and getting children off the streets was seen as a necessity

¹¹⁷ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1921-1925.

because of the increased traffic fatalities among children caused by reckless automobiles. A civic imperative to get children to play outdoors was believed to be directly related to a better life that included health and moral stability, and, if children were not presented with these opportunities, society as a whole would be affected. H. Addington Bruce wrote in the *Edmonton Journal* in 1923:

Approximately one-half of all deaths occur among those under fifteen years of age. Children must play somewhere in the outdoors. They need play in the open air for their health's sake and for their morale as well as for the joy of living. To make no provision for their play while forbidding them to romp in the streets is not only cruel to the children it is to weaken and handicap society itself.¹¹⁸

The idea of removing children from streets came to be identified as a focus of intervention and investment for the future needs, and an important way of developing spirit of citizenship and patriotism among children.¹¹⁹ The Gyro's main urban reform focus was the welfare of children. In meetings, they frequently invited diverse experts to discuss issues related to childhood and society. One of these professionals was the well-known paediatrician Dr. William Blatz, a progressive Toronto child psychologist and educator, who was invited to speak at the weekly Gyro luncheon in 1929. Blatz emphasized the importance of fathers playing an active role raising children and regretted that bringing up children was often delegated to their wives.¹²⁰ Nurturing children through play emerged as an important facet of masculinity and fatherhood for Edmonton's Gyro men.

¹¹⁸ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1921-1925, *Playground Need*, June 7th 1924.

¹¹⁹ Margaret Kernan, "Developing Citizenship Through Supervised Play: The Civics Institute of Ireland Playgrounds 1933-75," *History of Education* 34, no.6, (2005): 675.

¹²⁰ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1925-1930, *Edmonton Journal* October 1, 1929.

The annual Gyro Carnival stands out as a prominent fund-drive event appreciated by Edmonton citizens in the 1920s and 1930s. Carnival grounds featured games and attractions, and two shows were staged each evening. Local features such as the Gyro orchestra, dancers from the Evelyn Parks School of Ballet, a xylophone soloist, and acrobatic gymnastics performed by the local Morris School of Physical Culture¹²¹ emphasized what the Gyro Club deemed appropriate and exciting forms of creative physical and cultural literacy for children and their families.

According to the 1928 *Edmonton Journal*, Gyro Carnival hawkers rang out shouts to visitors. “Positively your last chance to lay in a stock of nice woolly blankets before snow flies! Right this way to the big housey game! See the hula-hula girls, they’re also warm! Cob corn for the carnivorous, and every time you ring a duck it’s yours.”¹²² Significant effort was invested with six months of preliminary work for a successful week-long event. “The Business of building the carnival was not an easy matter,” according to sources.¹²³ Members worked on advance ticket sales, as well as publicity and advertising in newspapers and radio. The biggest job was managing the Carnival, which included the purchase of merchandise, planning the layout of the booths, blanket wheels, dart games, raffle booths, bucket tossing games, and a dance floor serenaded by a local orchestra.¹²⁴ All Gyros delegated to tasks during carnival days wore red blazers with the Gyro emblem displayed in black and white. “This carnival business is a lot of

¹²¹ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, *Edmonton Journal* August 18, 1925.

¹²² City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, *Edmonton Journal* September 4 1928.

¹²³ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1931-1935; *The Gyroscope*, *Edmonton Gyro Carnival of 1935*, Stan Smith, 7.

¹²⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1931-1935; *The Gyroscope*, *Edmonton Gyro Carnival of 1935*, Stan Smith, 7.

work. Oftimes we think we have been too ambitious in shouldering the responsibility of four playgrounds but after each carnival we agree that we actually become better acquainted during the carnival than during any other of our activities.”¹²⁵ The Carnival generated social capital as Gyro Club members pulled together around the event. Edmonton children began to anticipate the Carnival as an important part of the year with sought after prizes for best costume and decorated wagons. As well, many city families and children engaged in the Carnival, which encouraged collective social interactions and shared cultural ties between Edmontonians through the festival.

The Carnival Committee’s objective to fundraise and construct playgrounds was undertaken with great success, and each year revenues increased significantly. The first carnival -- known as “Round the World Carnival¹²⁶” -- lasted three days and was carried out indoors at the board of trade room in the McLeod Building, in December 1921, with net proceeds of \$960.¹²⁷ In 1922, they organized the First Street Carnival at Howard Avenue, on September 11 to 13; the amount obtained was \$2,153. In 1923, the carnival lasted a whole week, and the amount earned was \$4,787. Its huge success led to a new week-long program. The headline of the *Edmonton Journal* on August 18, 1925 stated: “Gyro Carnival Ticket Sales Mounting High: Nearly twelve hundred tickets sold, and all members busily engaged in the ticket-selling campaign, report presented at Tuesday’s noon luncheon at the Gyro Club. Every Member is out to make this year’s carnival, an outstanding success.”¹²⁸ Carnival rapidly became an annual

¹²⁵ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1931-1935; The Gyroscope, Edmonton Gyro Carnival of 1935, Stan Smith, 7.

¹²⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1921-1925, *letter to fellow gyros*, January 30th 1922.

¹²⁷ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1921-1925.

¹²⁸ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, Edmonton Journal August 18 1925.

tradition among Edmontonians, and, by 1926, revenue was nearly \$10,000, indicating the Gyros had effective business skills and capable organization to fund raise economic capital. Calgary's Gyro Club looked to its counterparts in Edmonton as innovators:

They netted the handsome profit of \$3,225.45 from their carnival this year. That's sure a fine showing and will help out their playgrounds fund very nicely. I still cannot help thinking that we could put over a similar carnival here, make considerable money and have lots of fun into the bargain.¹²⁹

Gyro Carnival represented a distinctive vision of children's play. It introduced an artistic circus-style play culture that Edmonton Gyros hoped would evoke happiness and excitement. In 1922, the Gyro membership rose to 65 and continued to rise through the next ten years, reaching 119 members in 1931. Gyro Club gave a middle-class group of men a stake in constructing civic life to improve the city and provide a place for children to play; it was also a place to instruct and train children in citizenship much as the Gyros operated themselves. Thousands of young Edmontonians enjoyed Gyro playgrounds¹³⁰ and even Calgary pointed out their success. The *Calgary Albertan* in 1926 "three playgrounds exist as monuments to the success of the Gyros efforts in Edmonton."¹³¹

¹²⁹ Glenbow Archives, Gyro Club of Calgary Fonds, series 11, unprocessed records. The Gyrograph official bulletins of the Gyro Club of Calgary, vol. 14 no 1, November 13, 1934.

¹³⁰ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1925-1930, *Calgary Albertan*, June 17th 1926.

¹³¹ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1926-1930, *Calgary Albertan*, June 17, 1926.



**Fig. 2: Children on Merry-Go-Round in Tipton Park Gyro Playground No. 3.
Source: City of Edmonton Archives/File EA-509-11/ Percy Brown A83-55.**

2.4 Gyro Playground Programs and Play Directors

Edmonton Gyro Club operated three playgrounds by 1924. Patricia Square playground at 95 Street and 108 Avenue, and Kitchener at 114 Street and 103 Avenue, both were situated in established neighbourhoods on Edmonton's north side. A third park at Tipton Square, on the south side, was located at 109 Street and 80 Avenue, a block from Whyte Avenue, near the University of Alberta. These playgrounds were equipped and maintained for a total cost of \$4,000 in maintenance and supervision, and \$2,000 in beautifying the grounds.¹³² Playgrounds were characterized by a wide range of activities and equipment: swings, merry-go-round, jungle gym, and a teeter totter. Tipton had an impressive and distinctive senior double slide that was well remembered by the community even after it was removed from the park in 1997. Gyros

¹³² City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, Edmonton Journal, July 2 1927, n.p.

were one of the City's key voluntary partners in the private welfare charity sector. The City provided the land for playgrounds and a grant of \$750 to help cover the six months of supervision. They hired full-time supervisors and a committee checked the playgrounds every day. In 1930, Gyro Club constructed a fourth playground installation -- known as the "crippled children's playground" -- at the University of Alberta Hospital, but no constructions continued until after Second World War. Five new playgrounds were built; both Cromdale and Jasper Place in 1948 and the following year; King Edward, Riverdale and North Edmonton (Westwood) in 1949, however none of these parks had programs like the first three.¹³³

Supervisors consisted of a general manager and three assistant supervisors on duty at all times. William T. Tait, better known as "Coach Bill Tait," was general manager of the three Gyro playgrounds. A veteran in the amateur track-and-field world, he had run Canada's Olympic team in 1908.¹³⁴ After World War I, Tait was hired by Edmonton's public school board as an instructor and as the University of Alberta track coach.¹³⁵ He was intimately familiar with amateur sport and was hired in 1924 to coach the Gradettes high school basketball team at McDougall High School, home of the famous Edmonton Commercial Grads team.¹³⁶

Younger male instructors were assistant supervisors trained as "Play Directors" responsible for playground operations in May to October. They were chosen to foster skills and development in children for healthy physical and moral growth. Carlton Taylor, assistant

¹³³ City of Edmonton Archives, Fort Edmonton Park Research Report, Acc#A80-5, October 1974: 4-5

¹³⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1926-1930, October 14, 1927.

¹³⁵ Ann Hall, *The Grads are Playing Tonight! The Story of Edmonton Commercial Graduates Basketball Club*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 2011):115

¹³⁶ Hall, 114.

supervisor at Patricia Playground, was a medical student at the University of Alberta and a local graduate of Edmonton's public high school. He was considered a versatile instructor with teaching capacity, and also a great athlete with ability to maintain discipline and order in the park: "Anyone who thinks that supervising a playground is as restful and peaceful as a quiet vacation at the lake should spend a day or two with Carlton Taylor at Patricia Square Gyro Park. The role of mentor, teacher, play director, arbitrator, lifeguard, elementary surgeon, and daddy pro tem on the busiest of the Gyro parks calls for versatility if nothing else."¹³⁷ 'Reg' Hamilton was an older active sportsman, formerly a prominent Toronto hockey player, hired as a supervisor in Kitchener Playground. Bert C. Watts was in charge of the Gyro Park No. 3 at Tipton Square. A school teacher with experience in athletics, team, and group games, he came from Ontario where he had been a member of the championship Western Ontario football team. "His high ideals of citizenship, his mature experience with children en masse, being the oldest of the supervising instructors, has made itself felt in his work at Tipton square."¹³⁸ A City gardener also worked in the parks planting new plants, trees, and shrubs where he engaged children to lend a hand.¹³⁹

Miss Marjorie Davidson was a trained physical educator hired as the playground "story-teller." Her job was to tell stories for one hour in each of the three Gyro playgrounds. Davidson was born in South Dakota and attended an Edmonton public high school. A graduate of McGill's well-established School of Physical Education in Montreal, she had studied playground

¹³⁷ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1926-1930, August 28, 1926.

¹³⁸ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1926-1930, August 26, 1926.

¹³⁹ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files Edmonton Journal May 22 1937.

activities, organization, and theories of play for two years. Experienced as a playground supervisor in Montreal, she was the only female on staff and the best trained in physical education.¹⁴⁰

Children's recreation and play leadership at this time was sub-specialized into work for girls or boys based on gendered play practices and theory. Playgrounds were designed to mimic children's future environment and ensure the correct development of gender-specific evolutionary sequences.¹⁴¹ Girls would dress up dolls and boys would decorate their wagons as part of playground activities, shaping children's identities and moral order. Supervisors cleaned wading pools, prepared games and stunts, watched young children on the swings, helped to build sand castles, and supervised games such as baseball, football and basketball to make sure children would maintain a certain style of play accordingly to Canadian ethics and morals. Together young supervisors engaged a holistic pedagogical approach to children's outdoor play activities that combined creativity with physical and cultural literacy.

¹⁴⁰ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1926-1930, September 01, 1926.

¹⁴¹ Gagen, 605-611.



Fig. 3: Athletic Group with Play Director Reg Hamilton (back row left) and Chief Supervisor Will Tait (back row right), Marjorie Davidson (second row left), and Gyro Club leaders at Tipton Park in 1928. Source: City of Edmonton Archives/File EA-211-1/G.H Rennie #A74-63.

Edmonton Gyro men envisioned and shaped a gentler creative concept of play than the typical ideals of competitive sport as a means to become tougher and stronger. Although amateur sports were a feature on the playgrounds, Edmonton's Gyro playground movement was more holistic and child centered than the standard masculinist sport model of team competition. Children's songs, games, stories, music, drama, sport, exercise, and outdoor play were components of cultural capital inculcated by Gyro play programs. They promoted a distinctive vision of holistic play for children. A variety of recreational activities from games to crafts, parades, reading, gardening, and team sports, along with a storyteller, made for an innovative and distinctive Gyro playground program. Supervisors concocted imaginative games and novelty participatory competitions, for instance, decorating dolls, carriages, bicycles and express carts. Programs included play considered constructive and useful work, such as lessons in wood-

working, model building, and carving. Small lending libraries of children's books were kept at each park to encourage reading. In 1937, students in the Community Extension Department of the University of Alberta brought dramatics to the parks and short plays were performed as a means of imaginative play.¹⁴² Handicrafts taught children coordination and basic skills, such as bead-work, square knotting, bird-house building, wood carving, and soap carving. Several sports from softball to volleyball, basketball and horseshoes were practiced. Track-and-field teams for boys and girls were organized to compete across the city. Typically, supervised play programs were institutionalized at Gyro summer playgrounds as embodied forms of social and cultural capital. In this sense, capital was evident in actions such as children sliding, swinging, spinning, running, crafting, and playing together.

One of the most awaited events in the playground program year was the annual circus. The Gyro circus was a free playground activity without any admission fee. Hundreds of Edmonton children and their parents attended to watch the circus procession where every boy and girl received popcorn and a gift. As usual, the Gyros had a strong sense of organization and the whole circus was pre-programmed. The group gathered at 1:30 pm and was ready to move off at 2:00 pm sharp. At 3:00, there was an innovation one year when local Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) presented the playgrounds with flags to grace new flag staffs. The circus proper started at 3:30 in the afternoon with a grand march past and presentation of the winners in the costume judging.¹⁴³ The programme involved many different prizes to reward children for their work during the playground season on each Gyro playground across the city.

¹⁴² City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, Edmonton Journal May 22 1937.

¹⁴³ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1926-1930, August 01, 1926.

There was a fancy costume competition for best home-made fancy dress, best floral costumes, and best comics, along with competitions for decorated dolls, carriages, bicycles and express carts. Three prizes were offered in a national dances competition, suggesting the performance of ethnicity on playgrounds. Prizes were awarded for the tire race, dog derby, lassoing, pet race, watermelon race, and for the best trick dog. And clowns entertained with funny stunts.¹⁴⁴ The purpose of the circus was to promote the “play for children” idea in the minds of the public, according to news coverage in the *Edmonton Journal* on August 1, 1926.

Edna Baldwin wrote about what she had observed with Gyro parks in the *Edmonton Journal* in 1925. “They are learning not only a lesson in resourcefulness but developing continually spirit and Canadian Sportsmanship in playing games fair and square.”¹⁴⁵ From her point of view, playgrounds helped mingle and integrate children with other peers: “There was a tramp once by the name Jacob Riis, he was a foreigner and he did not belong in this new country, but it wasn’t long before he did. Jacob Riis would be glad to know that every class mingles without racial prejudice on the playgrounds of Edmonton.”¹⁴⁶ Baldwin described the value and importance of the supervised playgrounds for foreigners with reference to celebrated New York photo journalist and child saver Jacob Riis.¹⁴⁷ Baldwin’s comments indicate she was aware of the child saving movement in Edmonton’s playgrounds and how these places worked to assimilate

¹⁴⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1926-1930, August 01, 1926.

¹⁴⁵ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, *Edmonton Journal* June 29, 1925.

¹⁴⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, *Edmonton Journal* June 29, 1925.

¹⁴⁷ Jacob Riis was the third of fifteen children born in Denmark in 1849. He immigrated to United States in 1870. Unable to find work he was forced to live a harsh life in the streets. In 1887 became a police reporter of the New York Tribune, and in 1888 became a photo-journalist for the New York Evening Sun. Having lived his childhood in poverty, he dedicated his career to write about children (*Children of the Poor*, 1892). (<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USArriis.htm>)

children in her eyes. It was believed by this time that children learned through play and that childhood was time for their protection. The lack of proper childhood was thought the root of serious problems¹⁴⁸ that could eventually lead to problems in their development. Edmonton Gyros were like other child savers who wanted to make sure that children who were poorly taught in their family environment could turn into children¹⁴⁹ with renewed hope and promise through playgrounds.

Edmonton Gyros wanted to be involved in the city's growth by providing amenities for children. Beyond the construction and maintenance of playgrounds, they also focused on the education of younger generations. Class, ancestry, language, religion, and gender were important factors in who should be 'Canadianized' and made a difference in who was considered more of a problem compared to others, especially boys who were often considered a source of trouble.¹⁵⁰ Several day-to-day events, such as flag raising ceremonies, demonstrated Gyro Club ideals of Canadian citizenship transmitted to future generations. The symbolic act of raising the Union Jack on playgrounds instilled middle-class Anglo-Canadian nationalism through child-rearing,¹⁵¹ as well as the creation of certain attitudes and behaviours that would inculcate lessons in citizenship for the working class and immigrant community. On the other hand, the activities on the playgrounds would help keep an 'eye' on these children and teach sports to show 'respectable' social order and allegiance to nation and Empire. Playground games strengthened

¹⁴⁸ Hugh Cunningham, "History of Childhood," In *Images of Childhood*, ed. C. Philip Hwang, Michael E. Lamb and Irving E. Sigel (New Jersey: Psychology Press, 2009), 30

¹⁴⁹ Cunningham, 30

¹⁵⁰ Comacchio, 21.

¹⁵¹ Marten, 80.

young Canadians to instill and reward fitness, behaviour, work ethic, individualism, social responsibility, and respect for private property.¹⁵²

Properly directed play was essential for the development of young Edmontonians according to the Gyros. Organizing and disciplining them, it was believed would prevent future disorders.¹⁵³ By 1938, problems with unruly youth had subsided:

Considered indicative of the growth of the playground service project and improvement in methods and supervision, it was recalled that about 15 years ago the Patricia playground presented to club directors “quite a problem,” with police often called to subdue trouble-making youths. But nothing of this nature has occurred for many years now.¹⁵⁴

Middle-class reformers thought of themselves as protectors of a child’s right to play and learn, and, thereby, completely free and unsupervised play was disapproved.¹⁵⁵ Adult intervention significantly changed how children played. At the same time, during hours that they were not able to look after them, Edmonton parents overall apparently felt secure when their children frequented a supervised playground.¹⁵⁶ The physical absence of adults is a structural deficiency in family social capital,¹⁵⁷ which can lead to deficiencies in social practices by which children may not be well connected to the social world. Gyros believed playgrounds would encourage children and families to know each other as friends and neighbours, which was essential to maintain community relations and improve social capital. Problems such as poverty, crime,

¹⁵² Collin Howell, *Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 30.

¹⁵³ McDonald, 141.

¹⁵⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, *Edmonton Journal*, May 23 1938.

¹⁵⁵ Guttman, 231.

¹⁵⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Clubs Newspaper Clipping Files, *Edmonton Journal*, October 8, 1932.

¹⁵⁷ Coleman, 110.

isolation and disease were believed by social reformers to be part of inequality among citizens. By contrast, a group with extensive trustworthiness as social capital was able to accomplish more than a comparable group without it.¹⁵⁸ The Gyro Club attempted to build a better community and to serve the social needs of childhood.

2.5 Conclusions

Edmonton's Gyro Club used leisure time to serve children and youth in the city, not only to entertain but also to enhance cohesion between communities. Cohesive bonds were important to strengthen citizenship and relationship structures, which was also relevant to economic well-being¹⁵⁹ that allows sharing values and education among different ethnicities and classes. Playgrounds were places where nurturing relationships and good habits could be assimilated. It was believed that supervised playgrounds were directly related to fewer rates of delinquency but also with positive reinforcement for the most needy children.

Sense of attachment tied to positive reinforcement leads to child's self-esteem, pride, and discipline among peers and adults. The playground had an important role as a public place that raised the level of social and cultural capital, and subsequently contributed to citizenship and social life. Involvement in art, music, and literature were assets to a child's cultural literacy. Sport activities and team work, such as baseball, running, and swimming, improved health and hygiene, while sport competitions encouraged allegiance and fostered a sense of belonging.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Coleman, 101.

¹⁵⁹ Saijun Zhang, Steven Anderson, and Min Zhan, "The differentiated Impact of Bridging and Bonding Social Capital on Economic Well-Being: An Individual Level Perspective," *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* XXXVIII, no 1 (2011): 120.

¹⁶⁰ Adams, 74.

An important part of the holistic Gyro program was body improvement related to health through play and exercise.

Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital points to the dynamic and structures that Gyro men intended to establish through play programs. Members of the Gyro Club were typically endowed with both forms of capital; although capital enabled power and control, they also opted to share their capital with Edmonton children and families through playgrounds as an investment in the city's civic life. The diversity of Gyro playground programs was considered an investment strategy to improve the social and cultural capital that ultimately grew into economic capital that contributed toward the city's future as a desirable place to live. Gyro playgrounds were sites where children occupied leisure time to improve physical and cultural literacy joined with ideas related to social and civic life.

The continuance of the Gyro programs for many years meant a lot for Edmontonians. Even during depression and social crises Gyro Club ensured playgrounds continued for Edmonton children. Friendship was an important part of the Gyro Club and the playgrounds. Such friendships were considered important for individuals to satisfy personal and emotional needs that allow for belonging and determine happiness.¹⁶¹ Hegemony and social hierarchy prevailed to re-establish the English-speaking cultural elite while it reinforced British-Canadian values and middle-class behavior through public standards of morality.¹⁶² It encouraged patriotism based on the presumed centrality of British-Canadian traditions.¹⁶³ The Gyros also promoted beliefs about the role of the engaged individual in social change promoted by the

¹⁶¹ Hendrickson, 282.

¹⁶² Wetherell, 7.

¹⁶³ Wetherell, 100.

Social Gospel tradition and a commitment to social responsibility and fatherhood on the part of educated middle-class men. While Gyro men asserted hegemonic control through playgrounds, they also shared social and cultural capital to generate more for the Edmonton community as a whole, especially its children.

As a fraternal group of young men, Gyros attempted to generate young Gyro citizens to contribute to success in a modern prairie city- Were children a “Happy Contented Band”? The hegemony of middle-class adults was never complete despite the prototypical ideals of Gyro citizenship. At the same time, playgrounds were a form of shared social and cultural capital with various meanings to different players. The next research question aims to uncover more about how children experienced play through the playground movement at Edmonton Gyro playgrounds.

CHAPTER THREE

Memories of the Gyro Playgrounds, Edmonton Alberta, 1930-1940

I met a lot of kids in the park; the one that comes to my mind is Peggy Brown... She is my friend now... and subsequently has been my friend for seventy odd years... it's just kind of interesting.¹⁶⁴

Sally Stewart's memories of Kitchener Playground in 1936

3.0 Introduction

Adult memories of Edmonton's Gyro playgrounds can enhance the historical understanding of children's play. Making friends and meeting other children to play was an everyday interaction, yet important to the lives of children in their neighbourhoods and communities. I intend to seek out voices and experiences of children who frequented Gyro playgrounds in order to initiate an interpretation of their lived experiences of urban play, in contrast to child-welfare and education discourses produced by adults who believed playgrounds were safe supervised places to keep children off the streets and control youth. This case study of the history of the playground movement in Edmonton considers play represented from the perspectives of adults and children. It involves children's understandings of supervised playgrounds related through adult recollection of their own childhood memories and feelings to examine 'play' in the Gyro playgrounds from a point of view closer to the youngsters who experienced play in the Gyro programs.

The gaze of adult social reformers helps to understand the playground movement according to the 'specialist' who focused on changing social practices through children's play. Childhood memories of playgrounds and children's own practices and conception of play speak to another perspective. Childhood memories indicate children actively engaged their own knowledge and

¹⁶⁴ Author's interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March, 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

practices of play and playgrounds in and beyond structured programs and boundaries. Playgrounds were not the only places where children played. Free play combined with structured play was common among children in Edmonton families through the 1930s.

I hope to document and rethink play by giving consideration to how children constructed their own play discourses. Gyro Club and City of Edmonton institutional records, such as annual reports, newspaper clippings and bulletins, documented playgrounds through adult eyes. This research combines archival and oral history as critical methods to understand life experience in a more holistic way. Oral history interviews will offer access to children's voices and new information. The complexities of children's experiences will be tapped from the memories of older adults who grew up playing in Edmonton. Testimonies to experiences in playgrounds will be analyzed in order to create a coherent¹⁶⁵ historical record of 'play' related to Edmonton childhood from 1930 to 1940. To understand the diverse experiences of play, it is important to seek the voices of children who experienced the programs and played in the Gyro playgrounds. How did children experience play in the Gyro playgrounds? How did they make their own meanings about play? This study examines 'play' in and beyond Edmonton's Gyro playgrounds.

Based on the results of this study, Edmonton childhood experiences reveal early playgrounds were instrumental to build friendship and a sense of community belonging, wherein children were both disciplined subjects and active agents in the social relations of play. Although adult social control over and through children's play was significant, it was nonetheless incomplete as children themselves acted as playful beings with their own agency and expert knowledge of play. Supervised playgrounds nonetheless contributed to children building

¹⁶⁵ Charlotte Linde, *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter 1 *passim*.

friendships and sense of belonging in their communities, and part of the process to change children's social practices, but children ranged in and out of formalized play structures, often with noteworthy autonomy and independence in the city.

Playgrounds allow children to create an identity for a place as it is part of their daily life. Children's own experience with that specific space will allow to construct a sense of place for the neighbourhood and the surrounding area. According to Pia Christensen, the simple fact that children have independent mobility in their community suggests that children engage in a "relatively unconstrained exploration of their local environment, fusing a sense of local place with the formation of identity and the creation of significant meaning to place."¹⁶⁶ I argue that children in local play settings created kinship ties with peers and community, allowing development, integration, discipline, and assimilation within a network of friendship and sense of belonging.

Supervised playgrounds influenced the life of children in modern cities. To improve childhood, social reform policies and initiatives were a response to modern living. Urban reformers were concerned about society's moral and physical decay,¹⁶⁷ and playgrounds were seen as the antidote to these problems. Nancy Janovicek and Joy Parr suggest childhood is shaped by historical processes and transformed by their economic and cultural context.¹⁶⁸ Carly Adams' study of London, Ontario, relates playgrounds as a space to explore recreational

¹⁶⁶ Pia Christensen, "Space and Knowledge: Children in the Village and the City," in *Transforming Learning in Schools and Communities: The Remaking of Education for a Cosmopolitan Society*, ed. Stewart Ranson, Jon Nixon, and Bob Lingard, 69-84 (New York: Continuum, 2008), 73.

¹⁶⁷ Robert McDonald, "'Holy Retreat' or 'Practical Breathing Spot'?: Class Perception of Vancouver's Stanley Park, 1910-1913," *Canadian Historical Review* 65, no. 2 (1984):128.

¹⁶⁸ Nancy Janovicek and Joy Parr, *Histories of Canadian and Youth* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2003), 2.

activities while building lasting friendship.¹⁶⁹ To understand the Gyro playgrounds implemented in Edmonton, it is relevant to comprehend the relationships between the children who experienced play programs, their families, and the Gyro Club in its commitment to child welfare. The Edmonton Gyro Club developed holistic programmes which envisioned and shaped a creative concept of ‘play’ that fostered community engagement among children and families.

Supervised playgrounds and other contexts influenced Edmonton childhood and children’s own experiences of play. A collection of primary and secondary source material is engaged to understand the setting and history of playgrounds in Edmonton. Primary source material included archival research at the City of Edmonton Archives, the Provincial Archives of Edmonton, and Glenbow Archives of Calgary. Oral history interviews are a collaborative process of narrative building that will help elucidate and expand on existing substantive knowledge about the playground movement in Edmonton.¹⁷⁰ The secondary literature relates to childhood development, friendship, urban reform and discipline, children’s play, and sense of belonging. An overview begins with the origins of Edmonton playgrounds, then shifts to ideas about play in terms of relational power grounded in a case study analysis of play from adult perspective informed by archival data, and childhood perspectives informed by archival and oral history methods. This study not only traces the development of supervised playgrounds in Edmonton at the beginning of the twentieth century, it also aims to understand how children made their own meanings of play in the Gyro playgrounds when compared to the discourses of play and playgrounds of adult social welfare reformers.

¹⁶⁹ Carly Adams, “Supervised Places to Play; Social Reform, Citizenship, and Femininity at Municipal Playgrounds in London Ontario, 1900-1942,” *Ontario History* CIII, no. 1 (2011): 62.

¹⁷⁰ Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy Patricia, *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (California: SAGE publications, 2011): 132-133.

3.1 Origins of Playgrounds in Edmonton

By the end of the 19th century, reformers across Canada attempted to be part of the child-save movement, utilizing the construction of playgrounds to accomplish their objective to create supervised play spaces for children. It was believed among civic reformers that impoverished living conditions were tied to both poor health and a lack of organized recreational opportunities.¹⁷¹ Local governments, in meeting with citizens started initiatives to improve space for public recreation. Edmonton's first initiatives originated in 1912 with a Parks Commission that addressed issues related to the disposal of grounds for general public as parks and playgrounds. Citizens actively participated through petitions that were sent to the Mayor and Commissioners of the City of Edmonton. Childhood health was a concern and J.M. Watson and 126 others petitioned for lands on July, 1912:

We the undersigned, owners and occupiers of property in east end center of the City, beg respectfully to submit this our petition, praying that you will give consideration to, and if possible grant, the placing at the disposal of the public the area of land situate between Jasper Avenue on the north and the Rowland street on the south... This land is beautifully situated on the slope of the hill commanding a full river view, adjoining to the enlarged 'Alex Taylor School'. The grounds of which are so limited that it is demanded in the health of the children, that it should be dedicated as an open space.¹⁷²

Adult discourse of safety and health was common when it came to request open spaces for recreation and playgrounds. Both adult supervision and sport activities would help shape the people into a thriving city, and, most importantly, shape the environment of children who were considered the most vulnerable. According to Stephen Hardy, parks were designed as an antidote, a refuge of

¹⁷¹ Wendy Frisby, Ted Alexander, and Janna Taylor, "Play is not a Frill: Poor Youth Facing the Past, Present, and Future of Public Recreation in Canada," in *Lost Kids: Vulnerable Children and Youth in Twentieth-Century Canada and the United States*, ed. Mona Gleason, Tamara Meyers, Leslie Paris, and Veronica Strong-Boag, 215-229 (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2010), 216.

¹⁷² City of Edmonton Archives, City Clerk-Special Committee Reports 1912, RG8.10 /file15.

life conditions in cities. Playgrounds provided a solution of direct control and organization of social life in communities.¹⁷³ Sharon Wall indicates that urban parks offered escapes from the pace activities in cities. They considered a “chaotic world. Streets as dirty, dangerous and crowded and parks as a state of relax calm.”¹⁷⁴ Robert McDonald argues that the purpose and design of urban parks changed from Victorian ideals of parks by the early twentieth century to newer perceptions of urban green space to fulfill recreational needs.

Notably Edmonton was a new small prairie city in 1912, but it already had citizens with formalized sporting interests and organized in different sport clubs. At least four Athletic Associations¹⁷⁵ were established and disputed over space and usage of parks and other grounds for their own sport activities. By 1913, the City of Edmonton had constructed two tennis courts, three baseball diamonds, three football fields, two cricket fields, and two playgrounds at a total expenditure of \$7,866.05.¹⁷⁶ This construction was a signal of the increasing industrialization and growing commercial distractions¹⁷⁷ that allowed women, girls, men, and boys to relate to one another negotiating social space and learning cultural norms.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community 1865-1915* (Boston: North Eastern University Press, 1982), 86.

¹⁷⁴ Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism, and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 27.

¹⁷⁵ City of Edmonton Archives, City Clerk-Special Committee Reports 1913. RG8.10 /file21; Baseball Association, Golf Club, Cricket Club and Football Club.

¹⁷⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, City Clerk-Special Committee Reports 1914, Commissioner Reports-Parks and Markets, RG.8.10, box 4, file 30.

¹⁷⁷ Adams, 60.

¹⁷⁸ Adams, 69.

To the reformers, knowledge was a near panacea. This was the beginning of the age of the ‘specialist’ and the ‘professional,’¹⁷⁹ whereas ‘experts of childhood’ intervened in the upbringing of children in Canadian families. Childhood became more central and considered with special ‘needs’ that implicated nurture and guidance¹⁸⁰ from experienced professionals who studied children from different perspectives. Psychologists, social workers, doctors and nurses would likely think they had the answers for parents in disciplining actions. Child welfare was clearly a major concern among federal and local governments. The Federal government passed the Juvenile Delinquency Act in 1908, and Alberta followed with the Children’s Protection Act, on February 25, 1909. Robert B. Chadwick was appointed the Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children for the Province of Alberta.¹⁸¹ Once Chadwick died, he was succeeded by Provincial Superintendent Archibald McDonald, who left his position on May 15, 1920, to take on a position in Cleveland, Ohio. Kenneth C. McLeod succeeded McDonald and served as superintendent from 1920 until 1935.¹⁸² One of his main duties was to supervise the work that was being done on behalf of children by voluntary organizations.¹⁸³ Significantly, McLeod was also involved during these same years with the Gyro Club of Edmonton. As a member he encouraged young male citizens to become part of the Gyro Club. Stanley Noel Smith, a well-known businessman, remembers McLeod as a mentor who

¹⁷⁹ Paul Rutherford, “Tomorrows Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1880-1920,” *Historical Papers* 6, no.1 (1971): 214.

¹⁸⁰ Peter Sterns, *Childhood in World History* (New York: Routledge: 2006), 5.

¹⁸¹ Baldwin Reichwein, “Looking Back: Child Saving in Edmonton 1900-1971,” *Unpublished paper* (2009): 3-4.

¹⁸² Reichwein, 14-15

¹⁸³ Michael Rothery, Gallup Jim, Tillman Gene, and Allerd Herb, “Local Governance of Child Welfare Services in Alberta,” *Child Welfare* 74, no.3 (1995): 592.

persuaded him of the benefits of joining the club.¹⁸⁴ Kenneth McLeod was a key prominent professional figure among local child savers focused on the welfare of children and programs established for Gyro playgrounds in Edmonton.

Eastern Canada was already ahead of the West with policies related to the welfare of Canadian children. In 1893, John Joseph Kelso began as Ontario's first Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children with responsibilities for overseeing all voluntary child-welfare programmes in the province.¹⁸⁵ In 1914 he wrote to the public "A Plea for Recreation and Playgrounds" that revealed playgrounds as the 'panacea' for Canada's future: "At playgrounds children would find a place to become happy and healthy. Someday the qualified and trained supervisor of play will be the popular children's doctor. His prescription will be made up of fresh air, sunshine, activity and laughter."¹⁸⁶ Kelso persuaded the wealthy and philanthropists to consider playground policy in towns and cities in order to claim posterity. As he once wrote "Any wealthy person who wishes to leave behind him an honoured name should donate a playground... Put your money into a movement that crowds sunshine and happiness into the lives of boys and girls..."¹⁸⁷

Edmonton Gyro Club members assumed responsibilities heading up various social and civic organizations. They saw the child as tomorrow's hope for a better society and invested in education as an instrument of social and moral improvement.¹⁸⁸ As a men's service club, one of its objectives

¹⁸⁴ Gyroscope: Gyro International Newsmagazine, October, November, December 2011, http://international.gyro.ws/index_htm_files/8%20Binder3.pdf (accessed March 05, 2013).

¹⁸⁵ Craig Heron, "Saving the Children," review of *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* by Joy Parr, 168-175 *Acadiensis* 13 no.1 1983, 170.

¹⁸⁶ John Joseph Kelso, *Playgrounds, One of Canada's Greatest Needs: A Call to Service for the Children of the Future; a Plea for Recreation and Playgrounds* (Toronto: Parliament Buildings, 1914), 8.

¹⁸⁷ Kelso, 8-11

¹⁸⁸ Rutherford, 206.

was the awakening and maintenance of interest in public affairs, and civic and community activities.¹⁸⁹ They chose to put their efforts toward the construction of playgrounds with emphasis on education and culture that would allow producing and promoting ideal childhood gender identities and learning the correct norms for future life.¹⁹⁰



Fig. 4: Children Posing in Gyro Playground Boyle Street, c. 1930. Source: City of Edmonton Archives /File EA-211-5

Playgrounds were open May to August during summer months and all were supervised by a trained play director who was strategically chosen by the members of the club. The success of playgrounds was not considered only by the type of equipment constructed, but rather success was due to the quality of supervision that encouraged and guided children towards a healthy life style. A wise play-leader was considered the key to success because “with a good play-leader the smallest

¹⁸⁹ Glenbow Archives Calgary, The Gyro Club Fonds, Series 11, M-8734, Unprocessed records (ca. 1920-1950): *Executive manual of Gyro 1954*.

¹⁹⁰ Elizabeth Gagen, “An Example to Us All: Child Development and Identity Construction in Early 20th-Century Playgrounds,” *Environment and Planning* 32, no. 4 (2000): 599-606.

space may be turned into a children's paradise."¹⁹¹ The Gyro Club was committed to child welfare and their ideals reflect J.J. Kelso "Plea for recreation and Playgrounds":

The success or failure of the playground movement depends not so much on the size of the grounds or their equipment as the spirit that animates the management... while it is important for the Parks commission to provide grounds and fit them for the purpose, it is equally necessary to have supervisors to encourage and guide the children and growing youth in their amusements.¹⁹²

The Gyro Club members were well known citizens highly supported by Edmontonians. Their success was attributed to their great efforts to improve the city and their continuous civic duties accomplished in the city. The 'Gyro Men' developed diverse activities to improve the welfare of children, from the week-long carnival fundraiser that gathered children from all over Edmonton, to an 'apple day' in the fall where Gyro members dressed up as clowns to sell apples on the streets.¹⁹³ And perhaps one of their most important achievement, the Gyro Playgrounds. These public spaces encouraged opportunities for interaction and social communication¹⁹⁴ that allowed long-lasting friendship.

3.2 Playgrounds as a Means to 'Disciplinary Power'

Foucault's concept of relational power,¹⁹⁵ presupposes multiple forms of power. Social reformers, particularly those related to child welfare practiced 'disciplinary power' to control judgement and normalisation of subjects in such a way that they are destined to a certain mode of

¹⁹¹ Kelso, 9.

¹⁹² Kelso, 16.

¹⁹³ Author's interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March, 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

¹⁹⁴ Mireia Ferre Baylina, Ana Ortiz Guitard, and Maria Prats Ferret, "Children and Playgrounds in Mediterranean Cities," *Children Geographies* 4, no.2 (2006): 178.

¹⁹⁵ Pirko Markula and Richard Pringle, *Foucault, Sports and Exercise: Power, Knowledge and Transforming the Self* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 38.

living.¹⁹⁶ Canadian childhood was moulded and influenced by the moral reform movement that was moved by social purity ideals. Mariana Valverde refers to this movement as a means for regulation rather than suppression or censorship,¹⁹⁷ thus the aim of it was “not as much to suppress as to re-create and re-moralize not only deviants from its norms but, increasingly, the population of Canada as a whole.”¹⁹⁸

The power relations between adults and children reveal the practices of dominance exercised with a series of aims and objectives.¹⁹⁹ While adults were considered responsible, competent and strong, children were regarded as irresponsible, incompetent and vulnerable.²⁰⁰ Regimes of power were a method to keep children under control and also show them to become model citizens. Power and control over children was considered necessary to shape their character²⁰¹ and make them ‘civilized.’ Foucault argues that the relations of power were not to be considered negative or positive; he suggests that the emergence of power is linked to the capitalist states and with the men of modern humanism.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ Markula, 38.

¹⁹⁷ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada 1885-1925*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 33.

¹⁹⁸ Valverde, 32.

¹⁹⁹ Markula, 37.

²⁰⁰ Gill Valentine, “Exploring Children and Young People’s Narratives of Identity,” *Geoforum* 31 no.2, (2000): 258.

²⁰¹ P.N. Moogk, “Les Petits Sauvages: The Children of Eighteenth-Century New France,” in *Histories of Canadian Children and Youth*, ed. Nancy Janovicek and Joe Parr, 36-56 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 36.

²⁰² Markula, 39.

The child-saving movement emerged in Canadian society as a means to improve family life and prevent inappropriate behaviours.²⁰³ Child welfare became a common topic in the cities. Street play was considered a threat to public order,²⁰⁴ because children were regarded as undisciplined in nature and would make poor decisions when spare time was not taken under adult control. Leisure time for working-class youth was largely free from adult supervision and frequently centred on street activities. But fear of juvenile delinquency and limited tolerance for unsupervised street play led reformers to construct places where children could play under surveillance. Childhood experts were concerned about the moral development of childhood and believed it was necessary to intervene. Unsupervised play alerted adult social reformers to create different movements that would redeem childhood and keep them in a safe place to play. According to reformers, chaos threatened urban environments. City childhood was identified with problems related to lack of order in personal lives, families, schools, and communities.²⁰⁵ One of the most influenced reform manifestations was the playground movement that emerged as a desire to constructively channel the energies of children and youth. Play was always a significant part of childhood, but the ability to learn while playing was equally important, in the eyes of reformers.

