

GAMES AND AMUSEMENTS IN OLDEN DAYS

While we can go back to the scenes of our childhood we cannot go back to our youth. The lads of two generations ago knew nothing of the supervised, organized and directed play-lots of the present time with their abundance of equipment and paraphernalia. But the boy in former days who possessed a bat, ball and glove was king in his crowd as they gathered for a game of "sides" or "rounders." His equipment outweighed any possible lack of personal skill and gave him an entree into all games. Masks were an almost unknown article, but not so a bloody nose when a foul tip found its mark on an unprotected proboscis. Many were the "open lots" and "corner lots" appropriated for play whose owners had a kindly feeling for youngsters and refrained from posting their plots with "danger red" trespassing signs — so plentifully and banefully obnoxious in these present times. No organizations or civic clubs and no adult managers took time to assist and train the teams. These were often consolidated and the most efficient players chosen for a select team to play a sectional, school or county nine. With seemingly disadvantages yet such playing fields could produce a Jim Sheckard or a Tommy Stouch.

There were no concrete indoor or outdoor swimming pools, with filtered water, to go to. But "the ol' swimmin' hole" in the creek was just as attractive and delightful — when you had nothing better and knew nothing better. Unrestrained by any one, the gang would troop out the lane past the former home of Signer George Ross, walk upon the railroad, cross the "Big Bridge" and oblivious of sunburn, heat and perspiration, plunge into the Conestoga at Sandy Beach. What carefree fun — until some older and larger boy held our heads under water, or dragged us into deeper and dangerous spots.

Out the Grofftown Road, on the near side of the creek, the larger and older boys headed for deep water and expert diving at Deep Rock.

One of the most enjoyable and eagerly looked-for event "in the good old summer time" was the annual Sunday School picnic. The kids in this automobile age, who are practically raised in cars, never knew the anticipatory delight of an infrequent ride on steam cars and later the trolley. Large wash baskets, heavily laden with food, were taken by each family, for a gorgeous, gorged dinner and supper. (Children and adults of today at most sports events have not forgotten this American habit and pastime—

still gorging.) A game of baseball, contests of all kinds, fireworks, small balloon ascensions, long walks into the woods, were some of the enjoyable features. Usually the places selected were Lititz Springs, Penryn, Mount Gretna and Kauffman's Park. What large trout at Lititz, immense catfish at Penryn! Did you bring your line and bait? Just as well you didn't — "no fishing" signs. The day was not complete unless some youngster fell into the deep part of the Springs, then was rescued and dried out in a friendly Lititz home. Pretzels were as plentiful then as now, and the style was to place them on a string and hang them about the neck as a "lei." Mount Gretna boasted of a narrow-gauge railroad that chugged up to Governor Dick tower, from which you could view the landscape o'er. Without effort one could easily become lost in the woods at Penryn — some did, and some were not found for days.

There were other restful spots where small groups would go by trolley to spend a holiday — Pequea on the Susquehanna, Chickies Rock, Rocky Springs, Conestoga Valley Park — all beckoned to picnickers. Conestoga Park, near old Witmer's Bridge, had as a major attraction an open-air theatre where light opera was produced. Madam Butterfly and Olivet would have gone without meals if the attendance proceeds depended upon the young boys who rode to the Park on their bicycles and viewed the stage from the high bank along the pavilion "for free."

If one never had a ride on the old Fall River Line, there was nothing in comparison for Lancaster County lads and lassies as a ride on the stern paddle wheel, double-decker, sea-worthy Lady Gay, which drew as much as two feet of water, and churned majestically from Witmer's Bridge to Peoples' Park and return, supplemented by round trip trolley rides from the city. Captain John Peoples never lost a passenger!

Canoeing was in vogue, and it took skillful handling to breast the wash of the Lady Gay and avoid a ducking. Canoe houses, owned by the many canoe clubs dotted the creek banks. You paddled your own canoe for no motorized craft had as yet invaded these waters. There were canoe regattas with prizes going to the owners of the best decorated boats and those with original features. The Pawnee Canoe Club, organized in 1911 and state-chartered, owners of five canoe houses, were the leaders in all regattas.

For rapid action the boys played "kick the wicket" and "duck off." The wicket, a short stick, was placed obliquely against a wall, and a player would kick it away as far as possible, and then run toward base, stopping just before the wicket was replaced by his opponent. If caught running when it was replaced, the players exchanged places.

