

## The Making of the East End Community Club

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# The Making of the East End Community Club

Errol Black and Tom Black

BRANDON, MANITOBA HAD ITS beginnings in 1881 as a divisional point for the Canadian Pacific Railway. The formative years of the city belonged to the land speculators, the contractors, and the other elements of a flourishing petty bourgeoisie, but by the first decade of the present century their dominance was being challenged by an expanding and combative working class.

The challenge from labour reached its peak in the years immediately following World War I. On 24 April 1919 Brandon's civic workers left their jobs to back demands for official recognition, the reinstatement of two union officials who had been dismissed by city council, and arbitration of wages by an independent board. The strike ended at midnight on 26 April, when city council capitulated to the demands of the Civic Employee's Union. A month later, on 24 May, Brandon workers started walking off the job in a show of support for striking workers in Winnipeg. Telephone workers, teamsters, power plant firemen, civic employees, city firemen, CPR shopworkers, CNR messengers, and brewery workers participated in this demonstration of solidarity. When the general strike ended in Winnipeg, many Brandon workers were faced with reprisals from employers. The most vindictive employer was city council, which cancelled the wage increases won in April, fired some employees, and stripped all employees of their seniority rights. This touched off a further strike on 27 June, but this time there was little support and it petered out by 1 July.

Labour was active in the political sphere as well. The Labour Representation League was formed in 1917 to lead the way in getting pro-labour candidates elected to city council. While the League managed to get one of its candidates elected to city council in 1918, it was never able, even in the aftermath of the 1919 strikes, to generate the working-class support required to make a decisive intervention in local politics. In fact, the major victory for labour in electoral politics came in the 1920 provincial election, when the

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Reverend A.E. Smith, Dominion Labour Party candidate, was elected with 43 per cent of the vote.<sup>1</sup>

After the defeats in the strikes of 1919, Brandon's working class became fragmented, and resistance and struggle tended to manifest itself along sectional and neighbourhood lines. Moreover, when the Great Depression hit, workers found themselves powerless to resist the onslaught of unemployment, wage cuts, speed ups, and the generalized degradation of working and living conditions. Consequently, they became preoccupied with trying to salvage what they could out of these conditions, and their struggles were diverted into activities that would provide immediate and needed benefits for their families and their neighbourhoods. These new forms of struggle were manifested in all parts of the city, but much of the impetus and leadership was provided by the people of Brandon's East End.

# I

## The East End

THE EAST END EMERGED as a distinctive working-class neighbourhood in Brandon in the first decades of this century. This distinctiveness was partly a matter of geography. The East End is bounded on the west by First Street (a main thoroughfare bridging the Assiniboine River), on the north by the River and the Canadian Pacific Railway yards, and on the south by the Canadian National (before 1919, the Canadian Northern) railway yards. To the east, there was, until comparatively recent times, little else but prairie and gravel pits; now the area contains a Manitoba Hydro steam generating plant, a fertilizer complex owned by J.R. Simplot, and a "half-assed" chemical plant owned by Hooker Chemical.

But it was also, and mainly, a matter of people. The people who moved into the East End from 1900 to 1930 were primarily immigrants, and the sons and daughters of immigrants from England, Scotland, and Ireland. These people had much in common. The majority of them were Protestant. Most of them worked at manual jobs on the railways, in the wholesale houses, in the hospitals (the General Hospital in the East End and the Mental Hospital on the north hill), in the manufacturing establishments, and on construction sites. (See appendix for occupations of people living in the East End in 1930-31.) Moreover, they shared certain attitudes and values which were at odds with those held by the dominant elements in Brandon, in particular a deep suspicion of authority and a healthy resentment of vested interests.

<sup>1</sup> This account draws on the following publications: G.F. Barker, *Brandon: A City — 1881-1961* (Brandon 1977); Mary Hume, *Brandon: A Prospect of a City* (Brandon 1982), in particular, the prologue by Tom Mitchell; and W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians* (Brandon 1982).

This combination of geography and people gave the East End, in Tom Mitchell's terms, a "garrison mentality."<sup>2</sup> At the same time it fostered progressive and oppositional politics — class politics.

