

New Projects / Nouveaux projets

PIONEERS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT IN CANADA

The idea of developing a history of physical education and sport in Canada by calling on the memories and reminiscences of pioneers and applying the principles and techniques associated with oral history should not be surprising to anyone. Are there not among you many who listened with great interest to the tales of the efforts of our hockey heroes as they were described on the Hot Stove League sessions of early C.B.C. Radio's Hockey Night in Canada? Here were recounted, by past participants or analytic observers, the memorable sports happenings of the past. Many of our super-stars of today were weaned on those stories of our Canadian sport heroes.

The question which might logically be raised by scholarly historians, of course, is whether this approach is legitimately historical. I would submit that it can be provided that the researcher employing the technique applies the normal rules governing historical data, which are: (1) to be aware of bias, (2) to look for internal consistency, and (3) to seek confirmation in other sources.

It is also my conviction that no established profession has depth, traditions, customs, or a present, without history. This heritage, in my view, must be recorded and preserved for future generations. The origins, growth and development of the field, the problems faced and solved, the cultural forces exerted, the movements that have waned and persisted, the changes in implements, facilities and costumes, the thoughts and deeds of the pioneer leaders who shaped the profession over the years; these surely are the concerns of the historian and the answers to these concerns are of value to society for it to better understand its existence.

Thomas Carlyle is reported to have said: "The history of living accomplishments is but the biography of great men". How better, then, to learn of the historical evolution of physical education and sport in Canada than from the recorded recollections of those "great men" (and women) who were active in shaping the direction we are following.

Accessibility to sophisticated recording equipment has made it possible for me to seek out those pioneers in my field of physical education and sport who are still alive, to interview them and to record their personal reminiscences of days and events in which they played a leading role. With a grant from the Canada Council and with the close cooperation of the Sound Archives Section of the Public Archives of Canada, fifty of these first person interviews conducted in the language of the interviewee are now available for study by interested scholars and the general public. A first in Canadian physical education and sport history.

My arbitrary limit of fifty interviewees was established simply on a "guesstimate" of how long the process would take and in consideration of my available time and the funding support I had received.

The selection of the fifty pioneers was made with an attempt to provide a representative cross-section of men and women, geographic regions, and Canada's two major language groups. Superimposed on this was evidence of peer recognition of their pioneer leadership status by virtue of awards or citations presented to them over the years by professional organizations such as the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation.

Without describing my methodology in detail, suffice it to say that I undertook

considerable preliminary study of those events generally considered within the profession to have had considerable historical significance during the 20th century. I then endeavoured, to the best of my ability, to match the pioneers with those events in which they appeared to have played a leading role. During the course of a relaxed, informal interview, these pioneers were then encouraged to recall those events and to reminisce about their personal involvement in them.

In all, some fifty such events were identified and, not surprisingly, many of these pioneers were found to have been active in several of them. Quite possibly this was due to their scarcity in numbers in the early days of physical education in Canada.

The completed interviews gave me valuable historical source material which will enable further study into this heretofore neglected area. The interviews also renewed inspiration for my own teaching and left me in awe of the accomplishments of these pioneers as they struggled to overcome apathy, disinterest and, in some cases, downright opposition. We could not be where we are today in our profession without their pioneering leadership and I only hope their stories, through the medium of oral history will receive the attention they deserve by those who follow in their footsteps.

Dr. Stewart Davidson
Department of Physical Education
University of Ottawa