

WINTER HERITAGE RECREATION ACTIVITIES,  
RED RIVER SETTLEMENT AND WINNIPEG,  
PRECONTACT TIMES TO THE PRESENT:  
INVENTORY, RESOURCES AND POSSIBLE HERITAGE INTERPRETIVE  
PROGRAMMING

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Acknowledgements	3	
2.	Background	3	
3.	Structure	4	
4.	Precontact Period	4	
5.	Fur Trade Period	7	
6.	Selkirk/Red River Settlement Period	8	
7.	Early Winnipeg Period	11	
8.	Recent Winnipeg Period	14	
9.	Possible Heritage Interpretive Programs	19	
10.	Concluding Remarks	24	
11.	Sources	25	

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### BACKGROUND

In 1991 the Riverbank Management Committee of the City of Winnipeg requested that the Parks and Recreation Department investigate the possibilities of a large toboggan slide being located at The Forks. The City and The Forks Renewal Corporation subsequently presented a proposal to the Department of Canadian Heritage, advocating the construction and operation of such a slide on The Forks National Historic Site. The site's tenant, Parks Canada, had some major policy and operational concerns regarding the proposed toboggan slide. The three organizations met and created a Working Group to develop a comprehensive proposal that would examine the proposed toboggan slide in the context of a larger package of interpretive programming and winter recreational activities centred on the broader Forks site and other central Winnipeg locations. This initiative would involve a broader community partnership base, including other key community organizations.

The present study is a preliminary step toward the development of a comprehensive strategy for winter recreational activities and heritage interpretive programming in Downtown Winnipeg, and the enhancement of the Downtown as a winter recreation amenity for the citizens of Winnipeg.

The specific objectives of this strategy are

- o To develop a proposal which addresses and integrates the objectives of all the participants, and can be approved by all parties and stakeholders involved with the project;
- o To develop a program of key winter recreation and heritage activities in the Downtown;
- o To develop a strategy to communicate the messages associated with winter heritage recreation and heritage interpretive programming;
- o To identify roles, responsibilities and strategies in the raising of the capital costs for the programming; and
- o To pursue revenue opportunities associated with winter recreation and heritage activities in the Downtown.

On 7 January 1995 a workshop was held at The Forks National Historic Site, and members of the heritage community were invited to participate. The purpose of the workshop was to investigate and document heritage winter recreational activities in the Red River Settlement and Winnipeg, and to discuss winter heritage interpretive strategies and directions. More specifically, the objectives of the workshop were:

- o To compile a list of winter heritage activities that occurred at The Forks/Red River Settlement/Winnipeg area;
- o To identify what resources are available, e.g., photographs, documents, paintings, etc. in relation to these activities; and
- o To identify possible heritage programs or activities that could be developed and presented to the public.

The present study is an expansion of the workshop results.

#### STRUCTURE

In the interests of organization, the information contained in this portion of the paper is presented within the following framework:

- Theme I. The Precontact Era (1600-1734)
- Theme II. The Fur Trade Era (1735-1811)
- Theme III. The Red River Colony/Settlement (1812-1870)
- Theme IV. Early Winnipeg (1871-1919)
- Theme V. Recent Winnipeg (1920-Present)

#### 1. PRECONTACT (1600-1734)

The period 1600-1734 is chosen to represent the Precontact Era because it can be reasonably assumed that two Aboriginal Nations -- the Cree and Assiniboin -- were resident in the study area within that timeframe. Other nations were no doubt present, but it is unlikely that they were in any way as prominent as these two. There may have been Ojibway in the district during this period, but there is no general agreement on this within the scholarly community and in any case this nation will be duly covered under Theme II.

This discourse draws entirely from the published record. By the time descriptive accounts of the Assiniboins and Crees were being written, both nations had departed the Red-Lower Assiniboine River area. Accordingly, the data base used here pertains to these people while they were living elsewhere, notably in Saskatchewan, North Dakota and Montana. It is assumed that the indigenous sports

and games practiced by these peoples elsewhere in later times were also in use while they were resident in southeastern Manitoba.

Furthermore, the Assiniboin were originally members of the Dakota confederacy. By that token, it is assumed that sports and games common to the other eastern and central Dakota nations -- Santee, Yankton and Yanktonai -- were also part of the Assiniboin cultural repertoire from early times and during that nation's sojourn in southeastern Manitoba. Accordingly, material pertaining to these groups will be included here.

Snake Game (Cree). A snow bank was piled up and a stake set in one vertical side so that it projected about two feet. Pointed willow wands, 3 or 4 feet long, were thrown at it by the players. Sometimes arrows were thrown also. The player who hit or came nearest to the stake won (Mandelbaum 1979:132).

Sliding Game (Cree). A 5-foot strip of snow was brushed off to make a sloping surface, and then iced. Twelve (12) holes were made in the lower end, each of which had a different scoring value. Marbles made by rounding tips of bison horns were rolled down the slope and scored points when they came to rest in one of the holes (Mandelbaum 1979:132).

Bouncing Stick Game (Cree). A throwing stick was made by scraping a buffalo horn thin and fitting it over the end of a 4-foot-long wooden stick. Fat was packed inside the horn and frozen solid to hold the shaft in place. The stick was slender enough to bend under the weight of the head. The object of the game was to throw the stick farther than that of one's opponents along a smooth stretch of hard snow. The stick was grasped at the butt, whisked around vertically, and released with an underhand motion (Mandelbaum 1979:134).

Sliding Stick (Cree). A 4-foot-long stick was whittled flat at one end to afford a finger hold. A mound of snow was made, and the stick was whirled and bounced off the mound. The player who sent his stick farthest won.

