

The Agassiz Whistler

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Ten Cents

PAUL COWLES OF RECREATION DEPARTMENT TO VISIT TUESDAY

With the arrival of spring, a group of Agassiz residents met to anticipate the neighborhood's outdoor recreational needs. The result was a letter which was personally delivered last week to Mr. Paul Cowles, director of the city Recreation Department, outlining a number of requests for our recreational areas and asking for a meeting. Mr. Cowles readily agreed to talk with the neighborhood about the possibilities of implementing these requests and will come to the Agassiz School on the evening of April 27th at 8 p.m. It is hoped that there will be a good turnout for this meeting -- anyone from the area may attend.

Briefly, the requests mainly concern the repair and maintenance of facilities at the Alden Playfield (the Tot Lot) and the Agassiz School playground and proper supervision for both the Tot Lot and the Sacramento Playfield for the months ahead. The last in the list of requests reads:

"The Sacramento Field is one of the few large open areas left in Cambridge and we would like to put it to its greatest use. To do this, however, we must get permission from Harvard University and must be able to guarantee them insurance and adequate supervision. We would like the Recreation Department to seriously consider sharing the responsibility with the Agassiz Community School. This would alleviate the overcrowding on the tot lot and provide the young people with open space which they so badly need for large game activities."

(It was pointed out in the evaluation of Community Schools prepared

for the city manager that lines of communication between the Community Schools and the Recreation Department were not the best and should be improved upon for the benefit of Cambridge residents.)

The letter which Mr. Cowles was given was read in advance by a number of people in our area and a list of signatures accompanied it.

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EDITORIAL

We hope that our readers, whether they have children or not, will take time to read the article on the pre-school playgroups (beginning on page 3) which was written by two parents and this year's leader. Although the article is lengthy, we found it so interesting and well-written that we decided to use all of it. It concerns just one Community Schools activity but we feel that many people will enjoy reading the history of this very successful program in which more than forty families have participated as well as the thoughtful ideas about child-care and neighborhood unity. We welcome other reports of this nature from anyone in the community who participates in an activity, Community Schools or other, which would have meaning for us all.

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The next COMMUNITY SCHOOLS COUNCIL MEETING will be held on Wednesday, April 28, at 8 p.m. in the Agassiz School. Everyone is invited to attend.

EARLY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN MID CAMBRIDGE

(Reprinted with permission from the Cambridge Historical Commission's Report Two: Mid Cambridge, 1967, p. 22.)

After the Revolution, several large land holdings in Mid Cambridge began to split up, and the major highways through the area were opened to traffic. Three factors determined the nature of the subsequent development of Mid Cambridge as a suburb: its proximity to the established urban centers, the existence of roads linking the centers, and the growth of transportation systems along these roads.

Three centers existed in Cambridge at the time the large estates began to dissolve. The first of these, Harvard Square, site of the earliest settlement in Cambridge, had by this time lost its pre-eminence as the focus of all Cambridge life. Although many inhabitants of the Mid Cambridge area worked there, it was not the Square's commercial activity but rather the presence of the university that most influenced the new suburb. Harvard professors and students built on the newly subdivided lots; Harvard's need to expand influenced, and still influences, those portions of Mid Cambridge nearest the university. East Cambridge and Cambridgeport were more important as commercial and ultimately industrial centers providing employment for the new inhabitants. A substantial number also worked in Boston...

The construction of the two bridges to Boston, the West Boston Bridge in 1793 and the Canal Bridge in 1807, led to the development of Cambridgeport and East Cambridge. The bridges also provided the impetus for the building of new roads linking Harvard Square to Boston. Two highways already ran

through the area. Kirkland Street, the oldest, was originally the highway from Watertown to Charlestown and thence to Boston. What is now Massachusetts Avenue consisted of two branches. One of these, the highway from Arlington and the west, entered Harvard Square, where it connected with Boylston Street and the route to Boston across the Great Bridge and through Allston, Brighton, and Roxbury. The other branch went east from Harvard Square to the salt marshes and Pelham's Island; it was extended to West Boston Bridge in 1793. The other highways through Mid Cambridge were opened in the first decade of the nineteenth century to take advantage of the direct links to the capital. Broadway and Hampshire Street went through in 1805 as sections of county turnpikes. By 1808 Harvard Street had been completed, and 1809 Cambridge Street was open to traffic.