The politics of the East End was manifested in two ways. First, it was reflected in traditional electoral activities. Thus, East Enders opposed temperance in votes in 1914 and 1916. In 1918, they succeeded in blocking city council from granting a 20-year exemption on local taxes to the McKenzie Seeds Company for an addition to its plant. In 1916, they helped to elect J.A.G. Grantham, whom the *Sun* described as one of Brandon's "strongest socialists," as the alderman from Ward 1. They consistently supported Harry Cater, self-styled "workingman's candidate," in mayoralty elections. And they contributed to the election of progressive MLAs in 1920, the Reverend A.E. Smith for the Dominion Labour Party, and 1943, Dr. D.L. Johnson for the CCF, who was subsequently expelled from the CCF as a "fellow traveller."<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, the people of the East End contributed much of the leadership and support in the struggles for local reforms, and in the creation of institutions to serve neighbourhood interests. This form of activity was especially evident in the 1930s when people from the East End helped organize a Hospital Sweepstakes to raise funds for the financially strapped General Hospital, led campaigns for the establishment of dental and health clinics in the schools, and built a community club.

This particular story focuses on the latter project; namely, the building of a community club. This story merits telling both because it is indicative of the capacity working-class people have to build institutions which enhance life in their neighbourhoods, and because the community club, at least in the form it finally took in the East End and other working-class areas in Brandon, has many of the characteristics of a socialist institution.<sup>4</sup>

## II

### From Frozen Ponds

IN THE EAST END'S EARLY DAYS, people found their recreation where they could. They swam in the Assiniboine River and in the winter they skated on it and the surrounding ponds. So long as adults were present the children swam and skated in relative safety. But because of the long hours worked by the men, and the burdens of domestic work in the home, the opportunities for adults to share these activities with their children were extremely limited. Consequently, the children would sneak off on their own. This naturally proved to be a constant source of worry to parents.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Mitchell, "East End: From Frozen Ponds an affectionate local history," *Brandon Sun*, 22 July 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Much of this documented in W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians* (Brandon: Brandon Sun 1981).

<sup>4</sup> The core of this story was provided by people who were involved in the affairs of the East End Community Club in the 1930s and the early 1940s.

This worry spurred parents on to find ways to provide children with safer places for recreation. These efforts bore some fruit in 1928 when a rink was established on the grounds of the General Hospital. The Hospital provided the ground for the rink for the benefit of families in the East End, on the understanding that it could be used by student nurses and other staff of the hospital.

The site for the rink was levelled by Sheriff McGregor and a crew of inmates from the Gaol. The shack and the lights were put up by volunteers. And a janitor, Mr. McCormick, was hired to look after the facility. There was a membership fee for use of the rink of \$2.00 per family per season and 50 cents for a single membership. The proceeds from the sale of memberships were used to pay McCormick and cover the expenses of the rink.

This rink, which lasted until 1931, took the children off the river and frozen ponds and gave them a place to skate in safety and comfort. Also it established a tradition of voluntarism and co-operation which has characterized the operations of the rink ever since.

### III

#### Under the Tank

IN AUGUST 1930 BRANDON CITY COUNCIL authorized construction of an Elevated Tower and Water Tank on a square block area in the East End, a site with the Provincial Gaol (built in 1885) to the east, Rideau Park to the north, King George Elementary School to the south, and a few houses to the west. Horton Steel Works, which had received the contract for a bid of \$262,000, constructed the tower in 1931 and 1932.

With the construction of the Tank, the rest of the site became unsuitable for most other purposes. Some of the people involved with the first rink recognized that this land would be ideal for a rink. At a 9 June 1931 special meeting of City Council, Alderman Hughes presented an oral request from the East End Community Club for the City to level the south part of the block for this purpose. After some discussion of the request, Aldermen Young and Davis moved:

That the matter of grading and levelling the Southern portion of the Tank Block be left in the hands of the Chairman of the Property Committee to get the work done in co-operation with the Parks Board as a relief measure, at a cost not to exceed \$200.00.<sup>3</sup>

The grading and levelling was done before the start of winter 1931. Before the rink could be flooded, however, it was necessary to provide a shelter where people could change into their skates and warm themselves. Therefore, on 7 December 1931, Sidney Broomhall appeared before City Council with another request from the Community Club, specifically, the use of one of the buildings located at the bathing beach on 16th Street North at the rink during the winter months. Broomhall assured Council that the Community Club would pay the cost of transporting the building to the rink and would return it in good shape to

<sup>3</sup> Brandon City Council Minutes, 9 June 1931.



*Hockey at East  
End Rink, 1934  
and 1937*



*Club, 1937*

the beach in the spring. With these assurances, Aldermen Patterson and Oglesby put the following motion: "That one of the dressing rooms at the Bathing Beach be loaned to the East End Community Club for the winter months, the same to be moved by the City at the expense of the Club."<sup>6</sup> Council approved this action.

