

Mary G. Hamilton:

Committed Dedicated Pioneer Made A Difference

by John Byl

Throughout the early decades of this century, **Mary G. Hamilton** dedicated her life to the development of physical education, recreation, and camping for girls and women. Her accomplishments include directing phys ed at a YWCA, teaching phys ed at several private girls' schools, holding the principalship of the Margaret Eaton School (MES) in Toronto, opening a summer camp for girls, offering the first comprehensive camp leadership training course for women in Canada, and hosting the founding meeting of the Canadian Physical Education Association (CPEA).

In 1910, Hamilton became head of phys ed at MES, which had opened its doors nine years earlier as a small school of literature and expression. She was also in charge of phys ed at Bishop Strachan School and Branksome Hall, private girls' schools in Toronto. Through her persistent efforts, MES' diploma course in physical education became firmly entrenched. While the program was not recognized by the Ontario government, its graduates took positions teaching phys ed in private girls' schools and directing phys ed in YWCAs.

Hamilton also offered Monday evening dance classes, one of the early forms of organized recreation for women in Toronto. In 1912 came an evening course in physical training. In 1916, she added "Special Classes in Chalif Interpretative Dancing" which was modified in 1918 to read, "Special Classes in Aesthetic, National and Interpretive Dancing..."

MES graduates must have been well-trained because they were in high demand. In 1918 principal Emma Scott Raff said: "Our graduates, in Miss Hamilton's department, who have noticeably made good...are all now teaching in Toronto or elsewhere. This year I did not have enough teachers to supply the demand."

During WW I, Hamilton arranged Patriotic Fetes at Toronto's Mutual Arena so students could exhibit their work and raise funds for Canadian prisoners of war. The Fetes raised more than \$4,000.

In 1922 an MES demonstration "included marches, drills and dances by senior and junior students." A reviewer noted that the 1927 demonstration was "interesting and varied" and "the girls showed an enthusiasm and precision which denoted a love for their work and excellent training. The program included a character clog (the original work of one of the senior students), ...and rollicking singing games and dances were enjoyed by both audiences and participants. Swedish remedial exercises, club swinging, wand exercises, Swedish gymnastics, apparatus work, and elementary class fencing were also featured. Marching tactics, under the direction of Miss Mary Hamilton, director of the school, were unusually fine."

STALWART LEADERSHIP

The history of MES revolved around four women: Hamilton, **Emma Scott Raff**, **Margaret Eaton**, and **Florence Somers**. From 1906 until the early 1920s, Eaton funded the school and when she withdrew her support, Scott Raff resigned as principal, and Hamilton assumed the post. The department of literature and expression was dropped, but she continued the phys ed department, and in 1926 began a two-year program to exclusively train teachers in physical education. Upon Hamilton's retirement in 1934, Somers took over and in 1941, encouraged MES' merger with the University of Toronto and the establishment of Canada's first



Mary Hamilton in her later years.

Eaton's Commercial Photographic Studio, Toronto

bachelor's program in physical education.

MES's program included a course in remedial gymnastics and massage, and offered instruction in the "causes and recognition of scoliosis, weak feet, and faulty posture, such as round shoulders, flat chest, forward head, round back, etc. The practical course in massage considers the technique, methods, and means of applying this treatment." Twice a week MES provided a postural clinic to give students an opportunity to practice massage, and "prescribe and give corrective treatments for postural defects."

Hamilton introduced student government in 1926. Its main function was overseeing various clubs for Riding, Outing, Literary, Badminton, Music, Camera, Dramatic, Glee, and Handcraft.

A 1933 newspaper article noted that "games and athletic skills, which have become a most important part of school life, have increased in both number and variety, and badminton, baseball, basketball, ground and ice hockey, lacrosse, tennis, volleyball and archery are major interests. We are fortunate in being able to use Ramsden Park for our out-door games including tennis, and during the winter months we rent the Varsity Arena for ice hockey and figure skating."