Public transportation followed soon after the opening of the new roads. Omnibuses started running along Massachusetts Avenue from Boston to Central and Harvard Squares in 1793. At first they travelled once a day, but by 1826 an hourly service had been established. This service doubtless con-

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Kate Mattes, Agassiz Administrative Coordinator

Eric Kingson, Teen Coordinator
Jill Norton, Editor, The Whistler

THE PRE-SCHOOL PLAYGROUPS

The Development of the Groups

by Jill Herold

One of the earliest programs in the Agassiz Community School was the pre-school playgroups. The first few sessions were held in the auditorium of the school in March, 1970. There was no one leading the group but most of the mothers chose to stay. The ages of the children ranged from one to five; the toys were those brought along each time by the children and there were no planned activities. The atmosphere was hectic and it became very apparent that there was a need to break down into smaller groups with more organization.

Thus, a Tuesday-Thursday morning group for pre-schoolers began operating in the present Community Schools office with mothers taking turns caring for the children and either Jay Lord or Kate Mattes there as representatives of the Community Schools program. A second group, meeting Monday and Wednesday, was organized very shortly afterwards, as the first group was immediately filled. The ages of the children remained mixed.

The two groups operated essentially in this manner for the rest of the spring and most of the summer. However, after a few months a young mother with experience in education volunteered to help on a regular basis several days a week; she joined one of the groups for part of the summer on an experimental plan. (An older group of children, with the help of the Community Schools staff,

were enrolled in a six-week summer program in kindergarten education run by Lesley College for teachers in training.)

The success of these two groups and the return of neighborhood people from summer vacations brought a pressing need in September for new playgroups to be organized. And, repeatedly, Community Schools staff were asked if a person could be found with experience in early childhood education to help the groups.

For more than a month the pre-school program was suspended while a thorough but unsuccessful search was made for a room in the neighborhood to be used for the playgroups, and while mothers were consulted as to their ideas for the new groups. It was necessary to use the Community Schools room again for the playgroups, but with staff people's time rescheduled (another pressing need for the neighborhood), the room was freed for playgroups five mornings a week.

The mothers of the pre-schoolers during this time interviewed several "teacher" candidates and chose Madeline Taylor to lead the groups. It was decided that there would be three groups; the under-tuos, the two-to-threes, and the three-to-fours. The youngest group would meet one morning a week and the other groups two mornings, all from 9:30 to 11:30. A nominal fee would be charged to cover the mid-morning snack.

The most pressing problem after all of this was to make the room a more exciting place to play in for the pre-schoolers as well as a suitable room for the teens in the evenings. The teens, through the guidance of Bruce White, had built a very large platform which provided

Jill Herold and Gretchen are mother-daughter members of the under-tuos; Susan Todd and Emily, of the three-to-fours; and Madeline Taylor is the playgroups' leader.

a marvelous area for the children to play under, as well as adequate storage space when a cupboard was added for all the toys and equipment which had been donated or built through the months. The room had been given a fresh coat of paint, and curtains and cushions were made to give it a new look.

The groups are now in their third ten-week session with Madeline. Because of the length of time that many of the children have been together and because of Madeline's guidance, there has developed a wonderful atmosphere within each group.

A Parent's Point Of View

by Susan Todd

The playgroups are generally regarded as a wonderful success. And yet, the circumstances, ostensibly, were not optimum. No one had ever set up a play school from scratch. The room was bleak. The equipment negligible. There was little money. And the city manager was questioning the Agassiz program.

But Madeline loved the kids. The parents were not only enthusiastic, but energetic and resourceful. And these particular children reacted so warmly to the whole thing that they reinforced all of Madeline's and the parent's efforts.