With the land ready and shelter secured, the Community Club hired Bob Johnston as manager at a salary of \$25.00 a month. Then, in early January 1932, representatives of the Community Club approached the School Board to seek funds for flooding the rink. The School Board funded the flooding and, in addition, provided coal and wood to heat the shelter.

That same winter the Club built a toboggan slide on the hill to the north and west of the Tank. This was probably the first community toboggan slide in Canada.

When the ice went out in spring 1932, the Club was faced with the prospect of returning the shelter to the beach. Broomhall and his associates apparently realized that the arrangement with the City for the use of the beach house was not very satisfactory, and on 6 June 1932, Broomhall went before the City Council to inform its members that if they insisted that the shelter be returned to the beach, the Club would have to close the rink. When Broomhall concluded his presentation, Aldermen Oglesby and Spafford responded by moving: "That if the East End Community Club will supply lumber required to erect a new building for the beach, at a cost not exceeding \$75.00, they be allowed to retain the building loaned to them."<sup>7</sup> Council endorsed the motion, but there was more to come. F.R. Longworth of the Kiwanis Club was due to speak on another matter after Broomhall had been dealt with. When his turn came, Longworth told Council he thought the East End rink was a worthwhile project and that the "underprivileged boys' section of the Kiwanis Club would furnish the \$75.00 referred to by the previous speaker."<sup>8</sup>

Thus, as a result of some judicious scrounging and a bit of luck the East End Community Club ended up with a permanent rink, complete with a first-rate shelter.

#### IV

#### Making Do In Hard Times

THE 1930S WERE, of course, hard times for many people in Brandon and in the East End. Some businesses closed their doors permanently. Other major employers such as the two railways laid off many employees and put the rest on half-time. As the jobs disappeared, many families were forced on relief. W. Leland Clark notes that at least 10 per cent of Brandon families were on relief by 1932. Since relief payments were very niggardly, many families, and not

<sup>6</sup> Brandon City Council Minutes, 7 December 1931.

<sup>7</sup> Brandon City Council Minutes, 6 June 1932.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

just those on relief, sought to stretch their incomes by "borrowing" coal from the CPR and ice fishing on the river.

Food was cheap; in fact, farmers went from door to door selling eggs at six cents a dozen and fresh pork at six or seven cents a pound. But even at these prices many families could not afford them. Instead they saved money and watched for specials on meats and other items. Occasionally, they would pick up a pig's head at 25 cents. This was a real bargain as many families made their own head cheese and one head would yield several meals.

Soup bones were also much in demand; indeed, the butcher shops in the area were ranked according to the price and quality of their soup bones. Often the results were disappointing. One old timer recalls being in a butcher shop when a woman ordered a soup bone. When she saw the bone she exclaimed, "But there's no meat on it!" The butcher replied, "Well madam, didn't you ask for a bone?" The by-now-agitated woman said, "Yes, but you didn't have to skin it first."

Most families also had to be frugal with their clothing expenditures. Many women purchased cotton flour and sugar bags when they were on sale. These would then be soaked to remove the print. If there were girls in the family, the bags would be made into cotton dresses. Otherwise, they would be converted into pillow cases, bed sheets, and tea towels.

Needless to say, by the time the rent and the bills were paid, and the family clothed and fed, there was little money, and probably little energy, left for other things. Under these circumstances, the Community Club led a "hand-to-mouth" existence. The fees that had been in effect at the old rink were retained, although the family rate was reduced to \$1.50, as a means of raising money to cover Johnston's wages and other expenses. Many people apparently had difficulty coming up with the fees. There is no record, however, and no recollection of anyone ever being prevented from skating or using the toboggan slide because their fees had not been paid. Other bits of money were raised through Whist Drives and Concerts held in King George School and through Moccasin Dances and the annual carnival held at the rink.

## V

### The "Boys"

BUT, AS THE OLD ADAGE SAYS, "It's an ill wind that blows no good." Some of the "good" of the Depression came to the Community Club in the form of a group of young, unemployed men who used the Club as a gathering place. These men, affectionately called the "Boys," helped with repairs to the building, cleaned and flooded the ice, helped the small kids tie their skates, assisted with the hockey teams, and coached the older children in the fine art of speed skating. They also provided the labour to build a toboggan slide and fence, and to convert an old box car into two change rooms. On Saturday nights after the



rink was cleaned and flooded, Johnston and the "Boys" sat down to a feed of hot pork and beans and buns prepared by Mrs. Johnston.

