

THEME:

Recreation - Then and Now

OBJECTIVES:

To acquaint the student with the activities of pioneer entertainment.

To give the students the experience of participating in pioneer games and activities.

To increase the students understanding that the pioneers were often responsible for their own entertainment.

VOCABULARY:

recreation

entertainment

schottische

teeter totter

box social

building bee

pioneer picnic

chivaree

music box

gramophone

phonograph

pianola

beef rings

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The homestead years were full of hardships, disappointment and hunger. It was also a time of settlement, adventure and discovery. Work and more work brought about the desire to find a means of relieving the drudgery and monotony of life.

Participation in sports and games provided relief from monotony and an outlet for the desire for pleasure. The pleasures of participation were accompanied by the pleasure of meeting with friends and neighbours.

The absence of commercial entertainment and the development of sports, encouraged settlers to take the initiative and form games and sports with whatever resources were available.

The origin of many sports can be traced back to the times of the early settlers. From the Indians they acquired the games of "baggataway" which was the forerunner of lacrosse and "hurley" which we now know as hockey.

When the British arrived in the west, they brought with them traditional games such as cricket, track-and-field events, horse-racing, and fox-hunting. Scottish settlers brought with them the games of golf, curling and the caber toss.

The settlers really had to rely on their own resources to solve the problem of recreation and entertainment. On many occasions, neighbors would get together and simply have long talks and discussions. Other times, more action was required to play a game of baseball or lacrosse.

During the winter months, skating parties were popular. In many communities a lake or river

was close by which served as a most suitable ice surface. Quite often the day was finished with a game of cards or a dance.

All that was needed for a dance to occur was a musical instrument such as the fiddle with someone to play it and a wide open space. The popular dances were square dances, waltzes, polkas and an occasional schottische. There were plenty of dances because they were always held to celebrate the building of a new barn, house or store.

A **chivaree** was an event which welcomed a newly married couple into a community. The residents of the community would all gather somewhere armed with noise makers, food and musical instruments. They would proceed to the newlyweds' home where they would make their presence known. Usually they were invited in for an evening of dancing and socializing.

Neighbours

There was a great feeling of togetherness among neighbours. The nearest homestead might have been as close as one-half mile but usually neighbours were two to three miles away. This was an incredibly long distance during the winter months.

One form of social activity was "neighbouring". This consisted of everyone in the family getting dressed up in their best attire to go and call on the neighbours.

Other neighbours were required to act as stand-in medical practitioners. Their duties could range from delivering babies to attending to farm accidents, of which there were plenty. Often the services of neighbours were extended to help out around the farm during the time of convalescence.

Another activity consistent with neighbouring was the **bee** - sewing, threshing, barn or house raising, baking. These bees were not only useful for getting lots of work done in a shorter time but also lent themselves to some good socializing.

The children of pioneer days were never at a loss for something to do. After all of their chores were done, the children enjoyed playing with their games and toys. Because toys were not available for purchase they had to be invented or hand made. The only limit to the games available was the scope of the child's imagination.

Many of the games played by children today were played in the pioneer days. Games such as tag, hide-and-seek and blindman's bluff were enjoyed by pioneer children. The teeter totter which we see in playgrounds today began with a plank laid over a saw-horse. Swings were made from a rope hung from a tree branch. The game of horseshoe pitching was popular for children and adults alike.

"In the West, entertainment meant box socials, building bees, tugs-of-war, and dances that lasted until dawn. Each event was a chance to get out and forget about the cares of being a farmer on the bald prairie, a chance to meet neighbours and talk about crops, new methods of farming, and above all, district gossip.

"In the towns, perhaps entertainment was a little more sophisticated. There were hockey games and curling matches, debates and fiddling contests followed by a dance. Town and country mingled at the annual fall fairs and the circuses that used to come to the main town in the district

every two or three years. Movies were just the rarest of flickers then, although travelogues with lantern slides would always draw a crowd.

"But dances were the main entertainment - apart from plain old-fashioned visiting back and forth - and enshrined in every museum in the West should be an old-time fiddle, for it made the music that enabled the pioneers to have a darn good time." ¹

The Box Social

The box social was an event used to raise money and to act as a social gathering. Each lady would prepare a lunch that would fit into a box. It might have included sandwiches, cabbage salad, some preserves and maybe a special treat such as a piece of boiled raisin cake. The box was decorated to look like a present with pieces of tissue and wool.

All of the boxes would be placed on a table at the social for the men to examine carefully. Then the boxes were auctioned one at a time to the men. When a man bought a parcel, he would open it to find out who had made it because he would share his refreshments with this lady.

¹ Broadfoot, Barry. The Pioneer Years 1895-1914, p. 320.