And so the playgroups succeeded because of certain spontaneous elements contingent on a teacher, some parents, some children, and a close-knit neighborhood.

This tells us something. Because the success this year has relied on circumstances of the moment, not the least of which has been the thrill of making something out of not much, the spirit has always been vigorous. This is the essential thing.

Next year the elements will be different. And they should also be allowed to discover themselves, as they did so buoyantly this past year.

Some Thoughts on Child-Care, Play, and an Environment for Growth

by Madeline Taylor

Child-rearing in Cambridge, indeed in many parts of America, is evolving from a family-alone-centered activity to a community-together affair. More and more, it seems, young parents are able to, and desirous of getting together with other parents in similar family situations. This is evidenced by the growing interest in playgroups for their kids. The tremendous upsurge in consciousness of women's classical, collective role, as it differs from their more realistic, individual needs and wants, has also nurtured the growing movement towards collective playgroups and more especially, eight-hour or more day care.

Our concern at Agassiz was that pre-school-age children have the opportunity to play and socialize with other children of roughly the same age, and in somewhat similar stages of growth and development. The mothers' intentions were not necessarily to be freed from child-caring responsibilities, but rather to be engaged in a collective, child-caring experience. The hope was also that the children would benefit by being together in a casual, before-entry-into-school environment.

As regards kids and playgroups. I think it is fair to have certain expectations but not others. I think it is fair to expect that the physical environment be as clean and safe as is possible and necessary. It is fair for the parents to expect that the leader, or mother who is mainly in charge be a responsible, sensitive

person who will look after the interest of all the kids individually and equally. And of the children, it is fair only to expect that they enjoy themselves and that their behavior is as natural as possible.

To my mind, playgroups are not miniature, academic set-ups where the child is urged forward or consciously programmed towards any adult-conceived end. The function of a playgroup is to allow a social environment where development takes place at a natural pace, without and over-anticipatory adult leading "the way".

And yet, adults are a vital part of the whole show. Since children cannot go out and find all the things they might like to play with, the adults provide. They bring the toys, books, records, equipment, and supplies that they think the kids would like. The adults plan the environment, which is often the factor most responsible for whatever degree of enjoyment is achieved. But even more important than the environment, is the atmosphere. The very best of equipment and supplies means nothing if the kids don't have the freedom to explore at their will, in an atmosphere devoid of adult, psychological intimidation.

At the Agassiz School much was done to improve the physical environment for the playgroups. With a truly enthusiastic and communal burst of energy, storage space was built, the whole room was cleaned and the floor painted, an area rug was purchased and laid, equipment was built and oodles of stuff was donated. The transformation from before to after was remarkable and the difference it made in the kids was, too. Everyone, including myself, the parents, the coordinators-- Kate and Jay-- even the Agassiz teachers and kids were delighted at the change. That was the most dramatic achievement that was made with the playgroups on a physical level.

But much has been gained also on a human level. All of us, whether we have children of our own or work with

kids because we like to, (or perhaps both) have lots to learn regarding our own behavior with kids. Some of the most exciting things that happen, happen inwardly. We learn to see kids as individuals, to respect them as we would other people. We learn to be honest with them as we would have them be honest with us. Perhaps we learn to tolerate disruptive behavior as we realize that learning is a process, not an isolated event.

Maybe we learn to live a little more in the kids' world where clutter isn't clutter but lots of neat stuff. Or when it becomes clutter, we help to put it in a better place, not as a chore but as a natural part of play. (It's as natural for children to mess up as it is for adults to clean up).

All of a sudden a child will smile who hasn't smiled all day and we'll realize that something caused that smile. What was it? Or a complete sentence in English will burst forth from a child whose native language is not English. We'll see two two-year-olds talking together and delight that there's no adult instigator. Perhaps we watch more than we do, or we wait before intruding. Sometimes we're uncomfortable. What do we think about then? What should we do?