Throughout the 1930s, the personalities involved in running the Community Club and rink were constantly changing. Johnston was called back to his old job and had to give up his position as manager of the rink. Jim Purser, one of the "Boys," took his place, at a salary of \$30 per month. Moreover, the composition of the group of fellows who made the rink a kind of "home away from home" also changed. Some of them gained jobs or "hit the road," but there were always others to take their places.

## VI

### The Link With King George School

FROM THE OUTSET, there was a close link between the Community Club and King George School. This link was a natural. King George School was the one school that every child in the East End would attend for at least a few years. As such it became a focus for the activities of children and parents alike. Along with the things that the school was required and expected to do — teach children discipline, punctuality, deference, and the "three R's" — it also served as a centre for social activity in the community and introduced the children to organized sports.

When people in the East End first became involved in forming a Community Club they held their meetings at the school. W.A. Wood, then Principal, not only made the school available for the meetings, but also participated in the formation and subsequent activities of the Club. The creation of a rink under the Tank was a great boon for the school hockey program, because it provided a place to practise. At the same time, the rink was perceived by school staff as providing other children with the sort of recreation that would keep them out of mischief in out-of-school hours and help them to develop the healthy bodies that were needed to nurture healthy brains.

*The link between the school and Community Club was cemented with the practice of having the Principal automatically on the Club executive. Under other circumstances, and with other individuals, this might have turned out to be simply a procedural matter, an acknowledgement of support from the school. This was not the way it turned out. Wood (and his successors, Bill Peden, 1934-41, and Henry Nordin, from 1941 on) not only showed up at the meetings, but also provided valuable advice, took on executive responsibilities, and contributed time and labour to the work bees.*

Indeed, for part of the 1930s the Principal and staff of the school took over major responsibility for operation of the rink and toboggan slide. This came about as a result of a meeting held in the school on 27 October 1933. The details of the meeting and the plans for 1933-34 were spelled out in a newsletter which was sent home with the pupils at the school. Apparently, this change in

organization was prompted by financial problems. Thus, the financial statement for 1932-33 (included in the newsletter) showed a shortfall of \$23.28 on the total expenditures of \$217.11.<sup>9</sup> The newsletter goes on to say:

We hope to operate this year without a deficit. This can be done only by selling three hundred or more season tickets at .50 cents each. This, together with the proceeds of a carnival, will assure enough money to operate the rink for the season.

Season tickets will be on sale in a few days. The pupils of King George School will be calling on you. They are counting on your support. Money is needed previous to the opening of the rink and slide. We have the best Community rink in the city, and the only Community toboggan slide in Canada. Let us give it the support it deserves. If possible, buy some extra tickets for children who cannot buy them.<sup>10</sup>

The financial problems were sorted out, and the rink and other facilities became entrenched as a part of the East End.

## VII

### Come the End of the Thirties

AT THE END OF THE 1930s the Community Club was in sound condition. The financial statement for 1938-39 shows revenue of \$410.27 for the year and expenditures of \$333.35. This left a surplus of \$76.92, no mean sum at that time. The main source of revenue continued to be the sale of memberships. Thus, of the total revenue taken in in 1938-39, \$226.80, over 50 per cent, came

<sup>9</sup> The financial statement provides details on the sources of revenue and the expenditures of the Club:

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Receipts		Expenditures	
Subscriptions	\$86.60	Caretaker (\$1.00 per day)	\$120.00
Carnival	39.37	Lights	31.22
Whist Drives	51.92	License	10.00
Concert	11.35	Gramophone	12.50
Moccasin Dances	4.59	Printing and Advertising	4.96
		Hardware	24.00
		Lumber and repairs	11.88
		Miscellaneous	2.55
		Fuel and Water supplied by the School Board	
Total Receipts	193.83	Total Expenditures	217.11
Deficit paid by Community Club	23.29		

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<sup>10</sup> King George School Newsletter, October 1933.

from the sale of memberships.<sup>11</sup> The Carnival was another important source of revenue, netting \$107.62. Socials, in contrast, were not especially lucrative. For example, at the first social of 1939, held in January, \$15.55 was collected at the door. Out of this, the Club paid the orchestra \$1.00 for taxi fare, refunded the artist \$.25 for bus fare and bought \$2.40 worth of canned goods for bingo prizes. The net take, therefore, was \$11.90.<sup>12</sup>

Financial considerations aside, the significant thing was that, thanks to the efforts of the people living in the East End and the people working at King George School, the Community Club came out of the Depression firmly established as a vital element in the lives of people living in the East End. Mrs. Bob Allen, President of the Community Club in 1939, referred to the spirit which characterized the Club in her thank you letter to the people who worked with her:

I wish to thank you most sincerely for your co-operation and work during the past season. Our meetings have been well attended during the year. The spirit of good will and the desire to make the rink a success for the children was apparent at these meetings.

