

SPORT IN RIVERDALE

By Gerald Whyte

Riverdale has always been a sporting neighbourhood, particularly in the early days when there were fewer activities than in our present media/electronic age. Riverdale was also until recently a largely lower and middle income community where people enjoyed local competitions.



*Riverdale Park East: Summer of 1924: Tennis & Baseball
Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 372, Subseries 52, Item 1182*

the setting for baseball, soccer, cricket, now enjoying a revival, athletic exhibitions and military reviews. In winter there were “icies”, prepared bobsled runs where spaces could be rented on large bobsleds. This sort of activity is no longer possible because of liability concerns. It is reported that an ambulance attended on Broadview when the runs were active. The hill is still one of the best and most popular toboggan and sled runs in the city.

Withrow Park was for many years the location of a large skating rink near the clubhouse and sports are still played on the field at the south end of the park. The Lake Ontario shore provided a setting for a number of sports, swimming fishing and boating in summer, and notably iceboating in winter. When the great marsh still existed it was an excellent hunting area for small game.

Sporting activities in Riverdale today tend to be limited and more organized. There are also more regulations and a cost factor where city facilities are concerned.

The 19th century was still a horse centred era, where many people rode and horse racing was a popular sport. Jack Maitland’s racecourse just south and east of Queen East and Broadview was an important mid century attraction, accompanied by the essential services of the Rising Sun Inn just north of the track on Queen. The area, a centre of traffic from the earliest days, gave rise to other activities: the roller skating rink near the southwest corner of the intersection, the Sunlight Park baseball grounds just to the west and south on the Smith family property and the Royal Canadian –Athletic/Baseball/Curling Club just to the northeast on Broadview.

There were also the sporting activities just to the west on the Don River: curling and skating in winter and swimming, fishing and boating in the summer.

Riverdale Park East, where the slope along Broadview was a natural amphitheatre for spectators in the early days, was



*Riverdale Park East: Winter of 1915: Bobsled Runs
Toronto Archives, Fonds 1548, Series 393, Item 12681*

The City Playgrounds League



East Riverdale Junior Girls Hockey Team, 1923
Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 372, Subseries 52, Item 1111

In the early teens of the last century, the City of Toronto Parks Department was pioneering in setting up and administrating the "City Playgrounds League". Separate winter and summer schedules featured everything from hockey, soccer, wrestling, volleyball, track & field and tether tennis to potato racing, square dancing, skate racing and treasure hunts. Teams of bantams through to seniors participated. Six permanent Recreation Centres came to be established. Three were east of the Don. The East Riverdale R.C. stood at 1151 Queen St. E., now Jonathan Ashbridge Park. Two other nearby centres were at 56 Morse Street (now Morse Street Parkette) and 327 Pape (now the Matty Eckler Community R.C.). The League also came to represent more than sixty schools from across the city. Games were played in the neighbourhood parks and schools as well as the recreation centres. Hard fought battles for championships were eagerly reported in the city newspapers of the day. Winning teams of the League divisions would then go on to compete against champions from other leagues in the City championships.

A Word from Our President



Portrait by Ronnie Dick, 1977

As we launch into our 2014 events we are already looking at the 2014-2015 season. Because of the workload of running events and the increasing difficulty of finding speakers relevant to Riverdale we intend to scale back somewhat next season. We will have events on Tues. September 30, Tues. November 25, 2014, Tues. January 27, and Tues. March 31 2015, with our Annual General Meeting on Tues. May 26, 2015. There may also be special events, such as plaque unveilings or tours. Membership for the season will be \$15 for an individual membership or \$20 for a family membership, includes free admission to all events, or \$4 per regular event.

We still need your help finding Riverdale heritage photographs for use in our future publications. Please ask your friends and neighbours if they have anything we could use and forward them to us. Photographs of early Riverdale people, events or buildings are particularly useful. Sometimes they can be found in family photo collections.

Thank you for your continued support in the purchase of "Over the Don" and "The Streets of Riverdale" and your attendance at our events. We are always open to your suggestions on how we can improve our encouragement of Heritage in Riverdale.

Gerald Whyte

Upcoming RHS Events

Tuesday 29 April, 6pm at St. Matthew's Clubhouse:
"Frances Shirriff & the Canadian Dinner Table"
by Sarah B. Hood, Author, Editor and Speaker

Tuesday 27 May, 6pm at St. Matthew's Clubhouse:
Toronto's 61st Mayor, Barbara Hall
will speak at our AGM



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