Duck off was a similar game, but in it a smaller stone was placed on a large one. Players, one at a time, would throw a stone in an effort to dislodge the upper stone. The one who was "it" would replace the stone when knocked off, then quickly endeavor to tag the thrower if he retrieved his stone and started back to base. If caught he became "it."

The game of corner ball was popular. Boys on the four corners of a large square would throw a ball to each other, and when the opportunity offered make a hit of one of the boys in the center, who then retired, and

when all on his side were hit, they would occupy the corners and their opponents the center, who became the potential targets.

Before we knew the meaning of "safe and sane" or heard any preaching on it, the period preceding the glorious Fourth of July was one of noise and narrow escapades. There were no restrictions on the sale and disposal of fireworks, and many fingers and faces bear evidence to this day of patriotic fervor. Some roman candles could and did back-fire upon the demonstrator; giant firecrackers placed under tin cans would blow the same sky high with a tremendous report. Small boys operated stands in all parts of the city, and careless or calamitous buyers would at times endanger the contents of the stands. When successful, what a pyrotechnic display was had, as a sorrowful junior merchant surveyed his unredeemable loss.

The Fourth in 1898 was one of protracted activity and wild exuberance, for combined with the usual hilarity was the stirring news of the naval victory of Sampson and Schley at Santiago, Cuba. That called for an all-night celebration with the wierdest, loudest and most dangerous contraptions of home-made cannons, constructed mainly of cast-off pipe remnants. The bravest would stand defiantly by the cannon and give more than three cheers for the army and navy. How close to becoming a martyr for his country the foolhardy never new as the trusty and rusty "cannons" somehow remained intact. "Hail Columbia."

Some enjoyed May Walks in season; these were replete with a full (I use the word advisedly) band and refreshments. You may or may not get back to town safely, depending whether any rowdyism developed.

The more active and energetic boys had their "fox and hound" chases, with the scent marked by bits of paper. Some played "shinney" or hockey, using an empty tin can as a puck, and a crooked branch from a convenient tree as a stick. Usually the game was without harm, but if struck by the "puck," which had become battered, unrecognizable and sharp-edged, deep cuts could result, and even a lip could be cut clear through — the victim dreading to report home to irate parents that he indulged in such a dangerous (?) pastime.

On windy days some boys would determine to "go fly a kite." Most were of the home-made (now you'd call it "do it yourself") variety, of cigar-box strips in X shape with a cross bar, around the ends of which was drawn a string; a strong piece of paper, cut to overlapping size, was then pasted over twine and sticks, and you were ready for a flyer. What mattered it if the wind slackened and the kite and guide string tangled with overhead wires and branches, or crashed to the ground. There was ready material for others. It could be that modern model airplanes are a more substantial substitute.

Don't forget the summer camps. For boys summer time was camp time. Social, church, Y.M.C.A. and other organizations had their camp sites — always along a stream or lake, for swimming was a major attraction. There were Shibley's Grove, Mount Gretna and many other spots. At the older boys undertook the chore of cooking; some had regular

chefs. One organization was not content to stay put but arranged for a "marching camp," going from place to place by "Shank's mare," the distance determined by heat, rain and the condition of roads. Of course the equipment they carried — half-tent, blanket, cooking utensils, etc. — weighed at times a ton, or so it seemed. But look at the geography they absorbed first-hand. These same boys in a year or two following decided on a more rapid mode of locomotion — they hopped on their bicycles and pedalled hundreds of miles with destination Boston, the next year Niagara Falls, combined with a boat ride to Canada. Tired, yes, but happy.

For the more erudite lads there was the call to the beckoning fields in the early summer months to go gather, not only jack-in-the-pulpit, skunk cabbage, but other more fragrant and beautiful specimens to tuck into their botanizing can, and later into an herbal. To others the search for minerals, especially quartz crystals, which were plentiful and of various sizes, was a delightful diversion. These stones were found most easily after heavy rain storms. To this could be added the search for Indian arrow heads, artifacts, etc., which abounded in the fields of Lancaster County.

There is no envy for the advantages which the boys of the later years of the twentieth century enjoy. We had the more primitive, less developed conditions which never palled upon us.