Mrs. Allen also noted the contribution of the "Boys."

The young men working at the rink render a service to the community which very few of us living in it realize. . . . These young men have been raised in this district and have enjoyed the community rink in bygone days; and are now helping to carry it on for the younger boys and girls, which testifies to its worth in the community.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Members of the Club in 1938-39 were provided a membership card with the following format:

EAST END RINK AND TOBOGGAN SLIDE 2 SEASON TICKET 1938-39	
Name	_____
Address	_____
(Write Name and Address in ink)	
This ticket is not transferrable and must be shown on request at Rink and Toboggan slide.	
SCHOOL PUPILS (Yellow Ticket)	\$ .75
ADULTS (Pink Ticket)	1.00
FAMILY TICKETS	2.00
No Tickets required for Children under School Age.	

<sup>12</sup> The financial statement for 1938-39 and the details on the financial aspects of the social were provided by Ester D. Allen whose mother was President of the Club in 1938-39.

<sup>13</sup> Copy of this letter provided by Ester D. Allen.

## VIII

## A New Deal for Youth

WITH THE OUTBREAK OF WAR in 1939, the conditions with which the Community Club had been faced in the previous seven years changed dramatically, creating new problems. A lot of the young men from the East End went into the armed forces. Other residents were recalled to their jobs or absorbed into essential industries; indeed, not only were the unemployed put to work, but people who in "normal" times would never be considered for jobs such as married women and old-age pensioners suddenly found themselves welcomed into the city's workplaces.

These changes were felt by the Community Club. The "Boys," who had kept the facilities in good repair and cleaned and flooded the rink, were gone. Members of the executive found that with all the overtime they were required to work it was difficult to stay on top of the problems of the rink. Hiring a manager was almost impossible. With the limited amount of money available, the only people interested in the job were old-age pensioners seeking to supplement their meagre pensions. A succession of pensioners operated the rink, but many of them found the job too much for them. These problems were temporarily and partially resolved by having volunteers at the rink in the evenings to organize the children, clean the ice, and keep the fire going.

The staff at the school did their bit as well. They kept the hockey teams going; and when there were heavy snowfalls, the older children were let out of school to clean the rink.

As a result of these makeshift and stop-gap measures, the rink kept operating. By spring 1943, however, it was apparent to members of the executive and the school principal, who was being leaned on by the school division administration because he was spending too much time on Community Club affairs, that something would have to be done to get more people involved in the activities of the Club. Consequently, the executive convened a special meeting in the King George School auditorium to discuss its future. The children were given a special newsletter, "A New Deal for Youth," to take home, which detailed the problems of the Club and called on parents to think about what needed to be done to take care of the recreational needs of their children. On the night of the meeting, the auditorium was packed.

School principal Henry Nordin set the stage for discussion with a review of the Club's problems. He stressed, in particular, that there simply were not enough volunteers and concluded his presentation with an impassioned plea for more participation. As soon as Mr. Nordin was done, a number of people volunteered to assist with the operation of the rink during the winter of 1943-44. The discussion then shifted to the longer-term objectives of the Community Club. After much free-wheeling debate which touched on virtually all aspects of recreation, those present at the meeting approved the following plan:

- (1) Construction of a modern Club house with washroom facilities, a full-size basement that could be used for meetings and bingo, and a canteen.
- (2) The provision of two full sheets of ice, one for skating and one for hockey.
- (3) The creation of a softball diamond, horseshoe pitches, and tennis courts.
- (4) The construction of a paddling pool, and, in the more distant future, a swimming pool.
- (5) The terracing and landscaping of the hill side.

No doubt some of those at the meeting thought that this plan was a "pipe-dream." Here you had a group of people with no land (all the Club had was the right to use the corner of the block on which the rink and shack were located) and no money talking about a major recreational project. The one asset these people did have, however, was the resolve to seek to bring about the realization of their dream.