If any environment is created exclusively for one group, such that nothing in the environment is suitable to interest anyone else, then how can anyone outside that group function naturally and comfortably in that environment? If we design a room solely for kids, to such a degree that there's nothing in it that interests us, then we are defeating our purpose. The children have toys to play with, but if we have nothing to play with, we begin to use the children as our toys. They are not there for us to do something to, or for us to use in order to make

something else. They have their own things to do and are quite happy to do them.

It is one thing to "run" a playgroup and quite another to play with kids. As we would do if we were alone in our homes, we should find something that interests us and do it. If there is nothing, perhaps we watch for a while and just sit. It's perfectly normal for a kid to pause on his own, between doing things, so it is natural for adults (or "taller children") to pause, too.

I try to make the playgroups as much fun for me as for the kids, because it would be unnatural to expect that their happiness could sustain me, or that mine could sustain them. And I would hope that the parents who spend so much time with us would also feel that they can do their "own thing." When we look at a child playing contently in a sandbox, we get a good feeling. Children must get the same feeling when they see an adult doing something he or she really likes to do. If our purpose is to have a playgroup, we should also like to play!

We should be there to help provide materials, to supervise only when needed for safety purposes, to help kids go through emotional difficulties, (not merely to distract, but to allow time for hurt feelings to dissipate at the child's rate) and in-between and throughout all of that, to play!

It feels to me as if all children, indeed all people, thrive in an atmosphere of acceptance, understanding, compassion, harmony, and truthfulness, about all feelings. We all need stimulation and the freedom to act as a result of stimulation. We need to see people around us enjoying what they do. We all need to be undisturbed when we're concentrating and to be included when we want to join with others.

Hopefully, playgroups will provide children with the fertile environments and accepting atmospheres they need to develop naturally. Hopefully, we will all learn to be more comfortable with children and their individual ways. We will grow from doing two-hour playgroups to doing four-hour playgroups. We'll learn more and become more comfortable in groups of kids until some of us are ready to open collective day-care centers which will be more than the place a child goes when Mommy and Daddy are at work.

Learning how best to be with children is a process, and the country as a whole can be educated through contact and experience. Several Agassiz teachers let their students come down to the playgroups for a half-hour or forty-five minute visit. These kids play with the younger ones and everybody, especially me, "digs" it. We're always delighted when the fathers participate, as they add so much to the morning. People I've met occasionally drop in for a morning and, again, the scene is enriched. Everyone who is reading this article is welcome to come in and play. We need each other! Space limits our enrollment so unfortunately we can't invite all children but we'll see most of you at the Tot Lot. And there are so many neighborhood playgroups springing up for parents who are willing to share responsibilities. Smile! You can grow younger!

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SPRING PROGRAMS

There are still some openings in the spring Agassiz Community Schools programs. If you did not get a flyer, or were unable to register before, call 876-9268 (after 2:30 p.m.) or come in to the office at 28 Sacramento Street.

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50 GROUPS IGNORED IN APPOINTMENT OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

(As The Whistler was being sent to the printer the first week in March, the Cambridge Superintendent of Schools was appointed. Our March 8 issue, therefore, ran an erroneous note-- that two persons from our area would be participating in the final selection of the superintendent. The article below, by Naomi Cotter from the April Cambridge Civic Association Newsletter, tells the story in detail.)

When the Cambridge school committee appointed Frank Frisoli permanent superintendent of the Cambridge school system, it not only abandoned its eight-month-old nationwide search for the most qualified candidate but also reneged on its previous decision to allow citizens to interview the six final candidates before a final choice was made.

By March 2, the day the school committee abruptly thwarted this process of citizen participation, over 50 groups, representing people of diverse interests from all sections of Cambridge, had officially notified the school committee of their intentions to send delegates to those final interviewing sessions. This coalition certainly did not represent every segment of the community but it did include, among others, the following Cambridge organizations: The CCA, Riverside Planning Team, Chamber of Commerce, High and Latin School Students Assn., North Cambridge Planning Team, Churchmen for Civic Responsibility, Community Services, Teachers Assn., Concerned Black Parents, Visiting Nurse Assn., Education Warehouse, Neighborhood 10 Assn., the Pilot School, League of Women Voters, Cambridge Hot Line, Cambridge Alliance of Settlements, Citizens for Participation Politics, 10 PTA's, and 7 community school groups.

