

Robert Kossuth
University of Western Ontario

***Government Legislation and the Formation of
a Local Public Recreation Bureaucracy in
London, Ontario, 1867-1914***

Within the broader study of Canadian leisure, recreation and sport history one area that requires further critical investigation is the impact of federal, provincial and local recreation legislation upon the formation of local public recreation bureaucracies in developing urban centres. Specifically, the developing urban centre represented in this study is the city of London, Ontario in the period from the late 19th and early 20th century. In examining the relationship between legislation and developing bureaucracies it is important to recognize that each town or city approached the organization and regulation of leisure, recreation, and sport not only on the basis of their local circumstances, but also within broader structures that were framed by national and provincial legislation. Therefore,

it can be argued that local recreation bureaucracies, as with the case of London, were both reflective of, and designed to meet the needs of, the town or city's elite citizens while often ignoring the interests of women, workers and other marginalised groups.

This study is framed by two complementary theoretical constructs, institutionalization and the process of hegemony. Institutionalization, as interpreted by Don Morrow in 1992, provides the framework for the analysis of this social process. This approach is concerned with understanding how certain social practices, in this case the regulation of recreation, were initially introduced to protect the interests of specific groups, were then generally adopted, and eventually became law or accepted practice. In concert with institutionalisation, the process of hegemony, as outlined by Raymond Williams, is drawn upon to examine how specific cultural practices operated to reinforce or challenge the developing public recreation bureaucracy. Thus, through the examination of these two theoretical constructs, the process of recreation regulation can be assessed within the scope of broader social relations with London.

The first section of this study is focused upon specific pieces of federal and provincial legislation that have influenced the provision and regulation of public recreation in Ontario. The first of these was the 1883 "Public Parks Act" passed by the Province of Ontario which promoted the creation of parks and parks systems. The second level of this study involves the analysis of how this and other laws affected the formation of local bylaws and bureaucratic structures for public recreation regulation in London. Sources for this portion of the study are drawn from municipal records including city council minutes, bylaws, and the records of various municipal agencies.

The findings of this study exhibit that federal and provincial legislation had a large influence over the development of local approaches to the provision and regulation of public recreation. The case study investigation of London provides an example of how the various levels of legislation interacted within a developing urban centre to affect the formation of a fully independent public recreation bureaucracy by 1914. Finally, the evidence suggests that the legislation concerning public recreation at all levels was driven by and reflective of the interests of those citizens who represented the city's male elite. Thus, the interests of upper, and later middle-class men formed the laws and institutions were most often served, while marginalised groups such as women and working class men were more often than not largely excluded from public recreation by these same laws.