It was common for the ‘experts’ to consider unregulated play as unhealthy and a threat to society, and the desire to control ‘unruly children’ became the most important issue among reformers. Therefore, the construction of playgrounds was a movement that gave hope to improve the conditions in cities providing outdoor space, controlled and supervised by adults. On this

²⁰³ James Marten, “A New View of the Child: Children and Youth in Urban America, 1900-1920,” *Romanian Journal of Population Studies* 11, no. 1(2008): 71.

²⁰⁴ Collin Howell, *Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 10.

²⁰⁵ Marten, 70.

account, it was not conceivable to allow immature young people freedom from control, because it was believed there could be consequence in the community and even an increase in crime. At a time when the challenge of industrialization and urbanization was believed to increase negative effects in children's lives, movements such as the Gyro Club aimed at restabilising children behaviour through play and community development.

3.3 The Effects of the Reform Movement

At the beginning of the twentieth century, significant changes swept Canadian families. Middle-class men and women led the reform movement,²⁰⁶ which included proposed changes in childrearing practices, child labour regulation and compulsory education. A discourse surrounding the protection of children and youth took shape, which resulted in images of children and youth as vulnerable citizens who required protection. Remediation and prevention were highlighted in child saving. Urban problems were addressed by a new breed of professionals who were part of the child-saving movement: social workers, doctors, teachers, psychologists. Parents were told how to treat children and authoritative lessons on how to raise youth were common among different groups. However, traditionally mothers acted as a central role model for children,²⁰⁷ while men were considered 'breadwinners' and left child rearing as work for women. Daly Kerry suggests that the absence of preparation for fatherhood was because they had not received education or support necessary "to foster more involvement with their children."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth-Century Consensus* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 4.

²⁰⁷ Daly Kerry, "Reshaping Fatherhood: "Finding Models,"" *Journal of Family Issues* 14, no.4 (1995):510.

²⁰⁸ Kerry, 510-511.

There was a strong belief that the environment held tremendous influence on the child's life. It was mandatory that Canadian families understood that what they taught their children would affect their lives and thus impact society. According to Marc Jans, the term 'ecological' regards the environment that surrounds children as they grow up and it will determine child participation in society, along with their participation as citizens.²⁰⁹ The Gyro Club trusted that playgrounds would change the environment surrounding children in Edmonton. They envisioned an improvement in citizen participation with the play programs that would enhance discipline but at the same time help build friendship and sense of belonging towards their community and the city.

Experts believed adult intervention in childhood was a priority. Children were considered in a learning process, and consequently did not naturally know how to shape themselves.²¹⁰ English-speaking Canadian reformers saw a child's need for firm but loving care,²¹¹ and, above all, expected the child to act, think, feel and behave in a prescribed manner.²¹² The intervention of adults in children's lives was considered a 'disciplinary power' that reformers used as a technique to adapt children into the adult world of civilization and responsibilities. Until the middle of the twentieth century, it was considered a fact that children were prone to cruelty, aggression, and the major purpose of the upbringing was to restrain and redirect those impulses.²¹³ It was assumed that childhood was not biological given, but was the product of social interactions within a power

²⁰⁹ Marc Jans, "Children as Citizens: Towards a Contemporary Notion of Child Participation," *Journal of Childhood* 1, no. 11 (2004): 35.

²¹⁰ Kay Hymowitz, *Ready or Not: What happens When we Treat Children as Small Adults* (San Francisco: Encounter books, 2000), 11.

²¹¹ Sutherland, 19.

²¹² Hymowitz, 41

²¹³ Hymowitz, 6.

structure.²¹⁴ Reformers were concerned for the future of the nation, and because child development was crucial to obtain positive outcomes, disciplinary actions would impose homogeneity and train its future citizens. These fears and preoccupations of how children would affect the nation of Canada made a big transition from the laissez-faire to the welfare state system. This system was meant to intervene in parenthood, because it was not considered a biological instinct, but rather it was subject to training and required specialized knowledge.²¹⁵ Therefore, child socialization became a priority to the Canadian government, especially among specialists in charge of the new agencies that supervised the less fortunate²¹⁶ and, as we have seen among voluntary sector groups. For reformers, it was significant how children spent leisure time, thereby, not having appropriate opportunities for recreational space would eventually result in children who did not behave right and lead them to crime.²¹⁷ Training children became a western concept of childhood superimposed from a behaviour point of view. This education was developed by the dominant group of Euro-Canadian experts and educators who insisted in controlling childhood to shape character.

Professionals in Canada believed that ‘play’ was necessary for healthy development of the child. On October 1929, the Canadian Council on Child Welfare, under Charlotte Whiton, asserted that play was vital to child health.²¹⁸ In Montreal, the Council’s Harriet Mitchell, presented this argument. As a strong advocate of play and pre-school development, she proposed

²¹⁴ D.E. Chunn, “Boys will be Men, Girls will be Mothers: The Legal Regulation of Childhood in Toronto and Vancouver,” in *Histories of Canadian Children and Youth*, ed. Nancy Janovicek and Joy Parr, 188-206 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 188.

²¹⁵ Chunn, 192.

²¹⁶ Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 14.

²¹⁷ Marten, 71.

²¹⁸ Provincial Archives Edmonton, Acc. 68.218, “Authority States Play is Vital to Child Health,” *Edmonton Journal*, page 22, October 5, 1929.

that children require free play for proper development. She stated adults had the misconception that play was a luxury and not necessary for childhood. As reported by the *Edmonton Journal* in 1929, Mitchell emphasized play was essential:

There is an increasing tendency on part of parents to fill up the child's day with activities that cannot properly be called play. In some homes the time of Children is so divided up and directed that there is very little opportunity for them to play spontaneously and freely. This is highly undesirable.²¹⁹

Mitchell's early-twentieth-century argument children should experience spontaneous and free play shares some common assumptions with current issues of overly structured children presented by Richard Louv.²²⁰ Historically, the idea of free play has been seen as critical for children to become socially adapted to their environment and acquire skills to build a better future.

3.4 Play and Sense of Community from a Child's Perspective

While much attention gravitates to childhood reformers, how children experienced play and playground is less understood. For this reason, the oral history based on evidence and interpretation of childhood memories will attempt to grasp a better idea of past play experiences in Edmonton. The understanding of life experiences of adults who once played in the Gyro playgrounds as children will help elucidate and expand on the existing knowledge about social welfare reformers and their own conceptions of play embedded in the Gyro playground programs.

Drawing from archival documents, newspapers, and City of Edmonton's minutes, it is possible to understand the Gyro Playground from a local perspective on municipal-level

²¹⁹ Provincial Archives Edmonton, Acc. 68.218, "Authority States Play is Vital to Child Health," *Edmonton Journal*, page 22, October 5, 1929.

²²⁰ Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2008), part 1, *passim*.

recreation driven and operated by a private men's civic club partnered with the City. In order to explore further, oral history becomes a crucial tool in understanding children's interactions with playgrounds and their neighbourhoods. I will explore this avenue in a small pilot investigation pertaining to one playground site to probe what might be gained from such a method.

Typically children who attend playgrounds often live in nearby localities and consequently may formulate a sense of community in relation to shared 'spatial experiences.'²²¹ This 'sense of space' should not be mistaken by a geographic location; but rather 'places' are associated with memories, values and feelings²²² that describe human relationships, attachment, commitment and belonging to place.²²³ One benefit of sense-of-place experiences is the way they foster attachment to a particular place and the unique elements of that place.²²⁴ Playgrounds are particularly interesting to study because they are spaces with unique social interactions among children and adults, but mostly among peers in the playground environment; however, it is also important to point that 'childhood experts' consider play as a means to prepare children for what they may do and experience later in life.²²⁵ According to historian Carly Adams, playgrounds were a "life-defining experience" that met with the needs of children, but also the relationships between childhood character formation and between childhood exercise and health.²²⁶ Palmer

²²¹ Grant Tyler Peterson, "Playgrounds Which Would Never Happen Now, Because they'd be Far Too Dangerous": Risk, Childhood Development and Radical Sites of Theatre Practice," *Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 16, no.3 (2011): 387.

²²² Anette Sandberg, "Play Memories and Place Identity," *Early Child Development and Care*, 173(2003): 207.

²²³ Sudeshna Chatterjee, "Children's Friendship with Place: A Conceptual Inquiry," *Children Youth and Environments* 15 no. 1, (2005): 3.

²²⁴ Wilson, 29.

²²⁵ Wilson, 1.

²²⁶ Howard Palmer, and Tamara Palmer, *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), 99.

suggests that playgrounds helped children imitate their peers' 'ideas and ideals.' These play spaces promoted the construct of 'One Community' through play and, in doing so, promoted nationalism.²²⁷ The Gyro playgrounds brought together children from the same community, many travelled long distances to participate in the programs on a daily basis. At the end of the season, children from three distinctive neighbourhoods – McCauley, Oliver, and Queen Alexandra, as well as both sides of the North Saskatchewan River – came together to compete in an Inter-Playground tournament. Each child identified herself/himself with a local neighbourhood playground community. It seemed as if playgrounds were a space where children have created an identity and ownership of that 'space' and thereby a sense of belonging.

The recollection of childhood memories in the Gyro playgrounds reveals play experiences in playgrounds. Life stories as a means of constructing the past focusing on how things are emphasized, forgotten and associated²²⁸ will give a unique perspective on how supervised playgrounds were seen from a child's view. The interpretations of older adults who experienced play in the Gyro playgrounds as children will help to inform and enhance a new understanding of the past and give meaning to modern childhood.

3.4.1 Sally Stewart

Sally Stewart was born in the small rural town of Evansberg, Alberta. She was a young girl when she moved with her family to Edmonton where she grew up during most of her youth. Her father was offered an urban professional job with the Alberta provincial government, and decided to travel with his four children and wife to the capital city. She was the second youngest

²²⁷ Palmer, 100.

²²⁸ Leen Bayers, "Unfolding Urban Memories and Ethnic Identities: Narratives of Ethnic Diversity in Limberg, Belgium" in *Testimonies of the City: Identity, Community and Change in Contemporary Urban World*, ed. Richard Rodger and Joanna Herbert, 119-138 (England: Ashgate, 2007), 121.

of four siblings. At first, she lived quite a walking distance from Kitchener Park and her father would walk her over in the evenings to push her on the swings. In 1936, when she was eight years old, her father bought a house nearby the government district and directly in front of the Kitchener playground on 116 Street and 103 Avenue. She visited the park several times a week used the equipment and infrastructure built by the Gyro Club and shared with children of the community. Kitchener Gyro playground became part of Sally's memories of her childhood and life experiences of play with the children who visited the park. Most importantly it was where she made a friendship lasting for more than seventy years.

3.4.2 Gordon Robertson

Gordon Robertson was born and raised in Edmonton. He lived with his parents and two brothers in the nearby localities of Jasper Avenue. His father was a salesman for John Deere Company. As a young boy, he lived in 105 Street and 103 Avenue. It was not in a walking distance from Kitchener playground, therefore he has no early memories of playing at the park. In 1935, when Gordon was in Grade Five, his father bought a house on 122 Street and 102 Avenue. It was a distance of several blocks to get to Kitchener Park, however, he would ride his bike or even walk to the playground several times a week to meet his friends and play. Gordon remembers that he and his younger brother had no fears wandering around the neighbourhood because their mother, who was a homemaker, considered it was a good neighbourhood and her boys would go on their own.

3.5 Playgrounds: Friendship and Community Development

Sally Stewart was born on March 23, 1928, and has fond memories of Kitchener Gyro Park located in Oliver neighbourhood in downtown Edmonton. In 1936, she was in Grade Three

when she moved in a house in front of the playground. The first memories that came into her mind when she was asked about her experience in the playgrounds was meeting a girl in the park named Peggy Brown. Their long-lasting friendship still continues more than seventy years later.

Reflecting on this friendship, Sally recalls:

I am just trying to decide how old I was when we moved into that house in grade three so... and I met a girl in the playground who subsequently has been my friend for seventy odd years, it's just kind of interesting... She was just staying with an aunt or whatever she was next door to where the playground was and that's how I met her. It's interesting to know that we've been friends all these years ever since that chance meeting, on and off because she would be away and she would be back and I would meet her again.²²⁹

This example of Sally's long-lasting friendship is what Carly Adams refers to "life defining experiences." The playground programs gave opportunities to children to create kinship ties with peers and community. Kitchener Park, allowed two girls to connect and initiate a bond that changed the rest of their lives. Sally's friend, Peggy, came from Calgary with her mother to visit someone who lived next to Kitchener Gyro playground. That particular park became a social space that allowed these two young girls from different cities and communities to build a relationship that perhaps otherwise would have never happened.

Sally's first connection to Kitchener Park was at a very early stage when her family lived within walking distance from the park. Her dad would walk her over in the evenings and push her on the swings. "I was 5 or 6 years when the park meant something to me."²³⁰ But, when she moved into a house just in front of the park, the playground became part of Sally's life and she would play several times a week for long hours until she heard the CNR railroad whistle:

²²⁹ Author's interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

²³⁰ Author's interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

The railroad whistle went at noon and five o'clock that was for the railroad employees. But we were supposed to pay attention to that whistle and come home for meals and some home to do our jobs, or whatever our patents had us to do. She remembers that kids had to pay attention to the railroad whistle that was really meant for the employees, but for kids that played in the park it meant it was time for lunch or time to go home to do their jobs or whatever parents had told them to do.²³¹

Children's play was shaped by the city environment. Playground activities were subject to the interaction with the steam whistle and communities engaged on a daily basis. Sally recalls that "You could hear it almost all over the city."²³² Implicitly, work in the city determined social life in Edmonton. Family environment was organized by the railroad whistle intervening in the construction of discipline associated with meals and work schedules for both adults and children.

Gordon Robertson was born in 1925 and played in Kitchener Park as a teenager during summer vacations from 1937 to 1940. Gordon reported he was not the only boy or girl to visit the park. He believed Gyro playgrounds were part of a daily experience of every child in Edmonton. Most importantly, during years of the Great Depression, the Gyro Club made efforts to continue with the playground activities and reach out to most families who could not afford to leave the city for summer holidays, according to *Edmonton Journal* on October 8, 1932:

Children had been more in evidence at the playgrounds than ever before. Families that in other years were able to go away for part of the summer has had to remain in the city and the Gyro playground have taken the places of the beaches and lakes to the youngsters.²³³

Playgrounds were part of children's lives during summer time when children were out of school and had no obligations but the household chores and odd jobs. Playground infrastructure

²³¹ Author's interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

²³² Sally Stewart, "Those Old Gyro were lots of fun, but..." on the web page, *Edmonton Journal*, October 22, 1998: G2, retrieved from: <http://login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/252555966?accountid=14474>.

²³³ City of Edmonton Archives, Clipping files, *Edmonton Journal*, October 08, 1932. *Gyro Clubmen Provide Fine Playgrounds for Children*.

became essential to the middle-class and working-class families in Edmonton, who did not have other opportunities for recreation and leisure. “Every kid would go to the playground.”²³⁴ Gordon remembers visiting the park every day just to make friends. He recalls, “We had lots of fun! We would stay for hours just to play and meet friends.”²³⁵ Gordon’s experience in the playgrounds involved free and unstructured play. As a teenager, he did not spend time in the Gyro playgrounds concerned about the supervisor’s activities or programs. Instead he would use the Gyro playgrounds as a space to explore social and emotional skills with peers of his same age and sex.

Childhood expert Harriet Mitchell strongly believed that play was an important part of the health in childhood, and she proposed free play was essential for the development of children. Although she referred to pre-school ages, she also believed that there was a misconception among parents who believed that free play was not constructive for the upbringing. Gordon and his teenage friends believed that their ‘play’ activities were unsupervised and free from structure. They would meet in the parks to play sports and hang out until they had to go back home for lunch. However, it is important to notice that these teen boys chose the playground as a place to socialize and meet for their play activities, yet, the playground was at all moments under supervision and there was equipment available to practice sport games. These teenagers chose to play in an environment that was under supervision although they did not participate directly in the programs. The reasons for this may have been that different equipment, such as, balls and

²³⁴ Author’s interview with Gordon Robertson, 19 February 2013, Edmonton, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

²³⁵ Author’s interview with Gordon Robertson, 19 February 2013, Edmonton, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

bats, was provided for leisure activities. Playgrounds were also a public space and gathering place for them.

In late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most playgrounds in American cities were part of the social welfare movement. Advocates primarily “fostering care for the poor”²³⁶ existed in cities like Boston, however Edmonton Gyro Club was seen to support ‘all’ children without creating differences among social classes. According to the *Edmonton Journal* in 1930, “Gyro work is not aimed particularly at the under-privileged child but for all children and it was for this reason that the club organized the three playgrounds and threw them open to any child who cared to use them.”²³⁷



Fig. 5: Children Posing on a Big Slide. ‘May Day.’ Source: City of Edmonton Archives /File EA-509-10.

²³⁶ Jerry G. Dickson, “The Origins of the Playground: The Role of the Boston Women’s Clubs, 1885-1890,” *Leisure Sciences* 6, no. 1 (1983):90.

²³⁷ City of Edmonton Archives, Clipping files, *Edmonton Journal*, October 15, 1930. *Edmonton Children Benefit From Work of Gyro Club*.

Organized sports were also part of the play programs. Each park was equipped with softball diamonds as well as basketball and volleyball courts.²³⁸ Sports were considered well organized with inter-park teams that played ball games. At the end of the year, a shield would be given to the park with the highest standing.²³⁹ During August, the Gyro Club organized the annual playground day with sport competitions between boys and girls from all three playgrounds.²⁴⁰ Children who participated in these sport competitions had the opportunity to create connections through sport participation, linking Edmonton's children from the North, West and South sides. Once a season children gathered for a Children's Circus with a street parade. Children were asked to come in their own diverse styles of ethnic dress and to share games they played in their countries of origin.²⁴¹ The children in Edmonton not only experienced sport activities through the Gyro playgrounds, but also were able to create friendship bonds with children from other neighbourhoods that otherwise might never have happened.

Sally remembers participating in organized sports. Baseball or 'scrubby-ball' was a sport that was played frequently in a recreational level that did not exclude by gender:

We played organized sports, we played baseball where if you're the last one you join. You would say who's the last? And then you're the next one, and then you gradually work your way up to batter, which I was terrible at! And then you would start all over again. It was great fun! But even though I couldn't hit the ball worth a darn, and when I did hit the ball by chance I used to throw the bat and they used to say *Oh no don't*

²³⁸ City of Edmonton Archives, Clipping files, *Edmonton Journal*, May 22, 1937, Gyro Grounds to be opened on Saturday.

²³⁹ City of Edmonton Archives, Clipping files, *Edmonton Journal*, October 7, 1938, *Gyro Parks Visited by 1,000 Children Daily*.

²⁴⁰ City of Edmonton Archives, Clipping files, *Edmonton Journal*, October 8, 1932. *Gyro Clubmen Provide Fine Playgrounds for Children*.

²⁴¹ City of Edmonton Archives, Clipping files, *Edmonton Journal*, October 1925. *Childrens Circus at Kitchener Square*.

throw the bat! That kind of things... That's the only organized sport I participated in.²⁴²

Urban public spaces stimulate the emergence of a wide variety of activities, behaviours and relationships.²⁴³ These kinds of recreational organized sports in playgrounds led to unfold a wide construction of social practices that were implicit in the structure of the game. Recreational sports were overlooked by the typical sport competitions that occurred in the Gyro playgrounds. Yet, these types of sport activities were important because there was no exclusion by gender and there were no requirements or conditions to play. Children had the capacity to organize the game under no supervision or only when needed. When Sally recalls in her play memories that children in the park would ask “who’s next?” it is an indication of children’s ability to play on their own but at the same time respect peers without discriminating gender or skills. Everyone participated without conditions. This may be part of the process to change children’s social practices, whereas children learned to wait for their turn and embrace every kid’s participation even those who were not skilled. In the Gyro playgrounds, boys and girls had the opportunity to connect with others through sports that were not necessarily competitive. Jeroen Vermeulen’s study considered sport to be a bridge towards healthy life and also presumed that sports have the capacity to connect people.²⁴⁴ In this case, Gordon was not interested in organized play at the playgrounds as he grew older and did not remember the supervisor-led activities at all. “It was a common thing to meet at playgrounds and decide what to play until it was time to head back home.”²⁴⁵ Perhaps his attention was centered in free play and having a place to interact with peers, but at the same time

²⁴² Author’s interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

²⁴³ Baylina, 178.

²⁴⁴ Jeroen Vermeulen, “The Bridge as Playgrounds: Organizing Sport in Public Space,” *Culture and Organization* 17, no.3 (2011): 232.