Snow Dart Game (Puckitseeman) (Cree). Played by any number of persons, of either sex or any age, either singly or with partners. A narrow track was made down the side of a hill covered with snow for a distance of 60 feet or more. The track was iced, and the dart was started (not shoved) at the top of the track under its own weight. The track was barred at four points about 10 feet apart by snow barriers. The object was to pass the dart through as many of the four barriers as possible without its leaving the track. To win, the dart had to pass through all four barriers 4 times by the same person or partners. However, count was kept of the number of barriers through which the dart passed (Culin 1975:403).

Women's Dart Game (Esquayopuckitseeman) (Cree). Played by

women exclusively. Similar to Snow Dart Game (Puckitseeman) described immediately above, except that the ice path was made with numerous turnings and was not impeded by barriers. The ice path was also made much narrower, being but little wider than the dart itself. The passage of the dart around the several turnings was equivalent to the passing of the dart through the snow barriers in the men's games (Culin 1975:404).

Gliding Stick Game (Cree). Hardwood sticks about 2 feet long were whittled flat on one side and had a snake or duck carved on the other. A zigzag road was beaten down a hill and the sticks sent down this path. The stick that slid farthest won (Manedlbaum 1979:134).

Throwing-To-Slide Game (Shooceeman) (Cree). Played by men only, either singly or in partnership. Four barriers of loose snow were constructed at distance of a few feet apart and immediately behind each other. The players stood about 10 feet distant from the nearest barrier and the stick was thrown underhand, as in bowling, directly at the nearest barrier. It approached the latter in a gliding motion, and the object was to pass the stick through the entire set of barriers at one throw. This accomplishment won the game, although points could be counted according to the number of barriers penetrated by the dart (Culin 1975:403-4).

Sleds (Yankton, Santee). Yankton boys made a kind of sled (huhu kazunta), made of rib bones lashed together with rags (Culin 1975:716). Santee sleds were made of six or seven of the long ribs of the bison fastened together at the larger end. Bison robes also served the purpose (Eastman 1971:54).

Sometimes a strip of basswood bark, 4 feet long and about 6 inches wide, was used with considerable skill. The driver stood on one end and held the other, using the slippery side of the bark for the outside (Eastman 1971:58).

Tops (Santee). The spinning of tops was one of the all-absorbing wintertime sports. The tops were made of wood, horn or bone, and whipped with a thong of buckskin. The thong handle was a stick about 1 foot long, sometimes whittled to make it spoon-shaped at one end.

Games with tops involved from two to 50 boys at a time. Each whipped his top until it hummed; then one took the lead and the rest followed in a sort of obstacle race. The top had to spin all through the exercise. There were bars of snow over which the contestants had to pilot their tops in the spoon at the end of the whip. Then they would be tossed into the air onto another open spot on the ice or smooth snow-crust from 20 to 50 paces away. The top that spun the longest was the winner (Eastman 1971:58).

Story-telling (All nations). The traditional oral literature

of the Aboriginal peoples possessed a wide range of functions. Collectively, its role was to amuse and entertain; educate the young in the history, morals and philosophy of their people; keep up the people's morale during the psychologically depressing ordeal of the harsh winter months; and validate and uphold the principles that formed the foundation of the peoples' way of life.

With very few exceptions, the telling of stories traditionally took place only during the winter months. There were two reasons for this -- one practical, the other philosophical. The practical reason derived from the fact that the summertime was spent in considerable economic activity. The nights were short, the days were long, and the people's time was best spent in food-getting pursuits. The philosophical rationale lent support to this practical consideration: since spirits figured in the stories, and since the spirits did not like to hear themselves being talked about, it was advisable to narrate the stories in winter when the spirits were far away or in a torpid state (Pettipas 1993:34).

## II. THE FUR TRADE ERA (1735-1811)

Ice Stones (Tops) (Ojibway). Boys collected oval stones found along lakeshores and riverbanks. In winter they ran over the ice and drove the spinning stones against each other with whips and sticks. The stone that upset the other was the victor (Kohl 1985:84).

Lacrosse (Ojibway). Equipment comprised (1) a racquet and (2) a small ball. The racquet was made of hardwood bent into a "6" shape at one end. The loop was crossed with rawhide thong webbing. The ball comprised a deerskin cover stuffed with hair. Only one stick was carried by each player.

The playing field was c. 100 yards long with upright goalposts standing c. 5 feet high at either end. Eleven men made up a side, one of whom defended his team's goal. The ball was tossed up in the centre of the field by a chief, and each side then tried to gain possession of the ball and carry it to the opponents' goal. The side not in possession of the ball tried to stop their opponents by blocking, tripping or even clubbing them with their sticks. The ball could be tossed or carried in the cup at the end of the racquet (Howard 1977:89).

Lacrosse is generally regarded as a warm-weather game; however, Culin (1907:612-13) notes that the Santee Dakota played it on ice.

Shinny (Ojibway). Equipment comprised (1) a small buckskin ball, probably weighted with clay, and (2) 2-foot-long sticks curved at one end. The opposing teams attempted to drive the ball through each others' goal. The ball was not to be touched with the

hand, but could be kicked or batted with the stick. Essentially hockey without skates, it was played by the Assiniboin and Yankton as well.

Hoop-and-pole (Ojibway). Equipment comprised (1) a spear or pole upwards of 10 feet long and (2) a wooden hoop of c. 10 inches in diameter. The hoop was filled with a rawhide network in a pattern of four concentric zones. One player attempted to throw the pole through the hoop rolled by his opponent. If the spear went through the centre, he scored four points; through the next outer zone, three points; through the next, two; and through the outermost, only one (Howard 1977:90).

Snow snake (Ojibway). A smoothed wooden game stick with an upturned end was thrown with a wrist movement along ice or a snowy track. Sometimes, a ridge of snow slightly inclined away from the player gave the snake an upward trajectory as it left the hand, thus propelling it a considerable distance before touching the ice or snow. The object was to see who could make his stick go farthest.