During her tenure, Hamilton selected the graduation speakers. Reflecting her strong Christian beliefs, most were clergy, and their speeches emphasized the integration of Christianity and physical education, stressing the latter as a "complement to intellectual and religious teaching to make a whole life"; as "a necessary part of religious training"; as a "noble profession"; and as an important opportunity to teach people to play. The graduates were encouraged to be "graceful ladies", which meant: to appreciate beauty, to perfect their work, to sacrifice for the future, to work without immediate rewards, to get along with others, and to maintain sustained growth.

EXPANDING HORIZONS

One graduate recalled that "Hamilton felt that the students of MES should have camping experience and so, aided by a 1922 MES graduate, **Norah Macleennan**, she opened Camp Tanamakoon." The 1926-1930 calendars described the camp: "Camp Tanamakoon is beautifully situated on White Lake, Algonquin Park...A sandy beach and well-sheltered bay offer ideal conditions for swimming and canoe instruction; a level clearing behind the Camp gives ample space for games and athletics, and the network of lakes in the Park makes possible innumerable canoe trips."

The 1932 calendar noted that MES "is the only institution in Canada which offers camp leadership training combined with a regular physical education course. Experience over a period of years in placing our graduates has convinced the director that prospective employers appreciate the special training that our students receive during their two months spent at camp." Subsequent calendars praised the camp for its beauty, the value of the learning experience, and for increasing the student's employment opportunities.

Many MES graduates acted as counsellors at Camp Tanamakoon before, during, and after attending MES. One counsellor described the summer camp as follows:

"Miss Hamilton formed the camp in order to give her girls a camping experience, which she felt was very important for the development of a person's personality,

independence...and we really worked at it. We went up there two weeks in June and set up camp and got lectures from her and got to know one another as counsellors, and then when the kids came in, we had our own cabin of girls. When the season was over she would ask the girls to assess the counsellors. Which was a new, but very good experience. She would just talk to the girls. If she did not like what she heard, you wouldn't come back."

FORMING THE CPEA

In 1933 came the formation of the Canadian Physical Education Association (CPEA) which held its founding convention at MES. Faculty and students held key positions in the CPEA, formed 15 per cent of its membership, and contributed many articles and book reviews to the Association's journal. Hamilton herself served for two years as one of three CPEA first vice-presidents.

Upon her retirement from CPEA, a journal article noted: "It is a matter of great regret to physical educationalists throughout Canada, that Miss Mary G. Hamilton has retired from active physical education work...Under her influence, many physical directors now in various positions all over the country, have been trained in the highest standards of service for the physical education profession. Miss Hamilton is continuing her work as Director of Camp Tanamakoon, and the best wishes of her many friends are hers."

ANOTHER FIRST

Following a cooperative arrangement between MES and the University of Toronto, begun in 1934, MES amalgamated with the University of Toronto in 1941, when the University began offering the first bachelor's degree in physical education in Canada.

Through the hard work and dedication of Hamilton and Florence Somers, the amalgamation provided the university with a \$10,000 gift, a small library, and a phys ed faculty and staff. More importantly, they had created a climate that encouraged women to consider phys ed as a profession. Women who might have gone to MES became the university's first phys ed students. Joining with the university permitted the graduates to teach in public schools. Lost was an independent school run by women, for women interested in phys ed.

Mary Hamilton was a pioneer in physical education, recreation, and camping for girls and women in Canada. Upon her resignation from MES in 1934, to "the regrets of many", a newspaper article noted her 24-year career with the school and how she "sent out to teaching positions in the schools and recreation clubs of Canada many graduates imbued with her own high standards for physical education." Said Somers: "Generous, unselfish, just, open-minded, progressive, you and I are the richer for having known her. She has made the Margaret Eaton School known throughout the length and breadth of Canada for its high standards." MES graduates still remember her as a remarkable, daring, wonderful, dedicated, and kind person.

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