In any event, once the plan was agreed on, the meeting set up a six-member *Building Fund and Property Committee* with authority to expand and get as many people involved in the project as possible.<sup>14</sup>

## IX

### Raising the Money, Securing the Land

AT ITS FIRST MEETING the Committee laid plans for a major fund-raising drive. The East End was divided into blocks for canvassing, and a captain was placed in charge of each block. It was left to the captains to recruit the canvassers and to explain to them that each household in the East End would be visited and asked to contribute to the building fund. As part of the pitch for funds, the canvassers were instructed to tell families in detail how the monies collected would be used to improve recreational facilities for their children.

The canvass was enthusiastically received. Every family gave what they could afford. In total, approximately \$1,200 was collected. In addition, funds were raised through teas and bake sales held in the school and in other parts of the City.

Then, in February 1944 the Committee approached City Council to seek use of the square block of land on which the Tank was located. City Council advised the Committee that this land had been turned over to the Parks Board and it was from this body that approval for the use of the land would have to be obtained. The Committee attended the Parks Board meeting on 27 March 1944.

<sup>14</sup> The six members of the Committee and their occupations were as follows:

Tom Black, Carman, CNR, President  
 Frank Pickering, Trainman, CPR, Vice President  
 Henry Nordin, Principal, King George School, Secretary  
 Sid Roberts, Bookkeeper, Brandon Hardware, Treasurer  
 Jack Seymour, Attendant, Brandon Mental Hospital, Chairman of Recreation  
 Bob Judd, Fireman, CPR, Hockey Coordinator

The following excerpt from the minutes of this meeting explains what transpired:

A delegation from the East End Community Club comprised of Messrs. Black (Chairman), Strang and Moore appeared before the Board asking permission for the East End Community Club to have the use and control of the block of land on which the overhead tank is situated.

Mr. Black stated the Club wished to erect a permanent club building 40' x 12' [sic] with a full size basement, have two sheets of ice and a soft ball diamond on the South end of the block and . . . hope to construct an open air swimming pool at the base of the hill.<sup>15</sup>

The request was referred to the Parks Committee for an evaluation. Subsequently, this committee approved the request and recommended that it be referred back to City Council for appropriate action. City Council complied with the recommendation of the Parks Board and the Community Club acquired control of the block of land.

## X

### A Bit of Ingenuity, Many Hands, A Lot of Sweat

THE COMMITTEE WAS NOW in a position to push ahead with construction. At a meeting held in May, Jack Strang, who worked for the Good Roads, informed the committee that he would be able to have the Good Roads equipment that was overhauled during the winter months tested out levelling the grounds for the ice surfaces and excavating the basement for the new building. Jack Coates offered to draw up plans and blueprints for the new club house with the aid of his father who had been a builder. The Committee also decided at this meeting to seek someone to organize and supervise construction of the building; someone who was capable, but would not demand top wages.

Shortly after this meeting there was much activity on the East End grounds. The Good Roads equipment moved in and did the levelling and excavation, and groups of children picked the surface area clean of the rocks that were turned up.

Joe Pilchar was hired to supervise construction. His was to be the only paid labour involved in the project. Pilchar laid out the work for the volunteers that reported for work each evening and on Saturdays. When the cribbing was ready for the basement, the mixer was brought in and a large gang of men showed up to help with the pour.

This was, of course, only the beginning. In the next few weeks, the floor went down and the framing was put up. Meanwhile the Committee was busy scrounging help with other phases of the work. Pete Sigurdson, who had been a plumber before getting a job on the railroad, helped with the layout of the plumbing. A chat with Tommy Smith, a small electrical contractor, proved

<sup>15</sup> Brandon Parks Board meeting, 27 March 1944.

rewarding. When he learned of the Club's plans he volunteered to help detail the electrical circuits and supervise installation. Jack Tait, an electrician on the CPR, worked along with the other volunteers to make sure the wiring was done right.

At one point in the early stages of construction, some boys were observed fooling around on the site. Some of the people living close by were concerned that they might get hurt and do some damage, so they contacted Tom Black, Committee Chairman. Of course, when Mr. Black and one of his colleagues showed up the boys scattered in every direction. Mr. Black recognized one of the boys and called him over. The boy was scared stiff, but Mr. Black told him the cops would not be called and his parents would not be informed, if he and his friends showed up the following evening at 7:00 with hammers. Well, they showed up alright; indeed, there were so many of them additional adults had to be called out to supervise their labour.

## XI

### The Grand Opening

LABOUR DAY 1944 WAS SET as the date for the official opening of the new Club house. A full slate of activities was scheduled, including a softball tournament, a country fair, bingo, horse shoe competitions, and children's races. Brandon Mayor Les McDorman was invited to do the official honours.



