

# The Development of Sport and Recreational Pursuits in a Rural Community: A Study of Summerside, Prince Edward Island, 1850–1900

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Historians have long postulated that new communities are shaped by the factors of one, or a combination of four major determinants; a frontier thesis, a physical/environment influence, tradition or metropolitanism. While there has been considerable application of these theories to the economic, social and political aspects of community life the area of sport and recreation has received little attention.

Summerside, Prince Edward Island grew from a single ownership area to a community of two thousand people from 1850-1900. It was driven economically by agriculture, shipping, and ship building.

The earliest recreational activities in Summerside reflected a high level of socialization with debating clubs, Literary Institutes, Church Teas and Bazaars popular events. Horse racing was one of the first sporting events to take place with large crowds gathering on the harbour ice to witness match races and to engage in wagering. Subsequently summer races also became popular with the construction of the Driving park.

Cricket was the first organized team sport with the Prince County Cricket Club formed in 1869. Baseball and lawn tennis were also promoted early in the communities' development however did not gain a firm participation base until after 1900.

Winter sports grew more rapidly and involved the community to a greater extent than did the activities of summer. Ice skating, Fancy Dress Skating Carnivals, snow shoeing and speed skating provided many hours of recreational pleasure for the residents. The enjoyment of winter sport indicated an appropriate adaption to the sometimes harsh environment and problems associated with early settlement.

As the community matured (passed the frontier stage) new and exciting sports became part of the recreational activities of the residents. Cycling and track and field became competitive during the summer and hockey captured the enthusiasm of participants and spectators during the late 1890's. Hockey, as no other sport had done, created excitement throughout the community.

While physical/geographical determinism is evident in the development of sport and recreation, in Summerside there is evidence that tradition was a factor and metropolitanism significant. The presence of Charlottetown as a city in proximity to Summerside exerted considerable influence from the institution of Skating Carnivals to the prominence of hockey.

Early immigrants brought tradition with them to Summerside however it was their adaptation to the physical environment and the influence of adjacent, larger communities that created the impetus for sport and recreation to develop to a significant level in the community.