²⁴⁵ Author’s interview with Gordon Robertson, 19 February 2013, Edmonton, Alberta, notes in possession of author

has access to sport equipment. As Gordon recalls he mostly experienced free play and unstructured activities: “We would have a ball and just play with other kids.”²⁴⁶

Edmonton Gyro playgrounds were supervised by trained male ‘play directors’. This seasonal job was held by young university students and allowed them to have income during summer vacations. It was perhaps an atypical scenario compared to many other cities in Canada where local female school teachers²⁴⁷ were usually in charge of playgrounds and the programs established in supervised places. The active involvement of men in playgrounds served as a key role in local communities. The vision of young male university students in playgrounds shaped a different and holistic type of play that allowed ‘free play’ and unstructured activities, but at the same time delivered expertise in physical and sport activities. Sally has great memories of the male supervisor who was in charge of every activity inside the playground boundaries:

He was the park supervisor. There was only one person. He was responsible for everything he was there in the morning when he unlocked the park gate and he was there about until 8:30 or 9:00 at night until he locked the park gate. What long hours he worked I was thinking about that... he worked long hours but he was awfully glad to have a job, he was a university student, maybe not... I think he was, because it was a seasonal work and then he would go back to school or whatever.²⁴⁸

The supervisor of the Gyro playground worked long hours and was in charge of different tasks in the park. Sally remembers her supervisor with clarity. His name was Gerry. Children would interact with ‘him’ for several reasons. He was responsible for the ‘shack’ that was located at each park with different kind of equipment that they would hand to the boys and girls to play while in the park. Sally recalls: “All the kids would go to him for the balls and bats because there

²⁴⁶ Author’s interview with Gordon Robertson, 19 February 2013, Edmonton, Alberta, notes in possession of author

²⁴⁷ Susan Markham, “Early Efforts to professionalise Leisure Services in Canada,” *Avante* 11, no. 1 (2005): 17.

²⁴⁸ Author’s interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

was a shack that was locked up and he would give them out and then put them away.”²⁴⁹ It seems kids relied on Gyro sport equipment for their play. Perhaps it was an effort that the Gyro Club stressed in order to provide sports gear to share and access opportunities to children from different communities. Gerry the supervisor would also blow the whistle, gather the kids around the ‘Red Ensign,’ and lower the flag. He would close the gates and make sure everything was put away.

He also acted as umpire, coached kids on the parallel bars,²⁵⁰ and intervened when needed. For example, Sally preferred to play on the parallel bars presumably because she considered herself really good at it, and, sometimes, the supervisor would come along and instruct children how to do it properly:

I played on the parallel bars all the time personally I played at the parallel bars a lot. Because I was rather good at it and so naturally I would play on it. And sometimes the young fellow I think his name was Gerry that year, I am sure his name was Gerry, he came and kind of instructed us how to do it.²⁵¹

This form of intervention shows how the supervisor allowed free play and self-directed physical literacy combined with casual pedagogical intervention. He certainly was responsible for all activities inside the playground establishment, however, he would get involved with children’s play when he considered it was necessary, either for safety standards, or to instruct in physical activities.

²⁴⁹ Author’s interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author

²⁵⁰ Sally Stewart, “Those Old Gyro were lots of fun, but...” on the web page, Edmonton Journal, October 22, 1998: G2, retrieved from: <http://login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/252555966?accountid=14474>.

²⁵¹ Author’s interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

The ‘educative social purpose’²⁵² of playgrounds was meant to be a dual need to protect children from the danger of the streets and safeguard the streets. In 1928, Alberta’s Lieutenant Governor Egbert initiated a safety movement for Edmontonians. Public men, police officials, and teachers were part of the safety movement. A great number of school children signed the safety pledge at Government House. Unfortunately, in 1929, nine-year old, Moira Holmes suffered a fatal car accident in Edmonton, which moved Alderman Rice Sheppard to enhance this safety movement again:

I say that the city is whole-heartedly behind the safety club movement, and stands ready to do something possible to forward it. By all means have our children renew their pledge either in classes at school, or in their homes. And let parents and teachers instil into the children, the vital necessity for always keeping that pledge, as by so doing, we may prevent much sorrow in the future.²⁵³

According to reformers, once children were removed from the streets playgrounds became a focus of intervention whereby it was possible to develop civic behaviour among the children.²⁵⁴ However, contrary to this situation, families in Edmonton allowed their children to hang around freely in their neighbourhood and along the North Saskatchewan River valley and ravines. Perhaps parents did not have the same conceptions and concerns about the surrounding areas Edmonton, and did not see the streets as dangerous places to play.

Sally remembers that the park was not the only place children would go and play. They would do other activities, such as visit the library or just walk to the river valley with her brother and sister. She believed that her family was not an exception to other families but rather it was

²⁵² Margaret Kernan, “Developing Citizenship through Supervised Play: The Civics Institute of Ireland Playgrounds, 1933-75,” *History of Education: Journal of the History of Education* 34, no. 6 (2005): 675.

²⁵³ Provincial Archives Edmonton, Acc. 68.218; *Take Safety Pledge again Lieut.-Governors Message To Children of Edmonton*, Edmonton Journal, page 1, October 2, 1929.

²⁵⁴ Kernan, 675.

quite typical to see children play in the river valley and ride their bikes everywhere without adult supervision. Sally recalls:

There were other things I would do, you know. My sister and brother and I, we would walk down to the river Valley Park, along the river valley. We could walk anywhere we wanted to walk; we didn't have fear of anything.... So we would go down along big stretch steps ... down the hill ... and we would go down the hill... and walk across the golf course and throw things in the river, and stuff like that.²⁵⁵

Sally's memories of play tells us some middle-class British-Canadian Edmonton kids living in Oliver walked around the city opting in and out of both supervised and unsupervised spaces to play. They seem to be fairly independent and self-directed in selecting what to do by moving around their neighbourhoods and the natural areas in the river valley. It also suggests kids didn't see the good/bad dichotomy in the same way adult reformers did; they also didn't see it the way a typical social control argument would. But most importantly her memories of independent exploration in and around the neighbourhood indicate that her "childhood memories are a vivid picture of how as a child she came to know her local area, and subsequently built knowledge of the local environment as she moved through it."²⁵⁶ This construction of knowledge, according to Pia Christensen, is full of personal and social meaning that will enable the creation of significant meaning to place.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Author's interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author

²⁵⁶ Christensen, 69-70.

²⁵⁷ Christensen, 70.-73



Fig. 6: Children Performing a Play at Tipton Park c. 1920. Source: City of Edmonton Archives /File EA-509-13.

‘Play Directors’ would organize competitions and distinct contests on Saturdays. They would put together several activities, such as jumping and running, which would have prizes like candies and peanuts for children who won the contest. Sally remembers that Saturdays were a special and exciting day: “We all participated or anybody in the park would participate. He would blow the whistle and the kids would gather around.”²⁵⁸ These athletic activities enhanced boys and girls the opportunity to participate through positive reinforcement, which included small incentives that likely improved behaviour to develop good citizenship. These types of reinforcements may have been related to the dominant ideology of child and youth work in the early twentieth century epitomized by R.B. Chadwick, Alberta’s first Superintendent of Neglected Children.²⁵⁹ The Gyro playgrounds of Edmonton were known as ‘neighbourhood play

²⁵⁸ Christensen, 70.-73

²⁵⁹ Rebecca Priegert Coulter, “Patrolling the Passion of Youth,” in *The Life of a City*, ed. Bob Hesketh and Swyripa Frances, 150-160 (Edmonton: Newest, 1995): 152.

centres²⁶⁰ and were under the direction of trained supervisors; typically ‘men’ hired by the Gyro Club members. Sally remembers; “we never had a female represented in our playground we always had a boy, that is interesting!”²⁶¹ It is important to mention that the Gyro Club hired few women for specific jobs in the playgrounds. Only one female supervisor was recruited each season and she would divide her time between three parks. A prominent school teacher Marjorie Davidson and Kathleen Young worked as the story tellers in the Gyro playgrounds.²⁶²

Rebecca Coulter in her study *Patrolling the Passion of Youth* argues that by 1920 parental supervision, especially paternal supervision, was increasingly rare in Edmonton;²⁶³ and there was a necessity to fill the gap left by parents. On the other hand, she notes boys did not have strong male role models in the school teaching profession because mostly it was left to women.²⁶⁴ The Gyro Club not only provided play spaces for girls and boys to play, but they were part of the child-save movement whose major concern was boys. There was a direct relationship with playground ‘Play Directors’ and the emerging ideologies of childhood promoted by child psychologists and educational professionals. The Gyro Club followed the trends and ideologies of most child welfare movements of this period of time. They may have been influenced by the ‘boyology’ studies or driven by the necessity to continue with the guidelines of the Alberta Superintendent of Neglected Children to improve citizens who were to become the future of the country. Their vision of hiring mostly men as supervisors in charge of playgrounds follows the

²⁶⁰ City of Edmonton Archives, Clipping files, *Edmonton Journal*, May 20 1938; *Mayor Will Open Gyro Playgrounds*.

²⁶¹ Author’s interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

²⁶² City of Edmonton Archives, Clipping files, *Edmonton Journal*, May 22, 1937, *Gyro Grounds To be Opened on Saturday*.

²⁶³ Coulter, 154.

²⁶⁴ Coulter 155

ideals of providing youth with educated males with high standards to provide role models and leadership to boys.²⁶⁵ Girls were presumably believed to be less problematic, and storyteller Davidson had specialized in ‘girls’ work as a McGill physical education graduate with experience in Montreal play settings.

In playground areas, ‘play’ was considered of great value, because in this process children learned to discover gender roles.²⁶⁶ And most importantly it was believed that play itself creates habits of care, order, identity, and responsibility. Harriet Mitchell was not only a strong advocate of play in pre-school, but her studies deepened in the overall development of child through play, as noted in the published book by the Canadian Council on Child Welfare, “play is the great instinct and habit educator that a child learns by doing, experiencing and making mistakes.”²⁶⁷

Sally remembers that accidents happened frequently as part of the childhood experience of play in the parks. Both she and her older brother lived an ‘adventure’ that they will never forget. Learning through their mistakes was part of the learning process of free play, which is critical to build cognitive skills like problem-solving. Sally remembers that day clearly:

Another adventure we had in the playground... It was summer holiday, I have gone to swing, I liked swinging. And I went over to swing in the park. And some older big boys were swinging too, they were not threatening me or anything, they were just swinging... But we were supposed to pay attention to that whistle to come home for meals... So I wasn’t paying attention and I was swinging in the park and the whistle went and I kept on swinging, and then my mother called from across... There was a

²⁶⁵ Coulter 155.

²⁶⁶ Baylina, 178.

²⁶⁷ Harriet Mitchell, *Play and Play Materials for Pre-school Child*, Division of parent education, Canadian National Committee for mental Hygiene, Chairman Section on Education, Canadian Council on Child welfare, Ottawa, no. 45. (1900): 4.

big high hedge all around the park and then beyond that a fence. And so you couldn't see over the hedge, there was no way, so we lived right across the street and so my mother would call me: Sally come on over here for lunch! She called it dinner. So I paid no attention and then I paid attention, and I jumped down off the swing started running and ram into the path to the boy that was swinging next to me, and it hit me on the head. It hit me with such force on my head, I was lifted off my feet and I went over the fence, and I was lying on the ground.²⁶⁸

Sally's older brother also had a similar experience of a major accident. She recalls:

One day my older brother, he was very athletic, he said he was going to climb the flagpole, and he climbed that flagpole to the very top. And then he slid down, you know his legs around it! The only thing is that he ripped his leg open from there to there with a cut. That was the way it went.²⁶⁹

Both stories told by Sally are evidence that accidents were typical in children's play spaces. As they chose their own play and decided to take risks, results were unpredictable. However these risky decisions also lead them to an important learning process that would allow children to learn kinaesthetically and make better choices in future. It is important to point out that the interview data shows evidence that the safety and health discourse that adult social reformers stressed for Canadian childhood did not entirely live up to the idealized status of safe places, although first aid from the playground staff at times came to the forefront during operational hours.

Activities in the park were implicitly separated by age and gender. Supervisors and parents did not tell children who to play with, rather it just came 'naturally' according to oral accounts. Sally remembers that boys would play with boys and she would play only with the girls as "It was just that way."²⁷⁰ Only when they played baseball was there no separation by gender when everyone played together. However there was standard sex segregation when it came to the usage of equipment, specifically the slide. The slide was appointed by age, but also

²⁶⁸ Author's interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

²⁶⁹ Author's interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author

²⁷⁰ Author's interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

by gender. The bigger slides were for the older boys and girls, and considered too dangerous for smaller kids. Notwithstanding the smaller slides were explicitly designated for boys under six, whereas girls had no limitations in the usage. This decision may have been a result of the common assumption that boys were too rough and were to be kept under certain restrictions when it came to how and when to use the parks playground equipment. Sally's serious accident was apparently an unintentional collision with an older boy on the swings, yet size and age did matter in cases of travelling mass and velocity. Play supervision was intended to watch over these risks and to instruct safety rules and practices to govern gendered bodies in motion.

The wading pool was a standard amenity and water feature in ever Edmonton Gyro playground. This specific equipment also underwent a distinct separation by age but not related to gender. According to Sally's memories, children decided the usage of these water play areas was for younger kids and toddlers, who were typically accompanied by their respective mothers. Although there were no explicit rules for using these play features, the older kids chose not to use them and left it to smaller kids. On the other hand, the wading pool was seen by parents as a place that could possibly lead to unhealthy conditions as the cleanliness of the water was in dispute. Sally's mother did not think it was appropriate to allow her children in the water because she was worried about the diseases they might contract. Sally recalls, "for one thing my mother told us that the water might not be clean. Besides we were older big kids, we would go over to the big slides, parallel bars and the merry-go -round."²⁷¹ Notably, current efforts to renew Edmonton playgrounds by replacement of wading pools with spray decks emerged from new public health standards and regulations bearing on standing water. In retrospect, mothers like

²⁷¹ Author's interview with Sally Stewart, 4 March 2013, Spruce Grove, Alberta, notes in possession of author.

Mrs. Stewart were observant and, it appears, correct to question water quality and hygiene in playground wading pools.

Based on interview data we can speculate that children who played in the park like Sally chose certain type of activities according to their ages, which may be indicative of their own choices around play. Sally decided to use the parallel bars as an important part of her play in the park. Perhaps it was a challenge for her and girls of her same age. Gordon was a teenager and does not mention using the playground equipment, but he chose to play sports in the park with other boys of his same age. Perhaps teenagers felt that sports were appropriate for their age and would allow them to be more manly according to a conventional sense of masculinity. The Gyro Club of Edmonton was trusted by the City. Each year a growing population supported their playground objective by participating not only directly in the playgrounds but together kept alive a fundraiser Carnival which provided with lots of fun and at the same time a good way to fundraise money for their programs. According to the Edmonton Journal October 8, 1932, there was a growing positive feeling among parents in Edmonton whose children participated in these play centres. “Children were safe under the competent supervision provided by the Gyro Club.”²⁷²

3.6 Conclusions

The Edmonton Gyro Men were educated citizens who were also part of the welfare state, either in their professional roles or as voluntary members of the private charity sector. Lawyers, doctors, journalists and Alberta’s Superintendent of Neglected Children were members of a

²⁷² City of Edmonton Archives, Clipping files, Edmonton Journal, October 08, 1932, “Adversity Overcome by Club, Carries on Important Work.”

respected club. They were able to study children under their own expert eyes and transfer those ideas to the improvement of Edmonton children through the construction of playgrounds and their programs. Children were a major concern among federal and local government therefore Canadian cities were developing new systems of child welfare. Experts in Childhood, such as William Blatz, John Joseph Kelso and Harriet Mitchell were significant pillars that granted value to children's 'play' and the construction of playground spaces. Their studies aimed to develop proper habits of care and responsibilities to become better integrated citizens.

Oral history evidence offers a new insight pointing out a contradiction with what families in Edmonton really thought about unsupervised play spaces. Sally's stories with her brothers tells us at least a few Edmonton kids walked around the city opting in and out of both supervised and unsupervised spaces to play -- they wandered down to the river to throw rocks, they went to the playground for other kinds of play -- and enjoyed liberty of choice and autonomous movement. They seemed to be fairly independent and self-directed in selecting what to do by moving around their urban neighbourhoods and natural areas in the river valley. Even in playgrounds children understood play in their own terms at various times.

Through oral history interviews, it was possible to understand play from a different perspective wherein children were experts in childhood and active agents with their own knowledge and practices of play. With Sally's and Gordon's memories it was possible to make meaning to their own experience of play. Interviews strongly suggest that friendship was a key component in play activities. Children went to the park to meet friends and consequently created deep bonds that became long-lasting friendship. But in addition they experienced unsupervised play in different locations, such as the river valley and the surrounding areas, which appears to have been widely accepted by interwar-era families in Edmonton.

Playgrounds also allowed children to create sense of belonging to their community. They are spaces with unique social interactions among children and adults, but mostly among peers in the playground environment. Children spent a lot of time in these play spaces several times a week which allowed them to foster attachment to that particular place. Gordon's memory tells us that the playground became a second place to be in summer rather than at home. It belonged to the children. They would frequently visit and recognized a common place where children could interact and play freely. Sally knew that she would see her friend again the next summer, as Kitchener playground became their meeting place to connect with a friend.

Foucault's concept of relational power, points to the dynamic of 'disciplinary power' of the social reformers, in order to control children as a means for regulation rather than suppression or censorship. The regimes of power laid out by the Gyro Men, were not only used as a method to keep children under control, but also to show them how to become model citizens.

The Gyro playgrounds were established as a result of the efforts of a group of men who challenged their personal lives to confer a better lifestyle to children and families in Edmonton. These public spaces encouraged opportunities for interaction and social communication that allowed long-lasting friendship. Sally Stewart would go to the park several times a week where she met a lot of kids in the park every year. But most importantly she made a life-long friend 'Peggy.' Boys and girls who spent most of their summers in the Gyro playgrounds have long lasting memories of having a place to play and to meet children from all over Edmonton. Gordon Robertson played four summers in a row in the Gyro playgrounds and remembered playing for long hours and having the opportunity to meet many boys and girls around the city. The oral histories of Sally Stewart and Gordon Robertson's experiences as children at the Gyro

playgrounds offer insights into Edmonton's past that move beyond archival documents and also add to the understanding of the lives of children at play and their active agency that rendered adult hegemony incomplete. The next chapter aims to uncover more about the contribution of the private voluntary sector and public sector within the welfare state. It aims to understand the work generated by urban reformers to construct and maintain playgrounds with a focus on the structures and relationships between the Gyro Club and the City.

CHAPTER FOUR

The City and the Playground, 1920-1950

It was a great thing for the children of Edmonton when the local Gyro Club, looking around for a suitable objective, decided upon the establishment of playgrounds as an enterprise most worthy of its attention. Supervised play was a thing then practically unknown...hundreds of happy kiddies may be found on each of these recreational areas, sliding down chutes, riding the “ocean wave,” whirling around on the “giant stride” or the merry-go-rounds, or enjoying themselves to the full on the various other devices.²⁷³

Edmonton Journal August 20, 1925

4.0 Introduction

Historical analysis of the Gyro Playgrounds of Edmonton can enhance the understanding of social service delivery from a local perspective in Canada. I intend to trace relationships between the government and a key non-governmental agency in the making of the welfare state. This case study shows the complex relationship between the private charitable sector and the public sector in the establishment and management of playgrounds. My research builds on the conceptual framework that Shirley Tillotson provides in her analysis of the welfare state in Canadian cities where “fundraisers tried to make efficiency and impersonality the basis of giving.”²⁷⁴ Although she refers to the establishment of Community Chest, I will make a parallel with Tillotson’s analysis and situate the Gyro Club as a charitable agency that fundraised and dedicated public service toward children’s welfare in Edmonton.

²⁷³ City of Edmonton Archives, Newspaper Clipping files, Edmonton Journal, August 20, 1925, *Over 1,500 Kiddies Make Good Use Gyro Playgrounds Daily*.

²⁷⁴ Shirley Tillotson, *Contributing Citizens: Modern Charitable Fundraising and the Making of the Welfare State, 1920-66*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 1.

The Gyro Club of Edmonton made a thirty-year investment towards playground programs for children. From 1922 to 1950, it played an important role leading the operation and management of supervised playgrounds. The Gyros were a vital volunteer sector organization that used charitable fundraising to deliver playground programs and services in a growing prairie city where the municipal government lacked funds and capacity to fill civic needs. The Gyro playgrounds continued to function despite the difficulties of rapid post-WWI growth in the 1920s, Great Depression crisis in the 1930s, and wartime demands in 1939-1940s. During these years, tensions grew between the Club and the City because funding became scarce and municipal government resisted taking more responsibility over the playground programs until the end of WWII. Mariana Valverde underscores that the private sector was never entirely autonomous rather the process of delivering social services was always a mixed economy, “a system of administering social services that involves a relationship between the state and civil society.”²⁷⁵

This chapter begins from the position that Edmonton’s municipal government lacked adequate resources and political will in the early 1900s to fund children’s playgrounds in neighbourhoods because of economic difficulties and political priorities. The City sought out a partnership with a new voluntary sector agency in the form of a local Gyro Club, which worked to produce playgrounds to fulfill its motto of Power, Poise and Purpose. City’s Parks and Recreation Department gradually took over playgrounds in the mid-1940s after Edmonton had already built a unique structure of government and reserves of city-owned land.²⁷⁶ This chapter

²⁷⁵ Mariana Valverde, “The Mixed Social Economy as a Canadian Tradition,” *Studies in Political Economy* 47 (1995): 34-43.