*East End Community Centre, 1946*

Labour Day turned out warm and sunny, and there was a massive turnout. When the time came for the opening ceremony, all of the East Enders, and especially those who had given so much time and effort, looked on with justifiable pride. The *Brandon Sun* report on the next day described the opening in the following terms:

A community venture which promises health and happiness for both children and adults in the east end of the city, was formally opened on Monday evening. The East End community club's ambitious program to provide healthy recreation for the children of that section of Brandon got a big send-off from a large crowd of citizens who visited the site opposite the King George School. An entire city block is being devoted to recreational features, and more than \$2,000 has already been placed into the plan.

Mayor L.H. McDorman, who officially opened the club last night, saw in the centre a "great asset to the health and happiness of the community." He said that while not all persons living in the east end belonged to the same church or the same lodge, they all belonged to the same community.

## XII

### Collective Ownership, Collective Responsibility

AFTER THE OFFICIAL OPENING there was a brief respite, but then it was back to the job of finishing the fences and making other preparations for the winter season. As part of these preparations, a general meeting was held to set principles and rules for the Club and create an on-going executive and committee structure.

The meeting laid down a series of principles which would guide the activities of the Club, among them:

- (1) All residents of the East End would be members of the Club;
- (2) Membership fees and membership cards would be abolished;
- (3) Nobody would be barred from using the facilities of the Club, so long as they complied with the rules.

These principles recognized that virtually everyone in the East End had contributed in one way or another to the new facilities. In short, the new facilities were the product of a collective effort and, therefore, should be held, or owned collectively. When people moved into the East End they would acquire a claim to the facilities and the right to participate in its activities; when they moved out of the East End, they would relinquish them, although they could still use the facilities. At the same time, residents of the East End took on an obligation, namely, the obligation to care for the facilities and to pass them on to subsequent generations in as good or better condition than they found them.

In short, the East End Community Club had been reconstituted along the lines of a socialist institution.



# **EAST END COMMUNITY CLUB**

OPERATED BY COMMUNITY OF THE EAST END

## **RULES AND REGULATIONS**

1. THE COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE FOR RINK SUPERVISION AND MANAGEMENT IS HEADED BY THE PRESIDENT.
2. THE SUPERVISOR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR RINK SUPERVISION AND MANAGEMENT AND HAS FULL AUTHORITY TO DEAL WITH ANY OFFENDERS, OR INFRACTIONS OF RULES AND REGULATIONS AS OUTLINED BY EXECUTIVE. WHERE DISCIPLINARY ACTION BECOMES NECESSARY SUCH ACTION WILL BE TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE UPON ANY MATTER REPORTED BY THE RINK MANAGER.
3. ANY PERSON DAMAGING OR DESTROYING RINK OR SCHOOL PROPERTY OR EXHIBITING RUDE OR NOISY BEHAVIOR WHICH SHALL BE DEEMED OFFENSIVE BY THE EXECUTIVE AT ANY FUNCTION IN KING GEORGE SCHOOL OR AT THE PLAYGROUND CENTRE, SHALL BE BARRED FROM FUTURE ATTENDANCE AND FROM PARTICIPATION OF ANY PRIVILEGE IN CONNECTION THEREWITH WILL BE SEVERELY DEALT WITH.
4. PRIVILEGE MAY BE SUSPENDED FOR A CERTAIN PERIOD FOR INFRACTIONS OF FOLLOWING OFFENCES:
  - (A) BAD LANGUAGE.
  - (B) DISOBEDIENCE OR DISRESPECT TO RINK MANAGER IN CHARGE.
  - (C) ANY UNNECESSARY INTERFERENCE WITH SKATERS.
  - (D) LOITERING IN OR ENTERING ANY CLASS ROOM AT KING GEORGE SCHOOL WITHOUT PERMISSION DURING FUNCTIONS.
5. NO STICKS OR OBSTRUCTIONS ARE ALLOWED ON SKATING ICE AT ANY TIME.
6. ALL SKATERS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL AGE BE OFF ICE BY 9:00 P.M. WARNING LIGHT SIGNAL WILL BE GIVEN. EXCEPT FRIDAY AND SATURDAY NIGHTS.
7. MINERS ARE PROHIBITED FROM SMOKING ON ICE OR IN CLUB HOUSE AT ANY TIME.
8. PERSONS CAUSING ANY DELIBERATE OR WILLFUL DAMAGE SHALL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR REPLACING SAME.
9. ALL GENERAL SKATING AND HOCKEY MUST CEASE BY 10 P.M. UNLESS AUTHORIZED BY THE EXECUTIVE.

