

Hardy, Stephen. *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982. Pp. xiv, 272. Index, selected bibliography, notes, illustrations, maps. \$19.95.

Stephen Hardy, a 35-year-old native of Boston and chairman of the Department of Sports Management at Robert Morris College, Coraopohs, Pennsylvania, writes like a seasoned historian of nineteenth-century East Coast America. *How Boston Played* is exceptionally well written, both in scholarship and in style. The editors should be acknowledged for their assistance in the preparation of the printed text and the general layout of the book. For example, the top of each page of the note section at the rear of the book (pp. 203-249) gives the pages in the text to which the notes of that page pertain. This is by far the easiest method of turning back and forth from text to note. I appreciated this minor detail.

Hardy explains that the increase in demand for recreation and sport activities during this period fell into

...two distinct patterns of what can be called a search for community. The first involved attempts to directly shape [a word used often in this book] or control the city so as to create a consciously defined sense of community. The drives to erect public recreation spaces and fill them with adult-directed games fit here [i.e., parks and playgrounds]. At the same time, however, a growing number of residents were less interested in confronting the city than they were in nurturing the ties of association and identity that the urban reality had presented to them. This receptive establishment of community encompassed clubs, commodities, and charismatic heroes (p. 198).

The thesis is that Boston, like other eastern American cities during this time, was in a constant state of flux, and those persons with any urban roots at all were continuously trying to reshape and maintain meaningful forms of community—Brahmin and common folk alike. The demand for recreation and sport was one way of shoring up this desired sense of community. Hardy stresses that the principal proponents and organizers of recreation and sport activities were not solely the middle- and upper-class reformers but were also the “...other urban constituents who were actively seeking to shape their communities on their own terms. Their tools for action were similar to those of the reformers, only they were far less visible in the historical record (p. 62):

Hardy cites several Ward Bosses of working-class neighborhoods that effectively organized and opposed the park or playground plans that did not benefit them directly. My bias, based on similar research (Jerry G. Dickason, “The Development of the Playground Movement in the United States,” N.Y.U., 1979), is that the working class organized and opposed only after the others had what they wanted themselves, i.e. the “Emerald Necklace” of connecting park lands encircling Boston. The middle and upper classes were seeking park lands in their own interest, and they were not seeking playgrounds for themselves. They organized and conducted playgrounds for the poorer class (I can sense Hardy’s hair raise).

My difference with Hardy lies in a definition of playground. He does not give an explanation of what playgrounds are. Hardy presents a chart of the city’s appropriations for playgrounds for the years 1869-1898 (p. 89). One would assume that the term playground means the same throughout this period. This is not so. Playgrounds before 1887 were not the same as playgrounds after 1887. The efforts of the Massachusetts Emergency and Hygiene Association (MEHA) made the difference in that term. Early playgrounds, often spelled as a hyphenated word, were unsupervised areas where self-organized games such as baseball and football could be played by neighborhood adolescents and adults, predominantly males. Playgrounds after 1887 were small, fenced-in, supervised areas for boys and girls four to nine years of age. These playgrounds had organized activities such as games, marches, singing, flag ceremonies, and play apparatus such as swings, teeter-totters, and a sandbox. These playgrounds were founded in mission yards, vacant lots, and school yards in the poorer sections of Boston. The earlier playgrounds were in large open spaces such as park areas. Hardy states that “The major initiative

for public playgrounds came from neighborhood lobbies who were sold on the simple proposition that outdoor exercise was wholesome, a deterrent to crime and disease (p. 87).” This might have been the case before 1887, but it certainly would not apply afterward. Why? Because in 1885 the MEHA established a supervised sand garden in the yard of the Parmenter-street Chapel, in the North End of Boston, the roughest part of town. The following year MEHA founded three sand gardens, all in the yards of missions, and in 1887 MEHA increased the number of sand gardens to eleven and changed the name to playgrounds. If these playgrounds that were first called sand gardens were the same as playgrounds before 1887, why were they not called playgrounds from the onset? The playground, as we know it today, stems from the 1885 sand garden; it does not resemble, at all, the playground before 1885. This is an obvious omission in Hardy’s research. He has not consulted the *MEHA Annual Reports* (which are in the Boston Public Library) which give vivid descriptions of reformers’ support and control of the development of playgrounds. The *MEHA Annual Reports* would be evidence to question Hardy’s notion that “The major lobby behind the acceptance of playgrounds had not been private philanthropic or reform groups, but the local neighborhood citizenry (p. 98).”

One of the most interesting chapters is “Bicycle Crazes,” describing how the bicycle came into popularity and how people formed bicycle clubs as a way to establish a sense of community much the same as the country club and the yacht club. Hardy also shows that the rise in spectator sports was a response to the need for community. The popularity for team sports and the celebration of their heroes enhanced community spirit and fostered intense pride.

Hardy has given us an excellent example of a historical case study of the growth of recreation and sport in an American city. The book is now a pattern that can be replicated for such cities as New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Louisville, Chicago, and St. Louis. Such studies would help verify or deny the scholarly notion that the growth of recreation and sport’s popularity occurred simultaneously throughout urban America.

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