²⁷⁶ John Weaver, “Edmonton’s Perilous Course, 1904-1929,” *Urban History Review* 6, no.2 (1977): 21.

reveals the work generated by urban reformers to construct and maintain playgrounds in order to improve the City. It seeks to understand actions taken to establish and develop children's playgrounds with a focus on the structures and relationships between the Gyro Club and the City Commissioner and, subsequently, the Recreation Department. The process of construction and management of the Gyro playgrounds in Edmonton deserves a thorough look in order to determine the contribution of the private voluntary sector and public sector, and their involvement with the funding of municipal resources within the welfare state.

I argue that playgrounds benefitted from voluntary sector support and operations that permitted the City of Edmonton to allocate resources and funding elsewhere at a time of scarce resources for social initiatives. How did Edmonton develop and manage playgrounds compared to other cities? Were private agencies capable to respond to the needs of citizens? How did the Gyro Club impact the policies for the provision of municipal playgrounds? How did playground programs transfer and develop under City supervision? How did City of Edmonton institutionalize new structures to govern and operate public playgrounds during the postwar growth of the state and municipal government in the field of recreation? To approach these questions, I will analyze how the Gyro Club's initial work in the playground movement impacted the policies, programs and infrastructure that the City undertook for playgrounds and recreation in Edmonton. A collection of primary and secondary source material is engaged to understand the emergence and periodization of playgrounds and program delivery. The secondary literature that has been engaged is related to political economy, public affairs, urban reform, parks management and children's play.

In the next section, I will describe Edmonton's population and its distribution according to class and ethnicity, which will allow a better understanding of the demographics and neighbourhood areas surrounding the first three playgrounds established in the city. I will also review Edmonton's city clubs and associations as an important part of the voluntary sector that contributed to community and city life. Finally, I will describe the playground operations and management from 1922 to 1950 and analyse the transition of playground management and delivery as it shifted from the voluntary sector to a public management system operated by City of Edmonton.

4.1 'Last Best West': Population, City Clubs and Playgrounds

Twentieth-century expansion in Canada had much to do with opening the 'Last Best West' to settlement, which emerged as a key attraction for migration.²⁷⁷ Immigrants spread among different cities in Canada, but were encouraged to settle on the prairies and in Western Canadian cities. By 1921, the net gain in population in Canada was 1,581,840²⁷⁸ and the greatest increase was settled in the West. In large cities, such as Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg, the most severe cases of overcrowding became a concern to the public health authorities who observed a striking correlation between overcrowding and high mortality rates among the young, which was also attributed to the lack of clean water, ventilation, sunshine, and fresh air.²⁷⁹ At the same time, it was often believed among reformers that there was a dark side to the city where

²⁷⁷ Census of Canada 1921, *Population*, pp. xxvii.

²⁷⁸ Census of Canada 1921, *Population*, pp. xxvii.

²⁷⁹ W. Van Nus, "The Fate of City Beautiful Thought in Canada, 1893 -1930," *Historical Papers* 10, no 1 (1975): 200.

disease, crime, prostitution and general misery flourished.²⁸⁰ As cities became more congested, reformers began to be more concerned about the health of citizens doing something to make the city a better place to live in and protect the younger generations. Child welfare appealed to middle-class Canadians who believed that by ‘saving’ the children and youth they would be saving the future of their cities.²⁸¹ These impulses contributed to urban social reform through city planning and playground movements in Alberta.

Alberta was a westward destination for new immigrants. The population increased 57.22 percent during 1871-1921.²⁸² Nonetheless most of the new population that arrived in Alberta and Edmonton was Anglo-Saxon. According to Wetherel and Kmet in “Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945,” before 1945 Alberta was not a cultural mosaic or an egalitarian society, but an English-speaking society by numbers and cultural control.²⁸³ Edmonton was the capital of a new province established in 1905 and the city welcomed great numbers of immigrants at the beginning of twentieth century. Census Canada data from 1941, indicates this overall increase.²⁸⁴ (See Appendix A)

The outbreak of World War I further affected Edmonton’s growth as many men joined the army and low real estate values went down, which made it a hard time for the municipality to collect taxes. Extra money was not available to consider investing to make the city beautiful or to

²⁸⁰ Paul Rutherford, “Tomorrow’s Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1880-1920,” *Historical Papers* 6, no 1(1971): 203.

²⁸¹ Rutherford, 206.

²⁸² Census of Canada 1921, *Population*, 4.

²⁸³ Donald Wetherel and Irene Kmet, *Useful Pleasure: the Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945*, (Regina: University of Regina, 1990), XXI.

²⁸⁴ Census Canada 1941, vol. II, *Population, local subdivisions*, 193.

build public spaces for the community to gather. During this period of time in Canada, real estate values were low, and at the same time municipalities had difficulties to collect taxes, and more above new policies had occurred to incur in a new expense of supporting soldiers families,²⁸⁵ which affected the funds available for other purposes. In order to improve urban cities conditions, it was necessary to ally with urban reformers who were willing to invest their money and time to transform the city into a desirable place to live in. Middle-class reformers were interested in suburban planning and social welfare, as many of them espoused of civic responsibilities towards the community as members of different clubs.

R.B Chadwick was a member of Edmonton's Parks Commission in 1903 and vocal when it came to advocacy for playgrounds, using a direct approach to City Council and indirect approaches through the Local Council of Women. In 1908, as the Superintendent of Alberta "Industrial School"²⁸⁶ R.B Chadwick recommended that Alberta should have a broad system of child welfare laws, which led to an Act for the Protection of Neglected and Dependent Children in 1909 with Chadwick as the first superintendent.²⁸⁷ In 1910, the Parks Commission was in charge of the first plan for the City of Edmonton. Two years later the Parks Department was formed. By 1913, a lack of municipal funding resulted in only a preliminary plan²⁸⁸ and the Parks Department quickly vanished during the recession years 1912 to 1920. The size of the

²⁸⁵ Van Nus, 204.

²⁸⁶ Legislative Assembly passed the Alberta Industrial Schools Act (1908) to provide for the treatment of juvenile delinquents. "Industrial school" was a term used synonymously with "reformatory school." Its purpose was to provide custody, education, industrial training, and moral reclamation of boys in trouble. Read more in Germaine M. Dechant.

²⁸⁷ Germaine M. Dechant, "Winter's Children: The Emergence of Children's Mental Health Services in Alberta 1905-2005," *The Muttart Foundation* (2006): 20.
http://www.muttart.org/sites/default/files/Dechant_G_Winter's%20Children.pdf

²⁸⁸ Susan Markham, "The Development of Parks and Playgrounds in Canadian Prairie Cities 1880-1930," Manuscript for paper presented at CPRA research Symposium, 1990, 12.

Board of Commissioners was reduced and the position of Parks Commissioner ceased to exist.²⁸⁹ The department was merged into the Engineer Department as a wartime economy measure. In 1913, the City rejected the motion of Recreation Commission to provide more playgrounds, and as a result, the Gyro Club movement took over this vision of construction of playgrounds for children.²⁹⁰ By the 1920s, the city started to reserve tax sale lands for park purposes and turned parcels over to local community leagues for recreation.²⁹¹ In 1922, an ‘Amusement and Athletics’ section of the Engineer Department had been created, but the budget cuts reduced effectiveness, therefore leadership to provide additional facilities would have to come from elsewhere.²⁹²

When the Gyro Club chose ‘playgrounds for children’ as its objective, its representatives approached City Council in 1921. The City decided to provide the land, whereas the construction of playgrounds was financed and managed by the Gyro Club members. In the 1930s, the Great Depression brought slow and steady migration to and through Edmonton. Families lived on meagre means as many were left out of the labour force and became dependent on government assistance. The Gyro Club also had to cope with this situation and struggled to maintain playgrounds and operations. They held several meetings with City Commissioners to discuss relinquishing their playground work,²⁹³ as the Depression also affected the carnival fundraiser

²⁸⁹ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, pp. 15.

²⁹⁰ Markham, “The Development of Parks & Playgrounds,” 12.

²⁹¹ Markham, “The Development of Parks & Playgrounds,” 12.

²⁹² Bob Charlton private papers, *Preliminary Research on Gyro Club Playground to be built at Fort Edmonton Park*, Dave Howell, 1974, 6.

²⁹³ Elsie McFarland, “The Development of Public Recreation in Canada”, Ottawa: Canadian Parks/Recreation Association, 1970, 43.

which was its primary income source to maintain and supervise playgrounds, nonetheless they continued their work until mid-1940s. During the Second World War, Edmonton became the base operations of several large military projects that stimulated the city's economic recovery from Depression. Between the late 1940s and in the beginning of the 1950s, the city boundaries and growth expanded as the municipal government also become more involved with park management. The City decided to take over established playgrounds in 1946. The Engineer Department looked after the "limited recreation operation"²⁹⁴ until November 27, 1944, when Bylaw 1069 was passed by Edmonton City Council to create the Recreation Commission.²⁹⁵ The structures and relationships of Edmonton's municipal playgrounds were a shifting development in the emergent welfare state. To trace these developments, I will examine the context of social movements in Edmonton to situate why the Gyros stepped into playgrounds compared to other voluntary sector. I will also analyze demographics and geography of the playgrounds to locate the different ethnicities which will allow to understand who was served by the Gyro playgrounds.

4.2 City Clubs and Edmonton's Playgrounds

Urban reformers inspired by the town planning craze²⁹⁶ became aware of the civic responsibilities to improve the city. The volunteer sector played an active role in leadership and establishment of social service provision that were key elements when it came to build a better city. Playgrounds were widely used by planners as a strategy for beautifying the city, and

²⁹⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, pp. 13.

²⁹⁵ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, pp. 13.

²⁹⁶ Rutherford, 208.

increasing land values.²⁹⁷ Urban reformers of western Canadian prairie cities were inspired by England and the United States, where concepts of town planning and park development were established ahead of Canada. Social reformers in Edmonton believed that playgrounds would improve life conditions for children and families. According to the *Edmonton Journal* in 1930, adults were concerned about ‘street play’ and were relieved that the Gyro Club had constructed playgrounds because now children were protected:

...Hundreds of city children whose playgrounds might have been streets, where traffic threatens life and limb now played on the three Gyro Playgrounds, equipped and maintained by the members²⁹⁸.

City clubs provided a space for leadership and civic advocacy for citizens who gathered to discuss topics that interested their family and community. It was a space that allowed a forum for public education and community-focused dialogue.²⁹⁹ Many of these associations intended to provide leadership and focused on teenage boys and stressed the value of ‘father-son’ activities.³⁰⁰ The Gyro Club was one group among the extensive voluntary sector established in Edmonton by 1921. There were fourteen different clubs³⁰¹ and twenty six benevolent societies³⁰² in 1921. Many of these groups were concerned for the welfare of the city and worked on

²⁹⁷ Ocean Howell, “Play Pays: Urban Land Politics and Playgrounds in the United States, 1900-1930,” *Journal of Urban History* 34, no.6 (2008):980.

²⁹⁸ City of Edmonton, Newspaper Clipping files, *Edmonton Journal*, October 15 1930; *Edmonton Children Benefit from Work of Gyro Club*.

²⁹⁹ Ron Kuban, *Edmonton’s Urban villages: The Community League Movement*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), 25.

³⁰⁰ Cynthia Commachio, “‘A Postscript for Father’: Defining a New Fatherhood in Interwar Canada,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (1997): 403.

³⁰¹ *Edmonton’s Henderson Directory 1921*, pp:74: Canadian Club, B’nai Zion Club, Canadian Women Press Club, Caxton Club of Edmonton, Edmonton Club, Edmonton Press Club, Women’s Musical Club, Edmonton Golf and Country Club, Kiwanis Club, Knights of Columbus, Rotary Club, Gyro Club and Mayfair Golf Club.

³⁰² *Edmonton’s Henderson Directory 1921*, 76-78.

different projects to participate as active citizens. The Canadian Club of Edmonton was founded in 1906 and was interested in promoting Canadian identity encouraging Canadian patriotism.³⁰³ The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) was founded in 1907 and was encouraged to serve young women newly arrived to Edmonton and it rented rooms at an affordable price.³⁰⁴ The Local Council of Women pushed to provide more playgrounds for children in 1919, and other clubs were also interested in child welfare services. As one example, Kiwanis Club focused efforts to fundraise to construct homes for children and to take care of orphaned or abandoned children;³⁰⁵ later, in 1947, it also assisted City playgrounds.³⁰⁶

The Edmonton Gyro Club constructed playgrounds, just like many other humanitarian reformers in Canada that were convinced that by saving children they would save the future.³⁰⁷ The Gyro Club was essentially a younger men’s club that aimed to cultivate friendliness and friendship,³⁰⁸ and its key goal was to improve the welfare of children in Edmonton.

4.2.1 Edmonton’s Playgrounds

The three Gyro playgrounds constructed by 1924 embraced the diverse social geography of city’s east, west and south side that spanned diverse immigrant ethnicities, along with the largest ethno-linguistic group comprised of English-speaking British ancestries. The Gyro Club

³⁰³ <http://www.canadianclubofedmonton.ca/about>

³⁰⁴ <http://www.ywcaofedmonton.org/history>

³⁰⁵ <http://www.edmontonkiwanis.ca/aboutus/clubhistory.html>

³⁰⁶ Kiwanis Club members in 1947 decided to jointly finance a “travelling playground” with Edmonton’s Recreation Committee.

³⁰⁷ See Hardy, Guttmann and Rutherford.

³⁰⁸ City of Edmonton Archives, Newspaper clipping files, Edmonton Journal, 1927.

helped finance the construction of five new playgrounds, however they did not participate as much in their programs and supervision as the City was in charge. At the same time, the City asked the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues for cooperation in the summer programs of 1946. The City's intention was to expand the summer programs in different districts around the City, either in established playgrounds or in community centers that were set up for local programs. The statistics for summer programs in 1949 indicate that 367,347 Edmontonians participated in summer programs, which included children, teens, adults, volunteers, spectators and a few special events.

There are some discrepancies in primary sources over the dates and names of the construction of the new playgrounds established once the City took over the summer programs. The records of the Gyro historian Roy Miller and also the 1974 Fort Edmonton Research Report 1974 written by Dave Howell, indicate the last five playgrounds were constructed between 1948 and 1949.³⁰⁹ However the Annual report of the Superintendent of Public Recreation written by John Farina indicates that there were eleven playgrounds operating to some extent in 1947. It may be that the City built playgrounds with the Gyro Club at the same time they were constructing playgrounds with the community leagues and/or with the community centers. For purposes of this research, I will indicate the names and dates of the playgrounds that the Gyro Club sponsored. (See Appendix B)

The playground movement in Edmonton was driven and supported by the voluntary sector that led the construction of playgrounds in early twentieth century. The City relied on the Gyro Club as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to manage solely all play programs and

³⁰⁹ City of Edmonton Archives, Acc. A80-5, *Fort Edmonton Park Research Report FEPR-86, October 1974.*

recreational delivery for children until the summer programs of 1944, when City Council decided to establish the Recreation Commission. The phasing out of the Gyro operations was a slow process, and it was not until 1946 that the playgrounds were turned over to the City. Despite the formation of the Recreation Commission and a newly formed Parks Department in 1947, the City continued working with the Gyro Club and asked for cooperation from the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues that was called on to partner with the City to deliver summer camps in the Gyro playgrounds in 1946. In 1947, a travelling playground was equipped with playground equipment that was jointly financed with the Kiwanis Club and equipped by the Public Library and Recreation Commission. The Gyro Club continued to cooperate with the City until 1952 when they decided to not continue to provide funding for the establishment of new playgrounds, however they still cooperated with the first three Gyro Playgrounds:

Last year this Committee recommended that the Club divorce itself from all new playground projects, and concentrate their activities with the three original Gyro playgrounds... It was decided to go ahead with the proposal of putting on asphalt court on each of the playgrounds and leave the rest to the commission...³¹⁰

The playground movement in Edmonton was an integrated system of shared responsibility and cooperation with the voluntary sector. The City management partnered with a crucial NGO in order to respond to the changing demands of the city.

4.3 Demographics and Geography

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that Gyro playgrounds in different neighbourhoods served across diverse populations of children and families that comprised the varied social classes and ethnic groups settled in the city. In this regard, Gyro playgrounds

³¹⁰ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Historical Records Roy Miller, *Gyro Club of Edmonton Secretary's 31st Annual report, March 25, 1952.*

served a broad and diverse scope of users that included children of many social and economic backgrounds. Looking at demographics and early city maps will allow us to better understand the areas surrounding Gyro playgrounds and to know where most families with children who played there likely dwelt. I will begin by tracing Edmonton's demographics and ethnicity in early twentieth century to interpret how the population was distributed in the advent of playground construction.

The population in Edmonton in early twentieth century was already divided by class and into more or less well-to-do residential locations.³¹¹ Carl Betke's analysis of Federal census data outlines social geographic distribution by class and ethnicity. In 1906, west of First Street (101 Street) -- especially the first six streets and particularly south of Jasper Avenue close to the North Saskatchewan River banks -- was the residential domain of the prosperous businessmen, professionals and senior civil servants, along with their families. East of First Street and mainly north of Jasper Avenue were neighbourhoods for the working class of labourers, tradesmen, marginal business men and alien ethnic newcomers.³¹² French-speaking Edmontonians were concentrated in the far west vicinity of St. Joachim parish, but many were scattered throughout the city, and quite a number were successful businessmen who lived in the west end, which was dominated by prosperous English-speaking families. The upper-class residential focus was north of the river, west of First Street and south of Jasper Avenue. The minority, usually newer and single, lived in the east end. Affordable hotels and struggling new businessmen were also

³¹¹ Carl Betke, "The Development of Urban Community in Prairie Canada Edmonton, 1898-1951," PhD Theses University of Alberta (1981), 144.

³¹² Betke, 144.

situated in the east-end district.³¹³ According to Betke's study, in 1921, those of British "racial origin" formed 78 percent of the population in Edmonton.³¹⁴ However based on federal census data of 1921 and 1931, Edmonton had a growing population and rising numbers of immigrants who were Scottish, Irish, Ukrainian, German, Scandinavian and Polish. (See Appendix C)

In other Canadian cities, historians have made the case that parks were segregated and for the upper class. Edmonton was already segregated by class prior to the construction of playgrounds; moreover it was not a racially diverse city. It was constituted predominately by white families with a diverse ethnic population. One playground in the East End served an ethnically diverse immigrant area, and the other two playgrounds served middle-class British-Canadian children and families. Some indications of racial and class tensions as well as racism are evident during mid-1920s. These contexts of discrimination led Black newcomers' community from Oklahoma to form the Shiloh Baptist Church in 1910, located in the East End on 105 Avenue between 94 and 95 Streets. However, it seems that Edmonton was moving forward when "black citizens successfully overturned an order barring them from civic swimming facilities in 1924."³¹⁵ It appears such public activists fought for open access to recreation during the period when Edmonton playgrounds were being constructed.

4.3.1 Edmonton Playgrounds and Neighbourhood Demographics

The first three playgrounds constructed by the Gyro Club were distributed in three different districts in Edmonton. Notably, the club's playgrounds served children and families of

³¹³ Betke, 150-151.

³¹⁴ Betke, 452.

³¹⁵ PearlAnn Reichwein, "Enjoyment, Health and Safety:" The Legacy of Queen Elizabeth Swimming Pool, *The Strathcona Plaindealer Annual XXIII* (2000): 11.

different ethnicities and social classes. According to a newspaper media in 1930, the Gyros served all children of Edmonton regardless of class and ethnicity. Historical records, census data and Edmonton's 1922 Munday Map shows that this assumption seems quite accurate overall. (See Appendix D) Early maps of Edmonton indicate the number of public schools established by 1922. Playgrounds were strategically located in the surrounding areas of these schools and in different neighbourhood communities. Gyro playgrounds thereby served children from different communities³¹⁶ and schools. Playgrounds were a physical space within the city where children gathered irrespective of class, religion and ethnicity. The Gyros implicitly created a diverse integration among children. Children were encouraged to share their own culture by bringing along games and folk dances. The Gyro Circus and the Inter-playground competition were examples of integration.

4.3.2 Patricia Playground

The first playground Patricia Park was established in the East End of Edmonton in the McCauley neighbourhood. This was a location where the north-eastern streetcar line extension was already constructed through the heart of McCauley by 1912.³¹⁷ With the streetcar line in place, development unfolded quickly. A high density population with smaller lots³¹⁸ and a diverse immigrant district that included several businesses and light industry provided job opportunities for labourers. Woodland Dairy Ltd. was a commercial plant, owned by David and Sanford Haire, located at 95 Street and 108 Avenue. It made and delivered milk, ice cream,

³¹⁶ Community refers to a small social unit in a neighbourhood that shares common values in a same environment, e.g. McCauley neighbourhood had Italian and Chinese communities that shared values among each other's.