Sledding (NWCo employees, Ojibway, upper Red River). Wrote Alexander Henry the Younger in January 1801: "My winter stock of provisions is complete -- all good, fat buffalo meat, and my men have little to do. They, therefore, amuse themselves by sliding down the bank on sleighs from the S. gate. Their descent is so great as to cause their trains to run across the Red River. The Indian women join them and they have excellent sport" (Coues 1965:168).

#### THE RED RIVER COLONY/SETTLEMENT (1812-1870)

Toboggans. Children slid down the riverbanks in improvised toboggans -- frozen cow hides with the hair inside for warmth (MacLeod 1962:13).

Coullion (Ojibway, upper Red River). January of 1801 provided "delightful weather for the Indian women to play their favourite game of coullion on the ice; they generally keep it up till dark, whilst the men are at their game of platter, and others beat the drum to their wabanno songs. Hunting is out of the question now" (Coues 1965:169).

Storytelling (Voyageur). It was in the winter season that the voyageurs rested from their toils and, circling around the fire, recounted to families and friends stories of dangers in the field and the scenes of their long and tedious voyages among the lakes and rapids of the interior (Ballantyne 1972:103).

Hurling. Miles Macdonnell, Governor of the Colony, noted in



his journal for 25 December 1812 that he played at hurl on the ice with "the people of the three forts." The game of hurling was played between goals on the ice by teams using sticks and a ball. These games, played by the men of the fur companies and the Selkirk Settlers were the country's first attempt at hockey (MacLeod 1962:5).

Pastimes (HBC employees). With the younger portion of the community -- clerks, apprentices and post-masters -- conversation and pipe-smoking occupied a prominent position in the passing of time. Games were also in demand, and every apartment possessed its well-used pack of cards, rough-but-ready cribbage board and sets of wooden dominoes. Reading was favoured by the studiously-inclined, and for others, music (primarily fiddle-playing) was very popular (Robinson 1972:101-2).

In winter and summer alike, the Canadians and Metis voyageurs' rest periods included singing, card-playing, throwing quoits, drinking, fighting, performing feats of strength and boasting or story-telling (Howell and Howell 1969:15).

Dancing. With the aid of the fiddle, the few holidays of the year and often the long evenings as well were enlivened with impromptu dances. It was in this particular pastime that the post clerk found his chief diversion, reeling and jigging the hours away to the measures of monotonous and often-repeated tunes. On such occasions the company was eminently cosmopolitan, with all grades of employees mingling on terms of the most democratic equality (Robinson 1972:103).

Winter allowed more time for rest and relaxation than did summer, and during the cold months in the latter half of the 19th century, parties and dances were frequently organized. They were eagerly anticipated; "as many who attend such gatherings have to traverse distances frequently of twenty miles, the phases of the moon are often carefully studied for very practical purposes" (Howell and Howell 1969:63).

Sleigh-riding. During the period of the existence of the Settlement prior to Confederation, Christmas was the principal one of the few breaks in the monotony of its yearly life. Occurring in mid-winter, it marked the passage of the shortest days and formed the turning point from which the earliest anticipations of spring -- still four months away -- were dimly entertained. The winter tracks on the rivers and adjacent plains, beaten by the traffic of a widely-scattered and sparse population, were getting into permanent trim convenient for the passage of carriages and cutters containing visitors on the way to visit relatives and acquaintances who often lived considerable distances away (Hargraves 1882). Every man sought to have a fine horse, and the showing off of it, with its ornamental harness and fine carriage or cutter, was the occasion of great contests (Howell and Howell 1969:17).

Balls. Frequently kept up for several successive days and nights, balls formed possibly the favourite diversion in the Settlement. The singular dance known as the Red River jig was the most invariably prominent feature. Strict sobriety was not a conspicuous feature at these assemblages, but strangers in the country and travellers of experience in passing through it found an interest in attending them and generally took an active and lengthy part in the festivities (Hargraves 1882).

New Year's Celebrations. Up and down the river, wherever there was a home, the New Year's celebrations were the outstanding event of the winter season. Feasting and merriment prevailed everywhere and lasted for days. The food supplies were always supplemented with a modest stock of rum or brandy from the Hudson's Bay Company Fort Garry Store. When the settlers had secured whatever they needed for the holiday treats, the store would be closed for two weeks and all business suspended for that period. The closing of the store was the signal for the fun to begin, and everyone seemed to instinctively assume a spirit of jollity.

New Year's day was ushered in by great firing of guns by the Indians who would gather on the prairies outside the fort for days before the event. In parties of 10 or 15 they would go from house to house where tea, tobacco, bannock and other gifts would be distributed. These they placed in leather pouches, and by the end of the day each Indian would have sufficient food and tobacco to keep him and his family in luxury for a week or more. This custom of making calls continued until Winnipeg was a good-sized city, but in latter days they omitted the gun salutes.

After the Indians had gone, the settlers hitched their horses to sleds and began a round of visiting themselves. By nightfall there would be a dozen or more dances in progress which would be kept up all night and perhaps for a couple of days. It would have been considered a breach of hospitality if the callers did not partake of the food and drink offered by every host, "so those of a bibulous temperament naturally grew very convivial before the end of the day, and both matrons and girls were subject to osculatory caresses which, of course, were taken good-naturedly and regarded as the best of fun." Kissing was greatly enjoyed by the Indian women too, who insisted on the favour at every house visited.

After immigration began, the old customs merged with those of the newcomers and began to disappear. But up to the time of the first land boom in the late 1870s, the homes of the early colonists were the chief social centres (Cameron 1984:9-13; Paterson 1970:28-9).

Letter-writing. Around mid-December, the dog trains bearing the packets of letters and postal matter for the northern districts and posts started from Fort Garry to Norway House. This was the opening stage of a vast and intricate system of intercommunication whereby information passed between every station belonging to the

HBC between the Rocky Mountains and Hudson Bay, and extending north to the Arctic Ocean. It was the only event of its kind to occur during the entire winter season, and everybody who could write made it a point to correspond with their friends by this opportunity. Hence, the first two weeks of December were always a period of literary effort, the conclusion of which, as necessitated by the departure of the packet, left the mind relieved and ready to welcome the holiday season (Hargraves 1882).