The story of how this unusual alliance joined together may be worth tell-

ing as a possible guide for future action. The legitimacy for citizen participation in the choice of superintendent was established by the school committee itself last June 30, 1970, when they voted to conduct a nationwide search and to consult civic groups, students and faculty on the qualifications for the position. Citizen participation was further endorsed and spelled out on January 5, 1971, when the school committee voted to permit citizen groups to interview the final six candidates.

The vehicle for coordinating this citizen effort was already developing on broader grounds in January. A city-wide conference was convened, January 9 at the Morse School by citizens who were eager to discuss the educational problems in the public schools. The 175 participants came from all parts of Cambridge. And the People's Conference on Education ended with the decision that a permanent organization should be created to pursue two goals: 1) greater citizen involvement and responsibility in school affairs; 2) encouragement of alternative approaches within the system. Thus PACE (People's Action in Cambridge Education) came to life.

Shortly thereafter, several community groups asked PACE to sponsor a meeting for delegates from the groups who would be interviewing the final candidates for school superintendent. PACE agreed to perform this service for the community at large and worked extremely hard to publicize the meeting and directly contact all organizations who might be interested.

On February 21, thirty-one delegates met and discussed in detail effective techniques for interviewing and then drew up some

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tributed to the early cluster of buildings on Austin and Temple Street as part of the grwoing center, Central Square.

At the time of the city's most extensive growth, horsecar railroads provided transportation through Mid Cambridge. From 1845 to 1865 there was a railway along Kirkland Street to Union Square in Somerville. Beginning in 1853 with the incorporation of the Cambridge Railroad and continuing until 1889, horsecars ran along Massachusetts Avenue, Prospect Street, Cambridge Street, and Broadway. Dwellings sprang up along these lines of communication and along the nearby cross streets. Without these horsecar lines, which brought the area within easy commuting distance of Boston, Mid Cambridge would not have grown so rapidly.

A short-lived steam railroad also helped open up the area. Incorporated by Cambridge citizens in 1848, the Harvard Branch Railroad ran from a station on the Little Common to Somerville, where it connected with a trunk line of the Fitchburg Railroad. Opened December 31, 1849, the branch line ran six trains a day to connect the Harvard Square community with Boston. Competition from the horsecar railway, however, made financial success impossible, and the line closed in 1855. Its right of way, paralleling the boundary of the old Foxcroft estate, has been covered by later development except for one section of the roadbed, now Museum Street.

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Our baby's STROLLER DISAPPEARED from our front lawn at 67 Hammond Street sometime between 5 p.m. on Friday, April 9, and 8 a.m. on Saturday, April 10. It is green and blue plaid with a chrome frame, has a navy blue canvas shopping bag attached, a baby's pillow on the seat, and a peace decal on the foot rest. If you have seen it in the neighborhood or have any information about it, please call 864-9081, Phyllis and Milton Kornfeld.

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suggested guidelines for appropriate and workable procedures for the interviewing, since the school committee had not yet announced a specific format. These suggestions were carried by a committee of three delegates to Mr. Edward O'Connell, secretary of the school committee.

Citizen participation was halted at this point by the action of the school committee on March 2. It was a bitter disappointment to the many people who were preparing to contribute intelligently and effectively in the choice of a school superintendent. However, important groundwork has been laid for future cooperation between citizen groups on community issues.

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COATES AND FANTINI ON COMMISSION

City Councilor Thomas Coates and School Committeeman Donald A. Fantini have been appointed by the city manager to the Cambridge Community Schools Commission. As of this writing, the manager has yet to appoint two citizens to the board. Recommendations for these vacancies were made by the Community Schools Advisory Committee (representatives from the 14 neighborhoods) last August. The other member of the Commission who will be continuing is Fred Arsenault.