³¹⁷ http://www.edmonton.ca/for_residents/2006_DEMOGRAPHIC_McCauley.pdf

³¹⁸ City of Edmonton Archives, Fire Insurance Plans for McCauley Neighbourhood surrounding Patricia Playground, circa 1925, No. 157.

butter and cheese, and was considered one of the most modern dairy plants in western Canada.³¹⁹ Several schools were well established, which indicates a large number of children living in the neighbourhood: St. Francis School, St. Josaphat School, Alex Taylor School, Victoria School, Cromdale School (now serviced by Virginia Park Elementary School), and McCauley School. Diverse churches served a range of religious and ethno-linguistic groups settled in the North East district and beyond. McDonald Baptist Church, St. Joachim's Ukrainian Catholic Church, Shiloh Baptist Church, and Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church were situated in close proximity of 96 Street and 95 Street. North East Edmonton where Patricia Park was located was considered a working-class neighbourhood district of new immigrants and diverse ethnic cultures among families and single residents. This older part of downtown Edmonton was also, at times, associated with poverty and crime as a higher density rougher district on the 'wrong side' of the CNR tracks and north of the river. It was, nonetheless, a community with substantial public and commercial buildings, architectural landmarks, and a diverse range of housing from well-crafted single family homes to lodging houses to cheap hotels. It was also just north of the historic Chinatown. Before 1946, there were 525 occupied units in this area.

4.3.3 Kitchener Playground

Kitchener Park was located in the Oliver neighbourhood. This play area was established in 1913 by the Parks Commission³²⁰ and was known as the Old School Grounds,³²¹ however, in

³¹⁹ Robert Alvin Cantelon, *Edmonton's Crossroads of the World: A Brief Review of the City's Development, and its place in the Post-War World*, (Edmonton: Civic Enterprises, 1944), 35.
<http://www.ourroots.ca/toc.aspx?id=1481&qryID=2c6e6997-c697-4590-bcd5-89e09fd40a89>

³²⁰ City of Edmonton Archives, RG 8.10, Box 4, file 30, City Clerk-Special Committee Reports 1914, Commissioners Reports-Parks and Markets.

³²¹ Merrily K. Aubrey, *Naming Edmonton: From Ada to Zoie*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2004), 185.

1925, the Gyro Club restructured the area with new playground equipment and “hundreds of people were recruited to bring shovels and plant 150 trees... that had been donated to the new Kitchener Park.”³²² Civic led beautification project to green the city neighbourhood located immediately west of downtown and today considered a downtown city core neighbourhood. In early twentieth century, this area was known as Edmonton’s West End, where plenty of residential constructions occurred prior to World War I. This district had larger size lots and a lower density neighbourhood with better real estate; several lots around the playground were still open and available according to the Fire Insurance Plans circa 1925.³²³ Several schools were well established in the area: McKay Avenue School, Donald Ross School, Grandin School and Oliver Public School was a key landmark and required additional school space located in out buildings in the schoolyard, which suggests higher enrolments. First Church of Christ Scientist church was established in 1915 at 118 Street and 102 Avenue. The city’s North West was considered a wealthy neighbourhood where children from well-established families attended the playground. Before 1946, there were 655 occupied units in this area.

4.3.4 Tipton Playground

Tipton Park was located in Queen Alexandra Neighbourhood on the south side of Edmonton. The northern portion of this area formed part of the original Town of Strathcona on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River. This new neighbourhood near Garneau and Strathcona neighbourhoods was lower density, primarily a residential area, and occupied by

³²² Lawrence Herzog and Shirley Lowe, *The Life of a Neighbourhood: A History of Edmonton’s Oliver district, 1870-1950*, (National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data, 2002), 109.

³²³ City of Edmonton Archives, Fire Insurance Plans for Oliver Neighbourhood, surrounding Kitchener Playground, circa 1925, No. 285-286.

University professionals, middle-class families, and students. Whyte Avenue was a business main street dating back to the City of Strathcona prior to amalgamation with Edmonton in 1912. The key structures were the Princess Theatre, Strathcona Hotel, a CPR station and a post office. A mix of genteel British middle-class and diverse western European ethnic working-class residences, including German-language churches, stood east of the CPR tracks and Strathcona train station. Holy Trinity Anglican Church was a mainstay of British Canadian tradition and a landmark constructed in 1913. Several schools were constructed by the early twentieth century in South Side Edmonton near the vicinity of Tipton Park. Alexander Taylor School, Allendale School, Queen Alexandra Public School, Mt. Carmel School, and Garneau School were some of the many landmark red brick schools already constructed by 1924 when the playground was built. Few buildings on Whyte Avenue existed occupied west of 109 Street near Tipton Park.³²⁴ Overall, it was considered a fairly new area for Edmonton, and 10 percent of the prominent men in Edmonton lived there by 1921. South Side Edmonton was considered a mix of commercial, varsity, and residential areas that comprised different ethnic and class cohorts with a predominance of English speakers. Before 1946, there were 405 occupied units.³²⁵

4.4 Edmonton Playgrounds: A Transition from the Volunteer Sector to the Municipal Government

According to Isobel Lindsay, the voluntary sector is inter-connected with the idea of citizenship and the most “obvious connection around volunteering is the image of ‘active citizenship.’”³²⁶ Gyro Club members were active citizens who believed playgrounds would

³²⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, Fire Insurance Plans for Queen Alexandra Neighbourhood, surrounding Tipton Playground, circa 1925, No. 845-846-725.

³²⁵ http://www.edmonton.ca/for_residents/2006_DEMOGRAPHIC_Queen_Alexandra.pdf

³²⁶ Isobel Lindsey, “The Voluntary Sector,” *Political Quarterly* 72, no.1 (2001): 115.

improve the welfare state in Edmonton. However as a non-governmental agency, they were not totally autonomous and had to establish a close relationship with the public state. Mariana Valverde argues that “scholars tend to pose the question of state and civil society as a binary opposition.³²⁷” This theory suggests that public and private entities worked against each other and provided competing programs that led to the destruction of the voluntary sector, however Valverde raises the concept that social service provision is a mixed economy between government and civil society. In this section, I intend to present the complex relationship between the Gyro Club and the City of Edmonton. Why and when did the Gyro Club end its role as private welfare providers of playgrounds in Edmonton? Archival data has shown that the relationship between the City and the Club in the beginning of the playground movement was relatively positive. It was, nonetheless, quite a burden to be fully responsible for the management of playgrounds for almost three decades and tensions arose when the Gyro Club advocated for more state involvement.

The Gyros opened the first playground in 1922 with the approval of City Council. Three years later, the Gyro Club made a formal written agreement with the City in 1925 wherein the Club undertook the responsibility to maintain and replace all playground equipment, to provide supervisors, and to keep playgrounds in an attractive condition. The City Commissioners and the Gyro Club signed a lease in 1928 with agreements between City of Edmonton Municipal Corporation and the Gyro Club of Edmonton to determine resolutions and responsibilities concerning the playgrounds. The Gyro Club donated to the City of Edmonton all playground equipment that was situated on playground parks known as Kitchener Square, Patricia Square,

³²⁷ Valverde, 34.

and Tipton Square. In this agreement, the Club covenants with the City to assume full responsibilities of the management of playgrounds:

...That it will at its own expense erect, supply, maintain and replace in proper and safe conditions for use, all playground equipment (including sand for sand box) at said playgrounds during the period from the 15th of May, 1928, to the 15th of September, 1928, both inclusive, and will at its own expense during the said period keep and maintain in proper safe condition for use, the building erections or structures used in connection with said playgrounds...It will at its own expense provide a supervisor for each of the said playground to supervise the children playing threat and to supervise the said playground equipment...³²⁸

The City was responsible for all taxes and levies related to playgrounds and agreed to not charge the Club with the basic utility bills, such as light and water. The City was also responsible for the removal and storage of equipment once the season was over “from 16th day of September to the 15th day of May in each year, at its own expense, maintain the buildings used in connection with the playgrounds.”³²⁹

All activities in the Gyro Playgrounds were under adult supervision for it was believed among civic reformers that “free play in the city was disapproved by the middle class families.”³³⁰ The Gyro Club members as middle-class civic reformers envisioned playgrounds as a place to teach different appropriate skills through games and activities. Playground programs were organized with a responsible play leader who was typically a student from the University of Alberta or a University graduate. Perhaps the Gyro Club saw in male university

³²⁸ Bob Charlton private papers, *Draft Agreement The City of Edmonton Municipal Corporation and The Gyro Club of Edmonton 1928*, Gyro Club Clipping file, City of Edmonton Archives, pp. 2-3.

³²⁹ Bob Charlton private papers, *Draft Agreement The City of Edmonton Municipal Corporation and The Gyro Club of Edmonton 1928*, pp.4.

³³⁰ Allen Guttman, “The Progressive Era Appropriation of Children's Play,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, no.2 (2010): 231.

students the ideal type of man to nurture children with appropriate manners and customs to fulfill the ideal of middle-class social reformers.

The Gyro Club Members were considered a valuable institution in the city because they had helped many families of Edmonton to have a safe place for their children to play. These men who were part of the voluntary sector not only worked on fundraising and the construction of playgrounds, but managed play programs and supervision for twenty-two years. The Gyro's considered its work pioneer in the City of Edmonton, and "first of its kind in the Dominion of Canada."³³¹ This model made Edmonton unusual compared to other cities. Playgrounds in other provinces were commonly operated by a Civic Parks Board, according to the *Edmonton Journal* in 1932:

Centres are operated solely by the club. Other Gyro Clubs in distant cities equip and provide playgrounds and then turn them over to the city to operate. In Vancouver there are magnificent Gyro Playgrounds, but they are operated under the civic parks board.³³²

The Mayor of Edmonton lauded the Gyro Club for its forthright concern and encouraged other groups to do likewise as "any organization that wanted to take up such a project could have the land for asking, as the city had lots to spare."³³³ Other organizations, such as the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, were popular service clubs and an example of the implementation of American civic models in Edmonton. Their facilities were not just for

³³¹ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Historical Records, Scrapbook 1946-1950, *An Objective? Your Club Needs One! Roy Miller, Gyroscope June 1948.*

³³² City of Edmonton Archives, Newspaper Clipping Files, *Edmonton Journal*, 1932.

³³³ City of Edmonton Archives, Newspaper Clipping Files, *Edmonton Journal*, August 23, 1922.

children, they were also used by the parents who would use the green areas for athletics and various team sports.³³⁴

From 1924 to 1929, the Gyro Club focused on the three initial playgrounds constructed and only developed programs on these three locations. The programs undertaken by the club provided children and families with great entertainment and a diversity of activities which included the Carnival week to start the season, children's circus with street parades, folk dances and games of "foreign lands," including Ukrainian, Ruthenian, English, Scottish and Irish dances. At the same time, recreational sports were offered such as baseball, football, basketball, and baseball leagues for older boys. Three times a week a story hour for children and a series of band concerts was given by a newsboy's band.³³⁵

The Depression and the Second World War affected business and families in Edmonton. The funds raised by the annual carnival declined because of the crisis of the Depression. The community was not able to respond with the Gyro Club fundraiser as they had in the past ten years, therefore to acquire money for the playgrounds was difficult to achieve. The playgrounds represented an investment of upwards of \$15,000 in operating expenses and \$20,000 in equipment and buildings.³³⁶ In pre-Depression days the public supported the carnival with \$20,000 a year, but in 1932 the revenue amount plunged to \$600. According to the Edmonton Journal, it was a good thing that the Gyro Club had kept a reserve fund that was built up from the past carnival events and was able to continue playground delivery: "fortunately a reserve fund

³³⁴ Wetherel, 103.

³³⁵ Bob Charlton private papers, *Preliminary Research on Gyro Club Playground to be built at Fort Edmonton Park*, Dave Howell, 1974, 13.

³³⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, Newspaper Clipping Files, Edmonton Journal, October 8 1932; *Adversity Overcome by Club, Carries on Important Work*.

has been built in the past and the cost and maintaining the playgrounds will be met chiefly from this fund.”³³⁷ Although the Club managed to continue their work, the maintenance and supervision was a difficult task to meet. At the same time, the Gyro Club was struggling to maintain membership and active participation. The carnival itself was considered a business that had lots of work in preparing and managing. The members often thought that they were too ambitious in “shouldering the responsibility of four playgrounds,”³³⁸ but at the end what kept them going was ‘friendship’ because they considered the carnival a great instance to become closer and better acquainted with the other members of the club.³³⁹

On May 1933, Barney Stanley, Chairman of the Carnival Committee, recommended at a weekly business meeting held in the Macdonald Hotel that the ‘Carnival business’ should not continue as a tradition in the Gyro Club. The members unanimously approved this recommendation. Taking into account the motion to drop the carnival, it also came into consideration the advisability of continuing the operation of playgrounds. It was suggested that the club should only continue with a scholarship objective, and the Gyro Club would withdraw the playground work by 1935, which would give a two year notice to the City of Edmonton.³⁴⁰ On May 9, 1933, the president of the Gyro Club reported his visit to the City Commissioners on the matter of relinquishing the playgrounds. At the meeting, it was agreed that the club should

³³⁷ City of Edmonton Archives, Newspaper Clipping Files, Edmonton Journal, October 8 1932; *Adversity Overcome by Club, Carries on Important Work.*

³³⁸ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1930-1935, *The Gyroscope, Edmonton Gyro Carnival of 1935, By Stan Smith.*

³³⁹ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1930-1935, *The Gyroscope, Edmonton Gyro Carnival of 1935, By Stan Smith.*

³⁴⁰ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1930-1935, *Minutes of the Monthly Business Meeting of the Edmonton Gyro Club, Tuesday May 2nd 1933.*

not withdraw from this work, “believing that this objective could not be improved upon.”³⁴¹ The Club decided to continue with the playgrounds for two more years, and if funds were not available, negotiations would be made with the City. The decision is reflected in the Minutes of meeting of Directors of Edmonton Gyro Club held at the Shasta Café:

The Directorate recommends to the club the continuance of the present objective for the next two years...and further recommends that in view of the excellence of the present objective every effort be made for raising funds so that its continuance will be assured: and that the city officials be advised of this resolution.³⁴²

In 1936, again the members raised questions about their objective to continue with the playgrounds. A letter was sent to the President and Board of Directors of the Gyro Club requesting to give consideration to whether the time had come to no longer “carry on the Playgrounds for which it had assumed responsibility largely on the grounds of difficulty in raising the necessary funds especially in war time.”³⁴³ However the two boards of directors did not agree on an answer, and, before giving any consideration, they agreed to introduce the question to open discussion to all members at the next business meeting. Despite several years of tensions and disputes to decide over the continuity of “Playgrounds for Children,” the Gyro Club continued to invest their efforts as the sole operators of Edmonton playgrounds for a few more years. Depression shifted into wartime and still the Gyro Club volunteers soldiered on in the absence of other supports.

³⁴¹ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1930-1935, *Minutes of the Monthly Business Meeting of the Edmonton Gyro Club, Tuesday May 9th 1933.*

³⁴² City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1930-1935, *Minutes of the Monthly Business Meeting of the Edmonton Gyro Club, Tuesday May 9th 1933.*

³⁴³ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Scrapbook 1936 - 1940, Letter to the President & Board of Directors, Gyro Club of Edmonton, August 12 1936.

The relationship between the Gyro Club and the City was certainly complex. It appears the Gyros were prompted to leave their project because they were not receiving adequate support to cope with playground programs. They might have continued to be a viable means of providing such voluntary sector welfare service in Edmonton had the City government been more responsive to the interests of the Gyro Club and play programs during periods of crisis in Canadian cities. Tillotson argues that the causes of the shift from a mixed management model – where the public sector and private voluntary sector worked together toward the public’s welfare – towards solely public welfare state delivery models was the beginning of changes toward the administration of social services wherein the state takes control of all social service programs. These changes towards its management show the struggles between public and private sectors, as well as indicating the state saw an opportunity to benefit from the innovative and administrative practices of the private sector that led to new public programs.

4.5 The Municipal Government and the Playground Movement

The City of Edmonton slowly started gaining strength and responsibility for recreation areas. In early 1940s, it was interested in taking over the Gyro Playgrounds that were built up to that stage. A number of public requests for play areas were sent to the City Commissioners demonstrating the four Gyro playgrounds were not enough to fulfill the needs of all children and families in Edmonton. At the same time, the Gyro Club had asked for assistance in the playground operation in 1942 because the Club was unable to carry on the operation on its own as the expenses for the members were too high.³⁴⁴ The City decided to assume maintenance of the grounds and the Club would continue to be responsible for supervision and operation. On

³⁴⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Historical Records Scrapbook 1941-1945, *Minutes Re: Playgrounds, March 4, 1942.*

April 1943, the Local Council of Women submitted a resolution urging the City to provide suitable playgrounds for children and requesting in conjunction with the Community Leagues that the East End of the Boyle street grounds be properly fenced in order to have children safely play during the day and to use as a softball park after 6:00 pm.³⁴⁵ A month later, The City Commissioner interim report recognized the necessity to ultimately use the Boyle Street location as a neighborhood park similar in operation to the Gyro Playgrounds. It planned to confer with the Local Council of Women to discuss future possibilities. In order to improve the problem in a short-term basis, “which is an endeavor to get teen age boys off the streets”³⁴⁶ the City Commissioner agreed to put in a temporarily facility for softball.

...It looks as if their ultimate and logical use is as a neighborhood park similar in operation to Kitchener, Tipton and Patricia Square. If this is so they should be ultimately fenced with a wire fence and equipped with suitable swings, sand-pits, pools, etc. and operated under proper supervision. I think this is in line with the wishes of the neighborhood who have previously protested against their use for particularly handball...³⁴⁷

On July 10, 1944, the City Commissioners submitted a “notice of motion” to establish the Recreation Commission as there was a growing demand for assistance for recreation projects. Also members of Edmonton City Council stated they were not capable of properly assessing the needs for recreational activities; it was necessary to seek individuals who were more qualified in various types of sports and recreation.³⁴⁸ The City Council resolved to set up a recreation commission and decided to appoint a full-time manager as noted in the Council Minutes on July 10, 1944:

³⁴⁵City of Edmonton Archives, City Clerks 1942-1949, film 10, Council Minutes April 12th and April 26th 1943.

³⁴⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, City Clerks 1942-1949, film 10, Council Minutes, May 25st 1943.

³⁴⁷ City of Edmonton Archives, City Clerks 1942-1949, film 10, Council Minutes, May 25st 1943.

³⁴⁸ City of Edmonton Archives, City Clerks 1942-1949, film 10, Council Minutes, July 10th 1944.

Therefore be it resolved that this council proceed at once to set up a recreation commission as a voluntary advisory board to a fully paid manager. Such Commission to have the duty of supervision and promotion of all sport and recreation in the city. That all lands and buildings now in the city and under the control of the city and used for recreation be under this commission.³⁴⁹

The Recreation Commission was established in November 1944 at a time when Edmonton had hopes for a better postwar economy and more prosperous society. The Engineers Department was relieved of playgrounds, a duty it had overseen for thirty years.³⁵⁰ Public policy and urban planning had shifted toward the postwar city and focused on a new government structure that purported to serve a primary role in leading the city. The new Recreation Commission consisted of nine men, two from council, one public and one separate school board member and five other sports-minded citizens, all to serve two year terms.³⁵¹ Their purpose was to co-promote and maintain all civic recreational facilities on an all-inclusive basis.³⁵² It was also the purpose of this commission to give attention to improve civic life following the war and most importantly to focus on the lack of facilities to be used by “youthful energies.”³⁵³ Juvenile delinquency was considered to be directly related to the absence of recreational facilities. Even though playgrounds were not a direct war effort, it is noteworthy that Gyro members considered it a war service due to the fact that “children of soldiers and war workers predominated in the

³⁴⁹ City of Edmonton Archives, City Clerks 1942-1949, film 10, Council Minutes, July 10th 1944.

³⁵⁰ Bob Charlton private papers, *Preliminary Research on Gyro Club Playground to be built at Fort Edmonton Park*, Dave Howell, 1974, 9.

³⁵¹ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, pp.13.

³⁵² City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, pp. 13.

³⁵³ City of Edmonton Archives, City Clerks 1942-1949, film 10, Council Minutes, July 10th 1944.

playgrounds.”³⁵⁴ Social supports for children’s play were, thus, linked to wartime labour force concerns in the service of nation as well as child care in the city.