Hunting. With the disappearance of the buffalo, hunting as a regular occupation ceased and winter rides after wolves became a favourite amusement. Dogs were not used in these hunts; the riders just scouted around until a coyote was spotted, and then proceeded to run him to exhaustion in the snow. Gradually, as settlement advanced, wolf-hunting fell into disuse, not from lack of enthusiasm but for the presence in every direction of barbwire fences (Anonymous 1898:211,213).

Skating. There was a time when, unless one was a snowshoer, skating was the recreational activity of choice in Manitoba's winter. The first settlers to the Red River practiced figures and raced, mostly on home-made skates fashioned from wood with a metal runner and strapped to "beef shoes" -- cowhide boots with thick soles, also home-made. There is evidence of skating parties on the Red River in Riel's day. Youngsters living close to the rivers only had to shovel the snow off to get a suitable patch of ice. Conditions were particularly amenable to skating in those occasional winters when the cold snap came before the snow; one oldtimer living at the turn of the century recalled skating from Redwood Avenue in Winnipeg to St. Andrews-on-the-Red (Leah 1975:24; MacLeod 1962:13).

Horse-racing. Horse-racing was a big New Year's day event. The Red River, kept clear by the prevailing north winds, was a busy winter highway and on New Year's day in the centre of the river along the stretch near Upper Fort Garry, spectators lined the race course where HBC officers and the more prosperous settlers matched their blood horses, sometimes for considerable stakes (MacLeod 1962:13).

#### IV. EARLY WINNIPEG (1871-1919)

Skating. The sport moved indoors from the ponds and creeks of the district in 1874 when Messrs Wilson and Brydon built an indoor rink on Princess Street and opened to a capacity crowd on 9 December of that year (Leah 1975:23-4). The first skating carnival in Winnipeg took place in this rink on 4 February 1875. It was described by one witness as "a grand affair and decidedly novel at the time" (Begg and Nursey 1879:111).

A large open-air rink existed at one time at the foot of

Kennedy Street that drew hundreds of skaters, and eventually another open-air rink was laid out close to what is now St. John's Park. With the construction of the McIntyre Rink downtown, close to the McIntyre Block (recently demolished), skaters were once again inside (Leah 1975:24).

Snowshoeing. The first races staged by the Winnipeg Snowshoe Club (whose career, which began in October 1878, has been described as "short, though brilliant" [Anonymous 1898:209]), took place on 3 March 1879 when C.D. Rickards, accredited with being a refreshingly green man on snowshoes, captured, somewhat to the annoyance and disgust of other competitors, the 2-mile race and the trophy in 15 minutes, 33.75 seconds (Lucas 1923:49).

In 1881 some ex-members of the St. George's Snowshoe Club of Montreal founded a branch of the mother club in Winnipeg and snowshoeing leapt into popularity. In the first year, the club had over 200 members. Its annual race meetings, cross-country runs and "bonnet hops" were among the important events of every winter. Les Voyageurs of St. Boniface was another flourishing club which in the late 1890s joined with the St. George in the weekly tramp and entertainment (Anonymous 1898:209).

Surprise parties. A form of visiting and social gathering which came with the new year was what was termed a "surprise party". A number of neighbours agreed to meet together on a given evening and make a descent on the quarters of some or other neighbour, who was kept ignorant of the plan. The subject chosen was usually one who had a pretty roomy house and who, it was known beforehand, would be both willing and able to receive such a number of impromptu guests. A fiddler was usually among the visitors, who brought an ample food supply to supplement the larder of the host so unexpectedly put to the test. These extemporised socials were sometimes kept up until three and four o'clock in the morning. The institution was an importation from Lower Canada (Goodridge 1882:69-70).

Curling. The first curling club in Winnipeg was formed at a meeting held on 5 November 1876, when 70 members were enrolled. At the meeting it was proposed to build a rink on the property of A.G. Bannatyne and for the club to affiliate with the Royal Caledonian Club in Edinburgh (Lucas 1923:207).

The first game of curling ever played in Manitoba took place between two teams on 11 December 1876 at the rink of the Manitoba Curling Club in Winnipeg. The game lasted two hours and comprised 11 ends. The prize, a barrell of oatmeal, was donated to the Hospital (Lucas 1923:226).

The first Winnipeg Bonspiel, a three-day event, opened on 5 March 1889 with prizes being offered in the amount of \$1,200.00. The participating teams -- members of the Manitoba Curling

Association which had organized on 6 December 1888 -- were the Thistle, Winnipeg, Granite, Portage la Prairie, Morden, Carberry, Stonewall and Stony Mountain rinks (Lucas 1923:50).

Hockey. Hockey found its way into Winnipeg in 1890. The first few seasons were played in an open-air rink. Two games were played between the Winnipeg and Victoria teams in 1890-91, with each team winning one game. In 1892 the Manitoba and Northwestern Amateur Hockey Association was formed, and in 1892-3 games were first played by schedule in the McIntyre Rink (Lucas 1923:163).

Horse-racing. After Princess Street was paved with wooden blocks in the late 1880s it became famous as the scene of the New Year's Day races. The old exhibition grounds were a favourite locale for many years. River Park opened as a race course in 1893 for both summer and winter racing (Paterson 1973:106).

Women's curling. Curling was not only a man's sport. The publication "Winnipeg 100" includes a photograph of women curlers in the Winnipeg Board of Trade Building in 1906 (Paterson 1973:15).

