

Playgrounds Born in a War-Torn World

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

Now that kids have returned to school, hundreds will look back to a fun summer of playground activity in Fairport and Perinton. They might be surprised to learn that this year marks the 75th anniversary of an organized playground program in this community.



Children surround playground director Ellen Hawver in this 1940s photo.

The year was 1943, and the demands of war resulted in hundreds of empty chairs around dinner tables in Fairport and Perinton. Young girls and boys struggled with the reality of a long, sometimes permanent absence of members of their family. The result was an enormous physical and emotional void in families, and in the community. Establishing organized playtime was one of many methods to help make life a little better in such a difficult time.

A committee was formed to drive the creation of the playground program. Included were Town Supervisor Raymond Lee, and Superintendent of Schools, Thomas Coffee. While they provided the leadership, the real work was completed by a group of dedicated women, including Anne Hartigan, who served as chairperson of the group.

Some playground equipment was provided by Monroe County's Office of Civilian Protection. The short list included one rubber ball, one dozen scissors for craft projects, a badminton set, one softball and one bat. Perinton responded by allocating two hundred dollars to purchase additional equipment. The playground program was placed under the direction of Miss Ellen Hawver, a 1937 graduate of Fairport High School. Her credentials included a degree in Physical Education from the Cortland Normal School, and two years teaching in Batavia. The young teacher was paid \$122.40 for the summer, shown in town records as coming from a "War Emergency Purpose" budget.



*1940s - Playground activities behind the school on West Church Street.
The rear of the school on West Avenue is visible in the distance.*

The playground program relied on volunteers, and served children from four to fourteen years of age. The school grounds on East Avenue, now Crossman Apartments, served the north side children, while south side participants attended playground at the West Church Street school grounds, where the school district's administration building is located today. Children participated in the playground program from 9:00 am to noon and from 1:00 to 4:30 pm.

That first summer playground program, established in 1943, proved to be a big success, with almost two hundred children registered on the first day. At the end of the season, the kids enjoyed a Field Days, with a picnic and athletic events for boys and girls.

After 75 years, Perinton's summer playground program continues a long and successful tradition of providing children with fun and safe summer activities, close to home.