The newly formed Recreation Commission overlooked summer programs in 1944 and 1945 when assisting in the maintenance of the Gyro playgrounds. At the same time, the Recreation Commission was constructing playgrounds in other locations in the City. And it was of their interest to hold a Children’s Field Day in each Gyro playground so that neighbourhood children could compete in an Inter-Playground Championship on the new playground at Boyle Street on September 1946.³⁵⁵ In February 1945, the Commission decided to hire a full-time Recreation Director. Officer J.B. McGuire was selected pending his release from the air force. Meanwhile the Engineers Department still looked after accounting for the new organization.³⁵⁶ The Commission rapidly started to plan for summer programs and in spring held the first annual leadership courses for those handling the summer children’s programs. The course was co-sponsored by the commission and the Council of Social Agencies.³⁵⁷

In the end, the City Recreation Commission took over the three Gyro playgrounds on May 1946. Certainly recreation was a major issue and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL) devoted much attention to ensuring its enhancement.³⁵⁸ The Commission

³⁵⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Historical Records, Scrapbook 1941-1945, *Thousands of Edmonton Children made Happy by the Gyro Playgrounds, Roy Miller, October 1944, Gyroscope.*

³⁵⁵ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Historical Records, Scrapbook 1946-1950, *Newsletter Gyro Playgrounds, August 30, 1946.*

³⁵⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, pp. 14.

³⁵⁷ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, pp. 14.

³⁵⁸ Kuban, 77.

approached the EFCL to request that the leagues assume responsibility for the Gyro-operated playgrounds only recently turned over to the City from the Gyro Club in 1946.³⁵⁹ The EFCL operated summer camps in 1946 with assistance from the Recreation Commission; nonetheless, the Federation quickly realized that its capacity to deliver programs was significantly limited by its “finances and decided to seek for financial assistance.”³⁶⁰ This point is key when considering the paradigm shift toward public welfare state support and equity toward community voluntary sector agencies. Did the City of Edmonton want control and a free ride?

When conversations started with the Recreation Commission about the management of the Gyro Playgrounds in 1946, the members still wanted to keep Children’s playgrounds as their main objective but needed assistance to continue. As money became more difficult to obtain, certain members were of the opinion that the playgrounds should be turned over to the City for supervision and maintenance. However the majority of the older members felt that they had sponsored playgrounds for so many years and worked hard to obtain funds it was hard to give total control of the Gyro Playgrounds. Although still reluctant, they agreed to hand them over to the Recreation Commission and to undertake the mission to equip all new playgrounds located on city property.³⁶¹ The tensions among the Gyro club and the City increased as the Gyros were used to a well-organized business program and unaccustomed to dealing with uncoordinated government management. On the other hand, the Gyro Club also considered that the Recreation Commission did not publicly acknowledge its efforts as noted in the Annual Report in 1948:

³⁵⁹ Kuban, 80.

³⁶⁰ Kuban, 80.

³⁶¹ City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Historical Records, Scrapbook 1946-1950, *An Objective? Your Club Needs One! Roy Miller, Gyroscope June 1948.*

The Club is not seeking publicity, but as it is customary to publicize service rendered by clubs, it would seem from this corner that the public should be advised, by the commission or just what part the Gyro club is taking in their activities...³⁶²

City Council approved the formation of the Parks Department in 1947. Mr. A.G Patterson was appointed Superintendent. With this new Department, the management expanded to all 2,250 acres of land. The Parks Department was in charge of controlling, developing, and maintenance for all city parks and boulevards, together with the operation of the municipal golf course, three outdoor swimming pools, six hockey rinks, two cemeteries, community league grounds and the maintenance of the city-owned playgrounds.³⁶³ Significant changes occurred in the management of recreational spaces. The programs were operated by an office staff consisting of a stenographer, an accountant and a temporary payroll clerk, seven full time people, nine part time and 157 field staff.³⁶⁴

According to the Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Recreation John Farina, the Playground season in 1947 opened with six playgrounds. This included the three original Gyro Parks: Tipton, Kitchener and McCauley (Patricia Park), and three new playgrounds: Ritchie, Boyle Street and Maple Leaf.³⁶⁵ The Gyro Club helped finance these last three playgrounds with the purchase of \$1,500 worth of equipment, donated to the Recreation

³⁶² City of Edmonton Archives, Gyro Club of Edmonton Fonds, MS-387, Historical Records, Scrapbook 1946-1950, *Annual Report 1948*.

³⁶³ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, pp.16.

³⁶⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, pp.16.

³⁶⁵ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping Files; *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Recreation from the City of Edmonton Recreation Commission for the year 1947*, John Farina, Superintendent Public Recreation, pp.9.

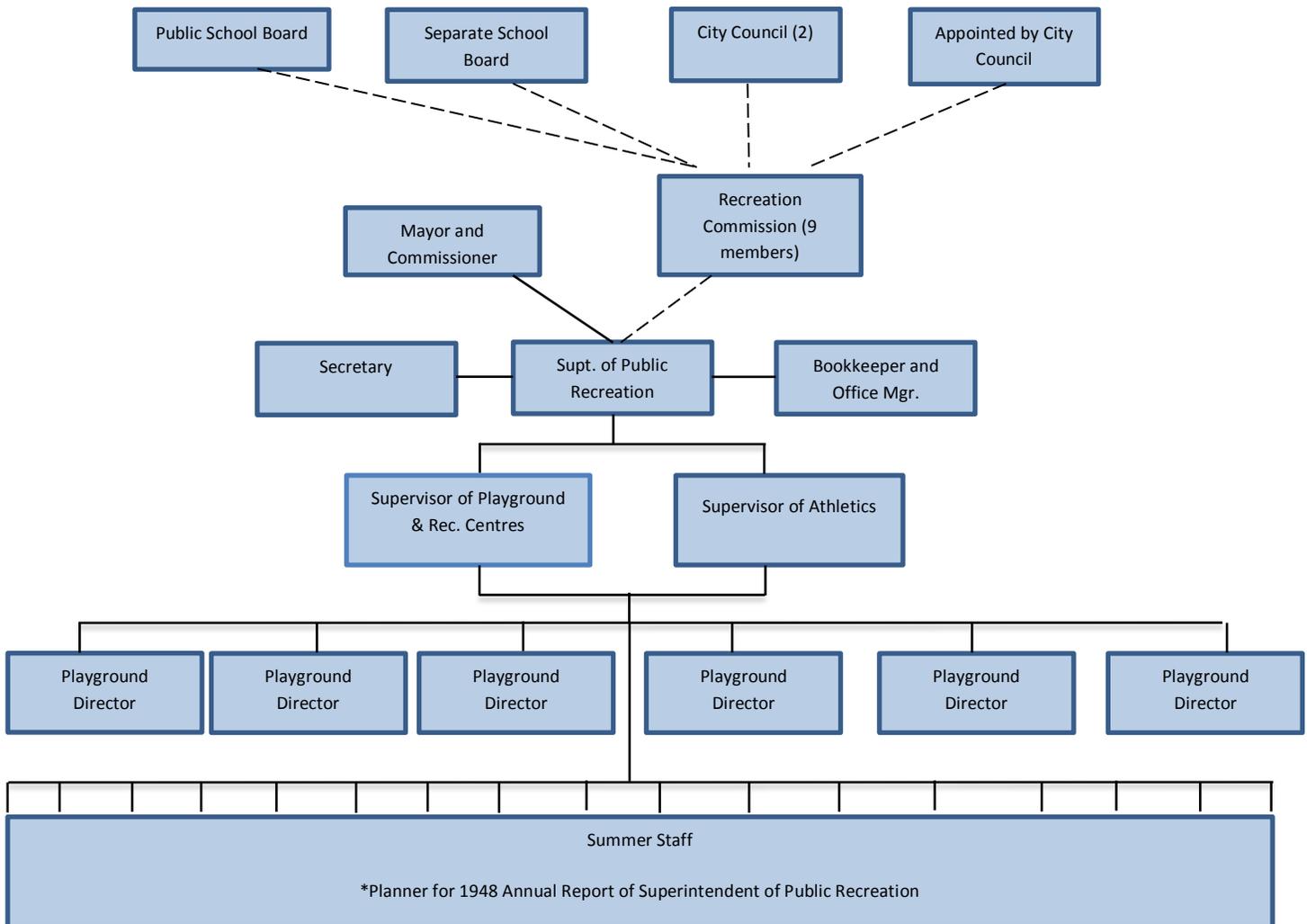
Commission.³⁶⁶ Apparently there was poor communication with the Gyro Club in regards with the decision taken for the construction of these play spaces. The Gyro Club did not consider these playgrounds as part of the equipment provided from the Gyro funding. It had expected funding to be destined to Gyro Playground No.5 Cromdale and Gyro Playground No.6 Jasper Place, but apparently it did not happen.

The Recreation Commission initiated a public recreation program that they considered the basis for the most comprehensive public recreation program in Western Canada.³⁶⁷ It started with the expansion of playgrounds throughout Edmonton. The organization and structure of the Recreation Commission in 1948 is illustrated in Fig. No 7.0:

³⁶⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping Files; *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Recreation from the City of Edmonton Recreation Commission for the year 1947*, John Farina, Superintendent Public Recreation, pp.9.

³⁶⁷ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping Files; *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Recreation from the City of Edmonton Recreation Commission for the year 1947*, John Farina, Superintendent Public Recreation, pp.4.

Fig. 7: Flowchart of Recreation Commission Reporting Structure for 1948



This newly formed staff was concerned about leadership training and program planning to deliver good activities to the community. In preparation for summer playground programs, an intensive three-week course in theory was attended by all permanent staff members and 13 newly appointed summer staff.³⁶⁸ On September 15, 1948, the first five-year plan proposal was submitted by the Recreation Commission, and the spring began with training given by the

³⁶⁸ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping Files; *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Recreation from the City of Edmonton Recreation Commission for the year 1947*, John Farina, Superintendent Public Recreation, pp.9.

Extension Department of the University of Alberta, which played a major role in the Leadership training courses³⁶⁹:

This session was given by the Extension Department of the U. of A. Material included music in recreation, games, sports, competition, elementary sewing, wood carving, folk dancing, theory of group work and play and elementary drama.³⁷⁰

The relationship with the Extension Department of the University of Alberta was not something new for playgrounds. Playgrounds operated by the Gyro Club had well established ties with the University of Alberta and educator Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, an innovator in community-based popular theatre. The Gyro programs included a summer school of drama with “Mrs. Haynes” of the Department of Education from the University of Alberta. She was in charge of the practical work in preparing children in several plays. The Annual Report of the Department of Extension of the University of Alberta in 1936 noted “... the 85 children who took part in these plays came from the Gyro Playgrounds of Edmonton.”³⁷¹

The Commission continued to take over facilities and received approval by the City Commissioner to draw up leases on all City owned recreation areas and athletic fields.³⁷² The annual report written in 1947 by the Superintendent of Public Recreation, John Farina, indicates that the playgrounds included many activities and much equipment offered to the community.

³⁶⁹ University of Alberta Archives, Department of Extension University of Alberta Acc.74-118, box 1, Annual Reports 1922-1948, April; 30th 1947.

³⁷⁰ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, 21.

³⁷¹ University of Alberta Archives, Department of Extension University of Alberta Acc.74-118, box 1, Annual Reports 1922-1948, Acc 78-48, box 1, Annual Report for the year ending March 31st, 1936, University of Alberta Department of Extension, 38.

³⁷² City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, 22.

This included sport programs such as volley ball, borden ball, pigmington, horseshoe, rugby, basketball, track, baseball and fastball. However, in 1948, according to historian Roy Miller, the Commission of the City was “censored for their slow progress and the Gyros had to assist.”³⁷³ It seems that the City attempted to deliver more than its actual capacity and without much experience and it ran into problems. Some of the playground areas received their equipment late in the season and certain areas were also late getting the playground equipment. Handicraft projects were included in the programs, but the equipment for these activities was only available for few areas, whereas “others had difficulty securing bare essentials.”³⁷⁴ Communities must have been disappointed that the new playgrounds were not fully operational and were not reaching a larger number of children as the City had planned. These shortfalls were noted by Farina in his annual report, along with community concerns to have toilets and water available.

As the City was not able to reach their public goals to open and operate all new playgrounds at the beginning of the 1947 summer season, the Recreation Commission looked for different strategies to adjust programs and delivery to the community. They decided to select a group of 10 to 15 children and transport them to a Recreation Centre for one period each week for handicraft, drama and music. In the same year, the Commission implemented “the form of travelling playground,”³⁷⁵ with a bus equipped with playground equipment, music, movies and staff that would travel to different areas every week. This bus was financed jointly with Kiwanis

³⁷³ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Facilities- Tipton Park files; *Gyro Club of Edmonton Box 92*, Roy Miller, February 23rd, 1972, n.p.

³⁷⁴ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping Files; *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Recreation from the City of Edmonton Recreation Commission for the year 1947*, John Farina, Superintendent Public Recreation, 10.

³⁷⁵ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping Files; *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Recreation from the City of Edmonton Recreation Commission for the year 1947*, John Farina, Superintendent Public Recreation, 10.

Club and equipped with the Public Library.³⁷⁶ Although the short-term strategies might have been efficient to improve the unsuccessful programs, 10 to 15 children did not serve all the population of children living in Edmonton and certainly most were left out of this summer program. Therefore the outreach and quality of the programs did not reach as many children as expected. It seems that the older Gyro model of community-based playground programs in neighborhoods worked much more efficiently when compared to this transition period.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the implications of the playground movement and how civic reformers responded to urban necessities in a moment when the City was incapable and unwilling to take over the recreational needs for children and families. The City acknowledged this situation, but the aftermath of war economy measures and urban political priorities did not open the opportunity to invest in new programs. The leadership came from the Gyro Club of Edmonton, which responded to the necessity to build playgrounds and supervised play to help children and manage the growth of the City from 1922 to 1950. Once the City took over playgrounds, the management and programs initially decreased because the demands and expenses were too high to follow up with the resources of City of Edmonton. The management and maintenance cost of these parks were high, and the expenses to hire supervisors to look after the equipment were not possible.³⁷⁷ In addition, the voluntary sector was retreating from the

³⁷⁶ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping Files; *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Recreation from the City of Edmonton Recreation Commission for the year 1947*, John Farina, Superintendent Public Recreation, 10.

³⁷⁷ City of Edmonton Archives, Parks and Recreation Clipping files, The Parks and Recreation Department; A History, J.C. Finlay, January 10, 1969, 33.

playground movement, which made the operation for the City a hard task to accomplish without its skilled and capable voluntary partner.

The role of the voluntary sector was paramount to achieve a public recreation program that would fulfill the needs of a growing population. Community leagues, civic groups and social clubs in the voluntary sector became needed partners with the City. Together they created an integrated system of cooperation and shared responsibilities towards public recreation, yet it was not a simple equation to realize and there were tensions between public and voluntary roles influenced by various factors.

The Gyro Club acted on the popular notion that society should focus more on children,³⁷⁸ and responded to the call of the City Commissioners to undertake the playground movement in early 1920s. These actions were the first steps towards the establishment and development of playgrounds for children in Edmonton. The Gyro Playgrounds were the first to prepare such programs and activities for children's play. Their holistic programs and delivery impacted the policies for the provision of municipal playgrounds in mid-1940s. These programs were able to involve a whole community around the common purpose of children's recreational and leisure time. Playgrounds became highly significant, especially in years when many families were unable to travel out of the city for vacations or could not afford to send their children out of town for summer camps. In this manner, summer playground programs operated as summer camps and vacations for urban children of all classes and demographics in Edmonton.

The cooperation between two different systems, private and public, was a strategic way to allow public recreation for children and families in Edmonton in early twentieth century. It

³⁷⁸ Bob Charlton private papers, *Preliminary Research on Gyro Club Playground to be Built at Fort Edmonton Park*, Dave Howell, 1974, 5.

was the beginning of the creation of new policies that created partnerships with a voluntary sector that was eager to get involved with civic responsibilities. There was never a complete sole operation from one or another, but it was a complex relationship where the charity struggles did not allow the Gyro Club to continue with playgrounds as a private sector charitable agency without adequate support from the City. Why did the state finally take over? First, there was a growing population in urban cities that acknowledged the private sector as the forerunners of a successful welfare system. Citizens' demands to improve and expand welfare services increased as well as their expectations for better living conditions in cities. The private sector failed to deliver funding and programs, and the state was more capable of fundraising through different mechanisms, such as taxation. Finally, the state saw the benefit of taking over the welfare programs that the private sector had administered so well to the public's great satisfaction. According to Tillotson's thesis, the Community Chest was responsible for social assistance in Canada until the 1940s when the state slowly took over their responsibilities. As with the Gyro Club, both private charitable fundraisers emerged in a vacuum and provided services that we now associated with the welfare state, and experienced struggles in the co-operative structure between private and public sectors. They were so successful that they transformed how citizens and state actors perceived these services, and eventually were taken over by the state. They were, in essence, the precursor to the welfare state at a time when governments had yet to accept unemployment insurance as a proper government responsibility despite the hardships Depression.

Today, Edmonton's playground programs operate through a partnership between community leagues and other community organizations, the City of Edmonton, the Province of

Alberta, and the Federal Government.³⁷⁹ Regrettably, playground programs face difficulties funding the Green Shack programs that deliver play activities for children in their communities, especially among families unable to afford summer camps or summer holidays. The Province of Alberta budget in March 2013 eliminated funding to the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) that supported salaries for municipal playground leaders across Alberta. The continuity of these programs for 2014 was abruptly jeopardized. This problem returns indirectly to similar issues that played out in early times about how to ensure equitable resources for all children to play and how communities will deliver them in the city and on the playground.

³⁷⁹ The Edmonton Journal, June 25, 2013, *City to ask province for more Green Shack funding*
<http://www.edmontonjournal.com/business/City+province+more+Green+Shack+funding/8578280/story.html>

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

5.0 Research Summary

This research project has explored the playground movement in Edmonton between 1922 and 1950 by bringing together an analysis of three main studies focused on the Gyro Club and members, children and families, and municipal government. I aimed to understand the different policies established for the welfare of children in western Canada in this study to enhance the understanding of social and urban reform through the Gyro Club, Gyro playgrounds, and children's outdoor play in Edmonton.

The major findings of this research run through three main thematic studies. First, Gyro men played an active role in play, nurturing, and child care. Most importantly, they established a Gyro culture of creative holistic outdoor play for children. Second, Edmonton childhood experiences reveal that playgrounds were instrumental to build friendship and a sense of community belonging, however children themselves acted as playful beings with their own agency and expert knowledge of play ranging in and out of formalized play structures. Third, the relationship between the Gyro Club and the City was complex as they created together an integrated system of cooperation and shared responsibilities for public recreation, yet it was not a simple equation as tensions between public and voluntary roles emerged in the process and struggles to deliver play programs for children. The Gyro's holistic programs and delivery impacted the policies for the provision of municipal playgrounds in Edmonton for a long duration and set the stage as precursors of today's system.

In 2011, I pictured myself in the Gyro playgrounds, imagining how children played and developed community life, building knowledge of the local environment and exploring each

neighbourhood constructing a sense of place and identity with the playground and their surroundings. At the end of this project, analysis of the experience of children and families who lived the summer Gyro playground has made an important beginning to understand the child's view of play in the city in and beyond play structures, and the importance of roaming as a means to create citizenship and sense of belonging within neighbourhoods. The experience of Edmonton's playgrounds and their programs from the child's perspective is still rather elusive in keeping with how the history of childhood presents challenges to access the perspectives of the young due to age and archival documentation created by adults. I often reflected on how different this project might have been if interviews had been conducted ten years ago and I'd met more surviving participants of the summer play programs in the 1920s and 1930s. There is still a great deal that we do not know about the memories of adults who played in Edmonton playgrounds. However, historical research through extensive archival work and initial oral history interviews have made it possible to know more and to probe important insights to adult and child experiences with the Gyro Club and the programs established in Edmonton for almost three decades.

This study has focused primarily on understanding the past within its own historical context. It can give a deeper understanding to playground renewal and delivery models today because it exposes patterns and long-lasting issues about private-public relations in support of social services through time. The historical examination of playground case studies in a regional context gives the opportunity to compare and contrast recreation as social reform and its relationship with the city and the voluntary sector. I shall begin with the interpretation of several historical events that led Canada toward a welfare state in the mid-twentieth century, and provide

new understanding of the origins of Edmonton's playgrounds and the importance of playgrounds for children and families in urban cities.

5.1 The Welfare State, Playgrounds, and the City

The protection of the economic and social well-being of citizens resulted in the idea that the public had responsibilities for those citizens unable to have access to a good life. Several decades before Canada's welfare state was well established, many private welfare agencies responded to the call for different social projects. According to Shirley Tillotson, these larger social movements and impulses helped to make the welfare state possible.³⁸⁰

Many of these charitable fraternal societies provided care for children. For example, the Kiwanis Club dedicated their efforts to construct homes for orphaned children in Edmonton and the Gyro Club constructed playgrounds with supervised summer programs for children after World War I. Experts of childhood were concerned about family life and the moral development of childhood, which became a major concern among federal, provincial and local governments. In response, Canadian cities were developing new systems of child welfare and granted value to the construction of playgrounds. Therefore, we could argue that the 'experts of childhood' became instrumental to the formation of the welfare state.