Horse Racing. In 1909, two racing organizations were in existence. One, the Winnipeg Ice Racing Association, had a track on the Red River near the Louise Bridge. There they had prepared a track and built stables for 20 horses and grandstands for spectators. The track was 150 feet wide and 1/2 mile long. Meetings were held every Saturday and on Christmas and New Year's days, and a special meeting took place in 1909 when the international curling bonspiel was held in the city. The horses were run in similar vehicles to those in trotting (harness) races. In some cases sleighs were used (Anonymous 1909:302).

Skiing. The year 1911 saw significant expansion of skiing in western Canada with the establishment of several ski clubs, one of them in Winnipeg (Schrodt, et al. 1980:171).

Snowshoeing. Winnipeg was proud of its snowshoe clubs. Weekly tramps were popular and provincial championships were enthusiastically followed. The events of the 1911 Manitoba Snowshoe Championships, as reported in the Manitoba Free Press of 20 February, are worthy of note: "The Winnipeg Snowshoe Championships were conducted at Elm Park opposite the Canoe Club, on the Red River. ... The feature of the meet was the dog races, which were conducted by a large field of many breeds. Some of the dogs stopped on several occasions to settle old scores." The full slate of activities was as follows:

Novice, 220 yards  
 One-Mile Manitoba Snowshoe Championship  
 Dog Sleigh Race  
 Boy Scouts Quarter-Mile  
 100 Yards Manitoba Snowshoe Championship

Veteran Snowshoers over 40 years, 220 Yards  
 Team Relay Race, 1 Mile  
 Manitoba Half-Mile Snowshoe Championship  
 Ladies 75 Yards  
 Half-Mile Steeplechase  
 Tug-of-War

Playgrounds. In December of 1912 the Winnipeg Playgrounds Commission began to provide skating rinks for inner city children. Three rinks were flooded that winter, all of them in the north-central section of the city; and all were equipped with toboggan slides as well. When it was found that children could only hang over the boards and watch because they had no skates or boots, the Commission appealed for donations of equipment (MacDonald 1995:37).

There was hockey for boys and "fancy skating" for girls, and each playground had its own competitions in the various sports and activities. Once the outdoor programs were well established, the Commission decided to commence indoor "social centre work" involving folk dancing and physical culture classes at least one night per week in designated schools during the winter months. These classes were expressly for older children who were employed in stores and factories (MacDonald 1995:38).

#### V. RECENT WINNIPEG (1920-PRESENT)

Vacant Lot Rinks. In 1921 the Winnipeg Parks Board operated 20 supervised rinks with shelters, mostly on School Board land. Lack of money prevented the the Board from supplying many more supervised rinks than had been provided by the Playgrounds Commission, and as a compromise the Board, in co-operation with community groups, began to flood rinks on vacant lots. The Board provided the flooding and maintenance of the ice surface, while the neighbourhood took responsibility for supervision. Initially regarded as a stop-gap measure, these vacant lot rinks, or "community rinks" as the Board called them, were extremely popular and their numbers increased until, by the end of the decade, they outnumbered the Board's supervised rinks by 43 to 29 (MacDonald 1995:50).

Festivals. The Carnival of Winter Sports was held on the Legislative Grounds, opening on 6 February 1922 with the crowning of the Carnival Queen and a grand street parade. The main event of the second day was a historical pageant entitled "Pioneer Days of 1870". The third day saw the 30-mile dog race from Selkirk to Winnipeg. Skiing, hockey, skating and snowshoeing all received their quota of events, the 15-mile Canadian Championship Snowshoe Race being included. The festival continued until 6 February (Lucas 1923:33).

The Festival du Voyageur, featuring cultural and sporting events, is probably the premiere winter celebration in Winnipeg today. It has taken place in February of every year without interruption since 1969.

In January 1973, the green lawns, flowerbeds and water fountains of Memorial Park near the Legislative Building were replaced by Manisnow, a kaleidoscope of winter attractions (Paterson 1973:110).

Skating. The Olympic Rink opened in 1923. It featured a live band that played from a bandbox on the mezzanine floor, and a large, multi-faceted globe that projected an array of colours as it revolved through the beam of a spotlight. With the advent of public address systems, music for skating came to outdoor rinks. Skaters thronged to Main Street Stadium, Drewery's Park, River Park, Sherburn Park, Wesley Park and the Granada rink (Leah 1975:24).

The St. John's Ladies Skating Club was an organization catering to women, most of them housewives, who enjoyed an afternoon of skating at the Olympic Rink. This club survived until the late 1950s (Leah 1975:24).

Skiing. The opening of the Civic Park recreational facilities in Valley Gardens provided a unique artificial ski hill called "Mount Vesuvius", completed in 1974 (MacDonald 1995:124). Today, cross-country skiing is provided for in the larger parks in and around Winnipeg.

Skating. During the Depression, the Parks Board maintained its skating rink programs. The high point came in 1935 when the flooding crew serviced 22 supervised rinks, 72 community rinks and 39 private rinks, the last-mentioned receiving these services at cost. After 1935, however, the number of rinks serviced by the Board declined significantly (MacDonald 1995:59).

Winter Club. After eight years of planning, the million-dollar Winter Club opened in 1950 with 2,400 members. In 1942 the old Winter Club, which had been operating since 1929, became HMCS Chippewa. That had left Canada's largest prairie city in the lurch for athletics through the remainder of the war and afterwards. The new club catered to children, 2/3 of its members being under 16 years of age. The program comprised badminton, squash, swimming, figure-skating and bowling, and the facility was open all year round (Anonymous 1950:24).

Community Centres. Community centres, also known as community clubs, trace their origins in Winnipeg to the First World War. By 1960 there were 19 community centres located throughout the city, operating year-round and offering a variety of programs for both children and adults. In the 1950s, the Playground Hockey League,

which had languished during World War 2, was re-established and any boy was welcome to play in the league regardless of his skill level. Other programs comprised pleasure-, speed- and figure-skating, and annual winter carnivals that included such events as figure-skating exhibitions, hockey tournaments, skating races and jampail curling (MacDonald 1995:68,77,81,84).