(THE EXECUTIVE)

*Rules and Regulations, 1946*

### **XIII A Legacy**

THE PEOPLE OF THE 1930S and first half of the 1940s who were involved in the making of the East End Community Club created an important legacy for

the people of the East End. There were, of course, the physical facilities. But there was more to it than this. They also passed on a tradition of collective action and effort to create things that would improve conditions for their community, their children and themselves and a sense of community, a sense of being part of something bigger and more important than yourself.

Despite significant changes in the character and population of the East End in the post-war years, and especially since the 1950s this tradition and sense of community remain rooted in the fabric of the East End. Evidence of this abounds.

Completion of the rest of the vision which had emerged from the "A New Deal for Youth" meeting in King George School in 1943 took some time, but it was realized. The Paddling Pool was built in 1946, using volunteer East End labour. A hall, half an army hut, was added to the Club house in 1952. And a swimming pool went in at the base of the hill in 1967, with financial and other support from the East End.

Recently, a Reunion picnic and tea were held in Rideau Park and the East End Community Club facilities, in conjunction with City of Brandon centennial celebrations. This project ended up involving 100s of people, baking, distributing newsletters, organizing fund-raising dances, etc. On the day of the picnic over 2,500 people showed up to talk about old times.

Moreover, the East End remains at the core of progressive politics in the City of Brandon. The current alderman for the East End ward, Riverview, is Ross Martin, President of the Brandon District Labour Council. Martin is the only progressive individual on Council. Len Evans, NDP MLA for Brandon East Constituency since 1969, has a solid nucleus of support in the East End. And the struggles for local reforms still derive much of their inspiration, leadership, and support from the people of the East End.

*This paper is adapted from, From Frozen Ponds: The East End Community Club, Brandon, The East End Centennial Reunion Committee, 1982.*

## APPENDIX

### OCCUPATIONS OF FATHERS OF CHILDREN ATTENDING KING GEORGE SCHOOL, 1930/31\*

Occupation	Number of Fathers    Per cent		Number of Children Attending King George School    Per cent	
Railway Employees	<u>109</u>	46.0	<u>161</u>	45.2
Firemen/Engineers	31		48	
Conductors/Trainmen	15		22	

## 172 LABOUR/LE TRAVAILLEUR

Occupation	Fathers	Per cent	Children	Per cent
Switchmen	12	13		
Carman/Machinist/ Blacksmith/ Stationary Engineer/ Carpenter	18	29		
Shop Employees	10	12		
Storekeeper/Freight Handler/Express worker	8	14		
Yardmaster/Foreman	4	5		
Helper/Labourer/Sectionman	5	12		
Other Railway workers	6	6		
Post Office Workers	3	1.3	6	1.7
Hospital Workers	9	3.8	15	4.2
Street Railway Workers	5	2.1	9	2.5
Gardeners/ Farmers/ Farm Labourers	7	3.0	9	2.5
Grocer/Butcher/ Storekeeper/ Dairyman/ Coal Dealer/ Flour Miller	11	4.6	18	5.1
Utility Workers	3	1.3	4	1.1
Drivers/ Teamsters/ Draymen	10	4.2	20	5.6
Skilled Occupations — other	24	10.1	36	10.1
Helper/Labourer/ Other Manual Worker Occupations — other	26	11.0	42	11.8
Sales/ Insurance/ Managerial/ Clerical Occupations	9	3.8	12	3.4
Turnkey/ Fireman	2	0.8	3	0.8
Presbyterian Minister	1	0.4	1	0.3
Governor Brandon Gaol	1	0.4	1	0.3
Moving Picture Operator	1	0.4	1	0.3
Elementary School Principal	1	0.4	1	0.3
Pensioners	2	0.8	2	0.6
Father Dead	3	1.3	3	0.8
Housewives	4	1.7	6	1.7
Not Specified	6	2.5	6	1.7
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* Information on the occupations of the fathers of children was recorded at the time children first enrolled in King George School. Since individuals changed occupations, and because the unemployment rate for male wage earners 20 years of age and over was approximately 20 per cent in June 1931, the data do not provide an accurate reflection of people's occupational situations in 1931. The data do, however, confirm the working class character of the East End.

NOTE: We would like to thank the Brandon School Board for giving us access to their files, and Irene Petrycia for compiling the data.