The development of childhood was discussed by diverse disciplines and experts. Theories of the importance of play developed from different perspectives, however they all asserted 'play' had an important role in children's lives and was necessary for a healthy development of the child. In Canada, scholars such as Harriet Mitchell (1929) argued that free play was

³⁸⁰ Shirley Tillotson, *Contributing Citizens: Modern Charitable Fundraising and the Making of the Welfare State, 1920-66*, (Vancouver: UBC press, 2008), 4.

relevant for a proper development of the child. And simultaneously there were others who believed children could be taught to behave through play, and most importantly, how they were taught to behave would determine what kind of citizen they would become.³⁸¹ In this manner, playgrounds were expected to be sites where children could learn responsibilities and control bad behaviours to become good citizens. ‘Play organizers’ stressed efforts to instill citizenship and hoped to contribute significantly to society’s present and future stability.³⁸² However, citizenship is not only to be seen as a formal status, but as a means of “belonging to a group and as such bears a significant impact on the identity formation [of children].”³⁸³

Edmonton’s Gyro Club upheld convictions that properly directed play was essential for the development of children in their city. As a non-profit voluntary organization, they constructed neighbourhood playgrounds as a strategic investment to improve social, cultural, and economic capital. It was believed among social reformers that children may not be well connected to the social world if there was an absence of adults or failure of an adult image in the family household. In this regard, adult supervision by Gyro play leaders helped to fill deficits in social and cultural capital related to a lack of adult or family presence. It was their intention to make Edmonton a desirable place to live for children and families. It was also a concern among middle-class families that their children have a safe and educational place to play during summer when most could not afford to leave the city for vacations.

³⁸¹ Xiabei Chen, *Tending the Gardens of Citizenship: Child Saving in Toronto, 1880-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005): 15.

³⁸² Ronald Cohen, “Child-Saving and Progressivism, 1885-1915,” *In American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook*, ed. Joseph Hawes and Ray Hiner (London, Greenwood Press, 1985), 293.

³⁸³ Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Clough, “Citizenship and Inclusion in the Early Years: Understanding and Responding to Childrens Perspectives on ‘Belonging,’” *International Journal of Early Years Education* 17 no.3 (2009): 193.

Parks and playgrounds developed community and place attachment in the city while they shaped neighbourhood environments as places to foster and engage children as citizens. Oral history interviews indicate that some children had an independent mobility, not only to walk to the playgrounds, but to wander around the city over long distances without direct adult supervision, although their comings and goings to play were monitored by some parents in various ways. It seems Edmonton children at this time were fairly independent and active agents with their own knowledge and practices of play. The exploration of the local environment allowed children to acquire a sense of local place with the formation of their identity and the creation of significant meaning to place.³⁸⁴ Mobility suggests children were citizens of their city who came “to understand themselves through the experiences, memories and use of streets and neighbourhoods”³⁸⁵ that created ideals of citizenship, sense of place, and space.

5.2 Playgrounds in Edmonton: From Private to Public Welfare

Canadian cities saw the emergence of many volunteer organizations in late nineteenth century that continued to develop through the first decade of the twentieth century. Most of their concerns were related to health care and welfare for urban children and families in cities. Historical records indicate Edmonton was different in its delivery system for playgrounds compared to other cities. In *Social Welfare and Social Credit: The Administrators' Contribution to Alberta's Provincial Welfare State*, Leslie Bella indicates that Charlotte Whitton was invited

³⁸⁴ Pia Christensen, Place, ‘Space and Knowledge: Children in the Village and the City,’ in *Transforming Learning in Schools and Communities: The Remaking of Education for a Cosmopolitan Society*, ed. Stewart Ranson, Jon Nixon, and Bob Lingard (New York: Continuum, 2008), 73.

³⁸⁵ Christensen, 71.

by the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire (IODE) to study Alberta's welfare system in the late 1940s. Whitton described "a chaotic situation with relief given arbitrarily by the municipalities and a child welfare program without any social workers to help families and their children."³⁸⁶ Whitton's report showcases Edmonton's poor social service system even compared to other Alberta cities. It is reasonable to speculate that Edmonton City Council authored much of the situation itself as other municipalities seemed to fare better with different delivery models in place. No doubt recreation for children was one of these longstanding problem areas as the City relied heavily on private charity agencies, such as the Gyro Club, to shore it up. Although City of Edmonton may not have been an active leader in the field of playgrounds, its voluntary private sector partner was.

The Gyro Club as a volunteer sector agency advocated for children's rights to be protected. They fundraised for playgrounds for almost three decades with great efforts to achieve their objective. Perhaps they believed that through playgrounds they promoted a good life for the community that was crucial in the quality and quantity of social relations, and at the same time allowed the prevention of delinquency. It is only recently that the link between social capital and health has been established. According to Trudy Harpham and others, research in the United States has shown that elements of social capital explain life expectancy,³⁸⁷ whereby elements for measuring social capital include participation in local community, neighbourhood connections, family and friend's connections, feelings of trust, and safety.³⁸⁸ The Gyro playgrounds fostered

³⁸⁶ Leslie Bella, "Social Welfare and Social Credit: The Administrators' Contribution to Alberta's Provincial Welfare State," *Canadian Social Work Review* 4 (1986): 87.

³⁸⁷ Trudy Harpham, Emma Grant, Elizabeth Thomas, "Measuring Social Capital within Health Surveys: Key Issues," *Health Policy and Planning* 17 no. 1 (2002):107.

³⁸⁸ Harpham, 108.

these elements, which allowed Edmontonians to improve social capital to a degree that enhanced connectedness and allowed bonding and bridging among neighbours.³⁸⁹ Such factors were patterns understood in the context of professional and volunteer sector work more than a hundred years ago among social reformers who initiated early playgrounds.

Like others, the Gyro Club struggled to attain their objective and to serve the welfare of Canadian citizens. They were recognized by the local media as sole operators of the Gyro playgrounds for twenty two years. Different social movements and charitable fundraising groups helped to make the welfare state possible. The idea that private and public division never existed in a pure form has been debated by different scholars, and “in this view governments have always participated in welfare provision whether through subsidy, licensing or direct provision.”³⁹⁰ According to Tillotson, Mariana Valverde was a key scholar who “made the beginning of the case for Canada, having had not a purely private welfare regime, but a mixed social economy, with significant participation by government.”³⁹¹ In Valverde’s study, *The Mixed Social Economy as a Canadian Tradition*, she focuses on the complex web of relationships linking the private and public and their provision of social services. She claims that the image of self-sufficient civil society of charitable philanthropists was a myth, because many of the private charities depended on government and municipal grants.³⁹²

³⁸⁹ Reed more in Trudy Harpham, Emma Grant, Elizabeth Thomas, “Measuring Social Capital within Health Surveys: Key Issues,” *Health Policy and Planning* 17 no.1.

³⁹⁰ Tillotson, 8.

³⁹¹ Tillotson, 8.

³⁹² Mariana Valverde, “The Mixed Social Economy as a Canadian Tradition,” *Studies in Political Economy* 47 (1995): 43.

The Community Chest that emerged in Canada during the twentieth century was a movement that rationalized social services, making sure that the money people gave through charity was used in an efficient way.³⁹³ Tillotson argues that the “Chest phenomenon was treated as an intriguing innovation,”³⁹⁴ and it was to bring different social groups together to participate in a democratic decision making process and engaging in public relations exercise.³⁹⁵ Although the Gyro Club did not participate with the Community Chest as a volunteer sector agent that used private charities to construct playgrounds, it faced similar problems between the roles of the public and private welfare state towards the construction of welfare services.

In Chapter Four, I begin from the position that the municipal government lacked adequate resources to fund children’s playgrounds, and, therefore, the City wanted a partnership with the Gyro Club. They came to a formal agreement dividing the responsibilities concerning the playgrounds. In this view, the City has always been linked to playgrounds, however were benefitted from the voluntary sector support and operations that permitted the City to allocate resources and funding elsewhere at a time of scarce resources for social initiatives. Both public and private welfare states were involved in the provision of social services, yet the distribution of this provision was not equitable. This issue became more relevant once the Gyro Club was not able to provide adequate funding to continue with playground programs and campaigning for funds through charity became difficult.

³⁹³ Tillotson, 139.

³⁹⁴ Tillotson, 14.

³⁹⁵ Tillotson, 102.

The Depression and the Second World War affected the business of Edmontonians. The funds had been cut down because of the crisis of the Depression. The community was not able to respond with the Gyro Club fundraiser as they had in the past ten years, therefore it was more difficult to raise money for playgrounds. Despite difficulties, the Gyro Club continued to develop programs for the community, although it requested new negotiations with the City and more assistance on several occasions but their needs was not met.

The “mixed economy between the public and the private” in Edmonton, cannot be considered equitable because the Gyro Club was burdened to continue to look for funding in times when money became scarce. Unfortunately tensions grew between the City and the Gyro Club. After ten years of struggles to continue with the playgrounds, the City decided to assume maintenance of the grounds in 1942 and the Club continued to be responsible for supervision and operation. In addition to these tensions, a number of public requests for play areas were sent to the City Commissioners requesting more play areas to fulfill the needs children and families. The City had little choice but to take more responsibility for recreation and playgrounds by this time.

The Gyro playgrounds are an example of the mixed economy of social service provision in Canada that emerged in a time where “the sense of crisis about welfare needs encouraged the discussion of co-operate solutions”³⁹⁶ The volunteer sector formed connections with the public welfare state in order to provide health and recreation to Canadian citizens. This system allowed overcoming difficult processes and the management of poverty and crime in the aftermath of wars. While we know that Canadians wanted a reformed country after wartime, it was not certain how to accomplish these efforts. What we do know is that local voluntary groups supported by

³⁹⁶ Tillotson, 24.

charitable donations and non-governmental agencies such as the Gyro Club played an important role in this process.³⁹⁷

5.3 Final Reflections

Until now, the history of Gyro playgrounds was little studied. There was no source to trace the origins of Edmonton playgrounds and its early recreation system in detail. This MA thesis study fills an important gap by providing new data and new understanding of the origins of Edmonton's playgrounds and salient issues of city parks and recreation partnered with the voluntary sector. The historical analysis of the Gyro playgrounds in Edmonton contribute to a better understanding of the roles of the private and public welfare state in the development of play programs during 1920 and 1950. We know that the Gyro Club as a private agency responded in an efficient manner to the crisis of 1930s, whereas the public state did not step forward in like manner. However both public and private shared social service provision for Edmonton community for three decades. The Gyro Club did not have total autonomy of social service provision, however it was always was a complex relationship between the state and civil society.

Playgrounds have been historically understood as a space to instill citizenship among children and families. I believe citizenship can enhance a sense of belonging to a certain group or community. Citizenship and sense of belonging are key components when it comes to making policies for people who live in communities, which brings me back to that warm summer day on August 2011 at a Tipton Park gathering. The renewal of the water feature in Tipton playground is an example of the ongoing work to build the city and foster equity for people who live in local

³⁹⁷ Tillotson 130-131.

neighbourhoods. It is also part of the swinging pendulum of complex relationships and models that have involved the voluntary and public sectors in building the state to support urban social services for children and families in the past. John Joseph Kelso believed that the playground movement “crowds sunshine and happiness into lives of boys and girls. A playground once secured, can never be diverted from its original purpose.”³⁹⁸ To the extent that land trust and play act as an investment for future generations, the legacy of Tipton Gyro playground may have pleased him and early members of Edmonton’s Gyro Club as well as many children.

³⁹⁸ John Joseph Kelso, *Playgrounds, One of Canada's Greatest Needs: A Call to Service for the Children of the Future; A Plea for Recreation and Playground* (Toronto: Parliament Buildings, 1914), 11.

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APPENDIX A**Census Canada, Edmonton Population**

Edmonton Population (Division 11)					
1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1946
4176	31,064	58,821	79,197	93,817	113,116

APPENDIX B

Gyro Playgrounds constructed between 1922 and 1949. Source: Historical Records Gyro Club of Edmonton. (Scrapbook 1946-1950 and Annual Reports 1949, 1952.)

No.	Name	Year	Built and Funded	Operation of Play programs
1	Patricia Gyro Playground (McCauley)	1922	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built and funded by the Gyro Club. The City provided the land for playgrounds and a grant of \$750. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gyros were sole operators In 1946 the City took over the management of playgrounds and named it McCauley playground.
2	Kitchener Gyro Playground	1924	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established in 1913 by the Parks Commission and was known as the Old School Ground it was 2/3 completed. In 1924 the Gyro Club restructured this playground. The City provided the land for playgrounds and a grant of \$750. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gyros were sole operators. In 1946 the City took over the management of this playground
3	Tipton Gyro Playground	1924	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built and funded by the Gyro Club. The City provided the land for playgrounds and a grant of \$750. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gyros were sole operators In 1946 the City took over the management of playgrounds.
4	University Hospital for Crippled Children	1930	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Gyro Club financed the construction of the playground. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintained and supervised by the hospital's staff. This playground was never part of the summer programs established by the Gyro Club or City of Edmonton.
5	Borden Park (Cromdale)	1948	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built by the Recreation Commission. Funding made available by the Gyro Club. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Edmonton in charge of all summer play programs City asked EFCL for assistance.
6	Jasper Place	1948	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built by the Recreation Commission. Funding made available by the Gyro Club. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Edmonton in charge of all summer play programs City asked EFCL for assistance.
7	King Edward Park	1949	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built by the Recreation Commission. Funding made available by the Gyro Club. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Edmonton in charge of all summer play programs. City asked EFCL for assistance.
8	Riverdale	1949	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built by the Recreation Commission. Funding made available by the Gyro Club. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Edmonton in charge of all summer play programs City asked EFCL for assistance
9	North Edmonton (Westwood)	1949	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Built by the Recreation Commission. Funding made available by the Gyro Club. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Edmonton in charge of all summer play programs City asked EFCL for assistance

APPENDIX C

Federal Census Edmonton 1921-1931: Population Classified According to Principal Origins of People

Federal Census Edmonton 1921, Vol. 1, Table 27: Population classified according to principal origins of people.					
British 22,580	Scottish 13,378	Irish 8,758	French 2,707	Austrian 1734	German 1,582
Scandinavian 1,353	Russian 1,065	British Other 928	Hebrew 821	Dutch 721	Polish 652
Chinese and Japanese 550	Ukrainian 508	European Other 430	Negro 277	Belgian 219	Unspecified 158
Italian 139	Greek 106	Syrian 55	Finnish 44	Indian 34	Asia Others 22
Federal Census Edmonton 1931, Vol. 2, Table 33: Population classified according to principal origins of people.					
British 26,794	Scottish 16,487	Irish 10,997	German 4,983	Ukrainian 4,625	French 3,654
Scandinavian 2,861	Polish 1,643	British Other 1,416	Dutch 1,098	Hebrew 1,057	European Other 576
Russian 562	Chinese and Japanese 508	Austrian 313	Czech and Slovak 304	Italian 268	Belgian 215
Romanian 189	Unspecified 158	Hungarian 119	Asia Others 91	Finnish 68	Indian and Eskimo 40

APPENDIX D

Munday's Map of the City of Edmonton. Publisher Munday Map Co. Copyright Canada 1922, by C.G Munday. Accessed from William C. Wonders map collection, University of Alberta.



APPENDIX E**Notification of Approval of Ethics, University of Alberta (HERO)**

Date: February 1, 2013

Study ID: Pro00034643

Principal Investigator: Paulina Retamales

Study Supervisor: Pearl Reichwein

Study Title: A History of Edmonton Gyro Playground and Urban Social Reform

Approval Expiry Date: January 31, 2014

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1 . Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

Dr. William Dunn

Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

APPENDIX F

Informed Consent Form



UNIVERSITY OF
ALBERTA

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

Project Title: A History of Edmonton Gyro Playground and Urban Social Reform

Principal Investigator:

Paulina Retamales MA Student

Van Vliet Centre E488

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

University of Alberta

E-mail: retamale@ualberta.ca

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this study?	Yes	No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study without consequence?	Yes	No
Do you understand that the information you provide can only be withdrawn from the study before the investigator begins the research analysis?	Yes	No
Do you understand that your interview will be information in the public domain?	Yes	No
Do you understand who will have access to your information?	Yes	No
Do you consent to being identified in conjunction with your interview?	Yes	No
Do you request your interview to remain anonymous (i.e. <i>not</i> identified by name or photo)?	Yes	No
Do you consent to the interview and photos being retained for potential archiving?	Yes	No

This study has been explained to me by: _____

I agree to take part in this study.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Witness

Printed Name

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

Signature of Investigator or Designee

Date

APPENDIX G

Letter of Information



Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

Principal Investigator:

Paulina Retamales
Van Vliet Centre E488
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB T6G 2H9

February 01, 2013

Dear Participant:

This letter is an invitation to take part in a research interview for my study **A History of Edmonton Gyro Playground Movement and Urban Social Reform**.

The purpose of the project is to examine the history of the Gyro Club in Edmonton as it relates to the beginnings of playgrounds in Alberta. The study aims to investigate how and why the Edmonton Gyro Club took a role in urban social reform beginning in the 1920s. Oral history interviews will record memories about the local Gyro playgrounds and children's lives.

A distinctive culture of creative outdoor play for children emerged through the Gyro Club movement. I hope to learn from your stories in interviews about the Gyro Club and the playground movement. I anticipate that oral history interviews will add to archival research to better understand the history of supervised playgrounds in Canada. I am the principal investigator of the research study; my research supervisor and co-investigator is Dr. PearlAnn Reichwein. The study will result in publications that contribute to understanding the history of the playground movement, civic life, and modern childhood in Alberta.

We would like to interview people who wish to discuss their experiences involving Edmonton's Gyro playgrounds or Gyro Club. They may have been involved directly or indirectly with the Gyro Club of Edmonton. Such individuals may include, for example, club members, past members, relatives, or past participants of Gyro playground programs and their families or friends.

If you agree to volunteer for an interview, I will meet with you for an interview that will last about an hour. The interview will occur at a convenient mutual determined location (e.g., home, office, campus, or other site). With your permission, the interview may involve follow-up contact requiring additional time. The semi-structured interview will start with one or two questions, and move to an open conversation. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded and you may be photographed. All information gathered will be securely retained in

my office. Materials such as oral history tapes, transcripts, and photographs related to the Gyro Club of Edmonton can have lasting historical value. For this reason, I may use it for future research analysis or give it to an archive for preservation and future research.

You are free to decide what information you wish to share. At any time during the interview, you can decline to respond to a question and we can move to another question. You are free to withdraw from the interview without consequence, at any time, by indicating your wishes to the interviewer. If you withdraw from the interview, your information will be removed from the project based on your specific request.

All information that you offer me will enter the public domain, meaning that it *will not* be confidential, unless by your specific request. If you wish for anonymity, personal information will be coded and secured in my office, and you will not be identified by name or photograph in any presentations or publications. The information you provide can only be withdrawn from the study before research analysis begins. Information collected during the interview may be used for academic publications in the form of journal articles, books, presentations, and exhibits, along with the publication and presentation of history to the public. Ultimately, published research will be available to you and others through means such as libraries.

All research conducted through the University of Alberta must follow approved ethical standards. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

The potential benefits of participating in this study include an opportunity to: 1) share and record knowledge, memories, stories, and thoughts; 2) reflect on the Gyro Club and the playground movement 3) contribute to a greater understanding of Edmonton's playgrounds and history of childhood; 4) document and conserve historical information.

I hope to hear about your experiences related to the Gyro Club of Edmonton. Thank you for considering this invitation to join the study.

Sincerely,

Paulina Retamales
MA student
University of Alberta

APPENDIX H

Sample Interview Questions



Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

The following list of questions is proposed as a sample of the subject matter to be covered in semi-structured interviews. Interviews will begin with general questions, and will allow for open-ended conversation centred on remembering the experiences and knowledge of individual participants. Questions will be posed as deemed relevant to individual participants.

1. When were you involved with the Gyro Club? How did you participate? Why?
2. Tell me about your experiences with the Gyro Club or Gyro playgrounds. What memories do you have of the children's programs, games, organized sports, circus, or carnivals, etc.?
3. Did you or your relatives or friends ever attend the Gyro playground or supervised playground programs? Tell me about what you can remember about playing there.
4. How did the Gyro Club view the purpose of the construction of playgrounds in Edmonton? How do you see it? What playground equipment do you recall?
5. How did the Gyro Club interact with the community?
6. How did children play in the Gyro playgrounds? Was there separation by gender?
7. Can you remember or do you know of any issues related to citizenship or child welfare that the Gyro's instilled in the playgrounds? What were your views on the issue(s)?
8. What was the role of the Gyro Club in Edmonton or other places?
9. What was the main purpose of the Gyro playgrounds when you were involved Club? Was the Gyro Club a valuable institution? Is it now?
10. Do you think the Gyro Club was a significant organization compared to other social service Clubs in Edmonton? Why?