Municipal Parks. Among several suggestions made in 1908-09 of facilities to be provided to Winnipeg's municipal park system was winter sports such as ski and toboggan slides and open-air curling and skating rinks, as well as encouragement for snowshoeing and sleigh-riding parties. Although all of these had long been pursued outside the parks, it was not until the early-to-mid-1960s that toboggan slides and open-air skating were introduced in Kildonan, Assiniboine and St. Vital Parks (City of Winnipeg 1972a:7, 1972b:6, 1973:8).

"Port-a-parks". Inaugurated in the last days of Metro and carried forward under Unicity was the "port-a-park" or "vest pocket park" concept, intended to deal with urban decay in the downtown area. These mini-parks were installed in vacant lots created by building demolition or destruction. The land was leased from the owner and moveable facilities installed. When the landowner required the property for other purposes, the fittings could be packed away for use elsewhere. The first port-a-park, which featured a small skating rink, was put in place by Metro in the fall of 1971 at the corner of Carlton Street and Graham Avenue (MacDonald 1995:171-72).

Ringette. Ringette, a Canadian game, was developed in northern Ontario in 1963 by a local community director as a winter sport for girls. It can best be described as floor hockey on ice, and can be played on any surface suitable for ice hockey. A rubber ring is propelled by a long straight stick. Teams consist of six players on the ice, and body-checking is not allowed. Ringette was first played in Manitoba in 1972, and in 1975 the First Annual Invitational Ringette Tournament, with 30 teams from across Canada participating, was held in Winnipeg (Schrodt, et al. 1980:139).

The Forks. Redevelopment of the CN East Yard by The Forks Renewal Corporation has produced a popular gathering place for Winnipeggers in recent years. Its linked riverwalks, market and plaza with terraces down to the marina basin, and the adjoining Forks National Historic Site, are visited by large numbers of people summer and winter. The Assiniboine River Trail, a meandering corridor laid out on the river ice each winter between The Forks and the Osborne Bridge, gives skaters a linear skating experience that is unavailable anywhere else in the city (MacDonald 1995:182).



One of the expected results of this project is the identification of available "resource material". Resource material is of three kinds: (1) textual, (2) pictographic and (3) recollective.

A good deal of textual material has already been identified in the foregoing Inventory segment of the project. Undoubtedly, there is much more of it available, but it is highly likely that what is not included in the above list would simply duplicate that which is. In other words, the textual information provided in the preceding section constitutes a fairly representative cross-section of the range of recreation and leisure activities that characterized the subject time periods.

The pictographic materials are basically of three kinds: (1) woodcuts or ink drawings, (2) paintings, and (3) photographs. The contract calls for some fairly specific, detailed reference data concerning these materials -- catalogue/accession number, repository, title, artist, description, copyright details. The research conducted into the sources of such materials disclosed very early on that the provision of information at this level of detail would have called for a much greater investment of time and money than is available for this project. Rather than attempt the unattainable, I will confine my input in this section to observations on the nature and accessibility of the pictographic record.

Drawings and paintings. During the closing decades of the 19th century, numerous domestic and foreign publishers produced books and newspaper and magazine articles about Western Canada. Many of them are travelogue-type items that describe the way of life of the region -- social histories, in effect. Typically, these works were illustrated with engravings and ink drawings.

Several early painters, most notably Peter Rindisbacher and Paul Kane but others as well, have portrayed life in the Red River Settlement. Some of their works depict winter scenes, and even though the originals are not necessarily available in Winnipeg, copies of them can be obtained from local sources.

One rather important consideration one must keep in mind when using hand-drawn and -painted illustrations is accuracy. There always exists the prospect that artistic license played a role in the production of such works, and the problem may have been compounded somewhat if the artist did not have personal contact with the subject matter and the information upon which the image was produced was therefore second-hand.

Unfortunately, there are very few recent compilations under one cover that focus on wintertime recreation or leisure (somewhat of an exception is Hugh A. Dempsey's "Christmas in the West"), and it would therefore be necessary to undertake a comprehensive review of

individual library and archival holdings to locate and document the whereabouts of such material and the specific categories of information to be derived from it. Two of the older local libraries -- Elizabeth Dafoe at the University of Manitoba and the Legislative Library -- and the Rare Book Collection at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, would be logical places in which to begin such a search. The Winnipeg Art Gallery should definitely be consulted for artworks in their possession having to do with winter activities in the study area.

Photographs. There are four archives in Winnipeg that collectively contain a wealth of publicly-accessible photographs on regional and local sport and recreation. These are the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, the University of Manitoba Archives (specifically, the Winnipeg Tribune Collection), the City of Winnipeg Archives and Records Control Department, and the Western Canada Pictorial Index housed at the University of Winnipeg. In all cases, the holdings are indexed and basically described via a cataloguing system, and all manner of access is facilitated by readily-available service staff. All are open to the public according to regular hours except the City facility, which is accessible by appointment only. Particulars concerning holdings and procedures of use can be acquired directly via telephone and/or by consulting the "Directory of Archives in Manitoba", published by the Manitoba Council of Archives (1989).

Before any attempt is made to seek out and transcribe catalogue-type information on hand-drawn, painted and photographic imagery residing in the various repositories listed above, it is important for the Working Group to establish in its own mind the purpose for doing so. Are these images needed as a means of deciding which heritage activities will and will not be programmed in the first place, or will the activities be selected, and the images then sought out for the purpose of acquiring historical details? The former objective implies a great deal more time and effort than does the latter, which would be much more specific and focused.

Recollective accounts. A further source of heritage information is human memory, at least for the 20th century. For example, Sam "Pop" Southern -- whose name is borne by the Sam Southern Arena on Osborne Street South -- operated a private toboggan slide at River Park in the 1930s. Mr. Southern is now deceased, but surviving friends and relatives are still alive who would be willing to provide information on the subject of that facility (J. Kacki, personal communication). Unfortunately, the memories of those who have had first-hand experience with Winnipeg history are a diminishing resource as people pass away. Accordingly, there is an element of urgency in securing this form of information.

