

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: Ideal Grounds for Play

By Michelle Johnston

There are a few familiar sights that unofficially announce the arrival of summer ? boats on the water, ice cream in hand and a neighbourhood playground full of kids! Whether it is a swing set, slide, monkey bars, merry-go-round, or all of those structures combined, a well-equipped playground can be a lifesaver for parents and kids who have energy to burn!

It is hard to imagine neighbourhood parks without a playground, but surely, there was a time before swinging, sliding and monkeying around was the norm. After some early research, I discovered that I needed to travel back over seventy years ? to 1947 ? if I wanted to learn more about the origins of Town run playgrounds in Aurora.

I arrived on a beautiful September day and read in the paper that residents were eagerly fundraising to purchase playground equipment for a lot on Tyler Street, just opposite the Tannery. The article mentioned that the Bank of Montreal was accepting donations, so I made my way over there to offer a contribution. I got to chatting with the teller and she informed me that the goal was to keep kids from playing in the streets because the roads are getting too busy. As I handed her a few coins from my pocket, I could not help but think, ?If only she could know how busy Yonge Street would be in 2019!?

Eager to see how this all would unfold, I took a quick trip to the spring of 1948.

Unfortunately, the fundraising efforts fell short but members of Local 27 and some Collis Leather officials were stepping up to sponsor the playground and build the equipment. Aurora's first public playground would be open and ready for the summer of 1948!

It is quite amazing how much conversation revolved around the playgrounds ? one candidate for Town Council even based his platform around the topic.

The newly created Aurora Recreation Commission took the issue of proper playgrounds very seriously and appointed a Director of Children's Playgrounds.

While skipping around the early 1950s it became clear that this whole playground thing had really taken off. I was happy to find Town Park, McMahon Park and the Mill Street Park were all equipped, and that was not all: the Aurora Recreation Commission had introduced a supervised Summer Playground Program, which included arts &

crafts, singing, baseball and of course ? fun on the playground.

The summer programs were an instant hit and playground captains were recruited to supervise the program.

Without the captains, the Summer Playground Program could not run. After speaking directly with a captain, I learned how extensive the training was ? playground captain candidates trained two nights a week, for five weeks, at North York Collegiate.

When I returned to 2019, I discovered that by the late 1970s, the Summer Playground Program expanded to a full day and eventually became known as Day Camps.

For forty years, the program was free and fees were not introduced until 1989!

Of course, summer camps have changed over the years, but many continue to visit the neighbourhood parks so kids can swing, slide and monkey around on the, much more modern, playground equipment.