

The Philadelphia Social History Project: Implications for the Study of Sport

J. THOMAS JABLE
William Paterson College

The Philadelphia Social History Project (PSHP) is an extensive analysis of Philadelphia and its people during the second half of the nineteenth century. The most ambitious history project yet undertaken, PSHP involves scores of scholars from many disciplines probing an enormous data base in order to reconstruct Philadelphia as it changed from a mercantile city to an industrial metropolis. The Philadelphia Social History Project is a grant experiment in quantitative-interdisciplinary history.

In analyzing the processes of urbanization and industrialization, PSHP has focused on four major themes: the nature of work, the uses of urban space, life course developments, and special group experiences. Information for developing those themes has come from PSHP's unprecedented machine-readable data base. From its vast storehouse, PSHP can describe on a block-by-block basis Philadelphia's 2.5 million inhabitants for the years 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880. The information has come largely from several unique sources: (1) Areal unit—a grid square representing an area one by one-and-one quarter blocks. The map of Philadelphia County has been divided into 7,100 areal units. (2) U.S. Population Manuscript Census Schedules for 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880. These schedules provide important variables on all blacks and all Irish (142,000) and German (84,000) males 18 and over. A sample of native white Americans (500,000) has been ascertained for comparison purposes. (3) The Pennsylvania Abolition Society and the Society of Friends Manuscript Census Schedules for 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880 describe all of Philadelphia's 11,500 black households. (4) The U.S. Manufacturing Manuscript Census Schedules and the City Business Directories for 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880 describe 29,000 and 127,000 firms, respectively. (5) All 150 of Philadelphia's transportation routes operating between 1840 and 1880 have been depicted on the map of Philadelphia County.

PSHP offers great potential for the study of sport. The sport historian can examine social stratification and social mobility among Philadelphia sportsmen. In looking at socioeconomic stratification the researcher can determine precisely when the upper classes begin to dominate sport and when the lower classes begin to imitate them. From an examination of residence, occupation, and socioeconomic class, one can determine the effects, if any, of urbanization upon sport in Philadelphia. Such an examination may also reveal the effects of residence and/or occupation on the growth or stagnation of various sports. One could also look at the involvement of transportation companies, businesses, and public officials in Philadelphia's sports. Other important considerations for the study of sport at PSHP might include the examination of the uses of leisure time during the latter half of the nineteenth century. A strong case, too, could be made for the study of the black and ethnic experiences in Philadelphia's sports.