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In sum, it can be said that there exists a sizeable fund of textual, pictographic and recollective information on heritage winter recreational activities pertaining to the temporal and spatial parameters set for this study. Most of the relevant activities have been identified and minimally described in the above Inventory and the corresponding information sources cited below in the section so named. However, a very substantial body of complementary illustrative material is "out there" and accessible, for whatever purpose. The compilation of this material, or at least the detailed cataloguing information pertaining to it, can be expected to be fairly time-consuming and therefore expensive unless volunteers are involved.

On that account, I would suggest that a serious attempt be made to establish a voluntary research program involving, perhaps, retired persons with an interest in history. It may be possible to utilize the good offices of the Volunteer Centre of Winnipeg to seek out and refer individuals willing and able to undertake such work.

## POSSIBLE HERITAGE INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

### Underlying Goals

One of the intended results of this exercise is to identify possible winter heritage interpretive programs and associated activities for The Forks and Downtown Winnipeg.

Any such proposal must be cognizant of the provisions of The Forks Heritage Interpretive Plan (1993). In particular, the "Goals of Interpretation at The Forks" (Pettipas and Kacki 1993:71-72) take on special significance. For the purposes of this study, the following stated goals are paramount:

- (1) To serve as a means of attracting visitors to The Forks in fulfillment of the Corporation's mandate to redevelop the site as a "meeting place";
- (2) To provide meaningful substance to the Corporation's specific objectives that call for
  - (a) all-season recreation (enjoyment of one's history is a form of recreation);
  - (b) creation of a public place, through activities and design, that is special and distinctive; that complements existing activities in the city; and that celebrates the site's special scenic and historical/cultural features;
- (3) To advance the Corporation's site planning principles

that call for demonstration of and respect for the historical and cultural traditions of Winnipeg and The Forks;

- (4) To educate the public in the long and varied history of The Forks and its environs;
- (5) To instill in Winnipeggers and Manitobans a sense of "pride of place" through an awareness of the accomplishments of their forebears;
- (6) To provide spin-off benefits to other interpretive ventures elsewhere in Winnipeg and Manitoba by serving as a promoter and reference to them.

#### Planning Rationale

Clearly, the operative word in planning wintertime heritage programming at The Forks and achievement of the above goals is "REVIVAL": revival of past activities and customs -- both recreational (as listed in the above inventory) and workaday world -- that are no longer practiced.

#### Interpretive Theme Selection

A key function of winter heritage program planning at The Forks is the selection of those activities and events best suited for the site. One consideration in the selection process has to be similar or comparable programming already established elsewhere in Winnipeg -- specifically, the duplication thereof. A repeatedly-stated requirement in The Forks Heritage Plan is the need to avoid interpretive programming that would undermine existing programs in the community, and/or lessen the attractiveness of on-site programs at The Forks because they are redundant.

#### Le Festival du Voyageur

The one major event in Winnipeg that must be borne in mind when planning winter heritage activities at The Forks is Le Festival du Voyageur. This event is based on and draws its substance from two major Manitoba cultural/historical themes -- the fur trade and Franco-Manitoban (including French-speaking Metis) social history. Program-planning for The Forks need not avoid activities subsumed under these themes; however, care must be taken to ensure that they comprise those not already on, or planned for, the program of Le Festival. The offering of them at The Forks must in some way complement their counterparts on Le Festival's agenda. Otherwise, they should not be considered as candidates for programming at The Forks.

#### "Unallocated" Themes

There are several historical themes that have not already been "spoken for" by Le Festival du Voyageur. These are

- (1) Precontact winter games and recreation;
- (2) Selkirk/Red River Settlement (non-francophone) social history; and
- (3) Early Winnipeg winter sports and recreation.

In addition, there are certain winter sports, events and activities that were indulged in by fur trade participants that are not on the Festival's agenda.

#### Precontact

A wide range of Cree and Assiniboine games and recreational artifacts has been described in the foregoing Inventory. Most if not all of them can be adapted to children's programming in two ways:

- (1) by setting up workshops wherein children can make their own equipments, and
- (2) by the staging of demonstration events and tournaments wherein these equipments can be put to use.

A ready precedent can be cited for the viability of this idea. For many years, Dr. E. Leigh Syms, Curator of Archaeology at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, has operated the "Young Archaeologists Club". A standard program of the Club is the construction of traditional artifacts as they were originally made by Aboriginal peoples. Foremost among the projects was the manufacture of atlatls by the Club members. The atlatl is by and large an unfamiliar subject to most laypersons, and so the "method and theory" behind its manufacture and use, and the actual steps involved in producing such an artifact, are of obvious educational value to the participants.

The replicating of traditional winter game artifacts need not necessarily be carried out at The Forks site, nor need it be entirely the purview of children. It may be incorporated into the Young Archaeologists Club program, or perhaps made part of the community club, Boy Scout/Girl Guide, or Big Brother/Sister programs in the city, with parental/adult involvement. However, tournaments could be staged at The Forks, involving child/adult teams; and in any event the off-site conduct of such activities would meet Goal #6 noted above.

It may be possible to interest a writer/illustrator in producing a guidebook that shows how to manufacture traditional-style equipments used in games and sports. There are numerous models available upon which to base such a manual (e.g., Anonymous 1982; Thomas 1981).

There is a very important point to be made when dealing with traditional Native heritage programming. It has been stated time and again over the years by Aboriginal spokespersons that mainstream society has made a habit of appropriating Native heritage in ways that provide no benefit whatsoever to the Aboriginal community. It would be a serious affront to establish programs of the sort described above, under the aegis of The Forks Renewal Corporation, without meaningful involvement of the Native community from the outset. It would be entirely inappropriate to realize such programs to the advantage of non-Aboriginals, while Aboriginal children are excluded without there having been any opportunity for their involvement in and enjoyment of recreational activities based on their own heritage. Clearly, the idea of adapting traditional Native culture to winter heritage programming at The Forks must, at the very outset, be referred to the Aboriginal Planning Committee of The Forks Board for comment and advice.

#### The Fur Trade Era

Cautions have already been raised above concerning the undesireability of duplicating the fur trade-based events offered at Le Festival du Voyageur. However, there are certain kinds of traditional activities, principally Aboriginal, that are not now part of the Festival's fare, nor are they necessarily planned for inclusion on its agenda in the foreseeable future.

These would include such things as ice stone competitions, winter lacrosse, shinny, hoop-and-pole contests, snow snake throwing and coullion. As was the case with the precontact games and activities, the community clubs should be approached to determine if their programming could accomodate such events, with playoffs and championships taking place at The Forks.

#### Red River Colony/Settlement

On the surface of it, the settlement patterning of the Red River Settlement, with particular reference to the Red River at and below The Forks, provides a logical basis for winter events planning. The east side of the river was occupied by French-speaking Canadiens and Metis, the west side by Gaelic- and English-speaking Scots and Mixed-bloods. The Festival Voyageur, staged on the east side of the Red in St. Boniface, could be followed by a "winter caleidh" at The Forks, on the west side of the river.

Notwithstanding the inherent "logic" of this dichotomy, it is not recommended here that such a course of action be followed. For one thing, it was agreed at the 7 January 1995 Heritage Winter Activities Workshop that the focus at The Forks and environs should be on winter programming rather than on a carnival concept. Furthermore, Scottish heritage is annually celebrated on two separate occasions each summer within the lower Red River valley -- Scottish Heritage Day at The Forks and the Selkirk Highland Games,

which is advertised internationally. Thus, even though neither of these events takes place in the wintertime, the basic theme (Scottish heritage) is well provided for locally. The following suggestions are therefore made with these facts in mind.

Miles Macdonnell described games of hurling being played on the river ice on Christmas and New Year's day in 1813-14. It is recommended that the re-establishment of this tradition be looked into, again via the community clubs, though the playing of the game would no doubt have to take place on days other than those mentioned.

The carriole was a conspicuous means of winter transportation in the days of the Red River Settlement. It is recommended that a feasibility study be made of establishing a business whereby carriole rides up and down the rivers are offered, just as horse-drawn buggy rides are nowadays provided in and around Assiniboine Park in the summer. Perhaps the operator(s) of the latter could be interested in establishing the former.

The next suggestion does not involve a distinctly winter activity, but it does pertain to a phenomenon that in many ways was a hallmark of the Red River Settlement. Bungi was the language used by the descendants of English, Scottish and Orkney fur traders and their Cree or Saulteaux wives. When these families retired to the Red River Settlement, they brought with them their own dialect of English with its strong Cree component (Blain 1987:7). Today, Bungi lies mainly within the purview of academics, but it would be interesting to enquire into the prospects of reviving it within the context of heritage programming at The Forks. For example, it would perhaps be appealing to persons taking carriole rides to have their driver speak to them (in part) in Bungi. There may be other ways in which Bungi can be incorporated into winter heritage programming at The Forks or at other venues in Downtown Winnipeg.

#### Early Winnipeg

The snowshoe clubs of Winnipeg and St. Boniface are no more. Nonetheless, snowshoes continue to be manufactured and are therefore available as recreational equipment. It might be worth enquiring into the prospects of school- or community club-based teams being formed and competing at The Forks in events like those conducted in the early 1900s.

Harness racing in Winnipeg (Assiniboia Downs) in the wintertime is an on-again, off-again thing, and it remains to be seen whether or not the sport will be staged in the city in 1995-96 and in the years following. When it does not, the teams normally go elsewhere (outside the province). However, when winter harness racing does take place in Winnipeg there is a local presence of such teams. It would be interesting to see if special-occasion races, similar to the more regularly-conducted events of the pre-World War 1 years,

could be run on the Red River adjacent to The Forks. One of the factors governing the feasibility of such events is thermal pollution of the river, due to discharges from the built-up Downtown area, and the consequent weakening of the ice.

Still on the subject of equestrian revival, there arises the prospect of old-fashioned sleigh rides. Today in the summer, there are water taxis and riverboat cruises. Their wintertime counterparts could be the aforementioned carriages and horse-drawn sleighs (cutters) taking friends and family groups for rides up and down the rivers. This might be especially appealing around Yuletide when many homes and establishments are decorated with Christmas lights.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The consensus of the 7 January 1995 workshop was that, rather than focus on leisure or recreation alone, the programming emphasis at The Forks/Downtown should be on the evolution of winter activities throughout time. The Forks area is considered to comprise a much broader area than the National Historic Site, and includes lands across the river as well as north and south of the junction (Pettipas and Kacki 1993:2).

A fundamental approach to the whole issue of heritage programming at The Forks (writ large) is to focus on target groups to provide for a multiplicity of activities throughout an 8- to 10-week period of winter programming. This would tie together the community organizations and give ownership to them, as well as allocate to them specific responsibilities for various periods of time throughout the winter programming periods.

It was strongly suggested that the Task Force itself participate in developing the winter heritage context and provide participating community groups with historical information on winter activities. A first step in this communication process might be the distribution of the Inventory segment of the present document, if not this entire document, to such groups. The preliminary listing of winter programming partners might include:

- o The Forks Renewal Corporation
- o Festival du Voyageur
- o Aboriginal Cultural Society Inc.
- o RiverTrail
- o Winter Cities
- o The museums
- o Tourism Winnipeg
- o Travel Manitoba
- o Parks Canada
- o City of Winnipeg Parks and Recreation



- o Winnipeg Winter Club
- o Manitoba Ball Hockey Association
- o Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg

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