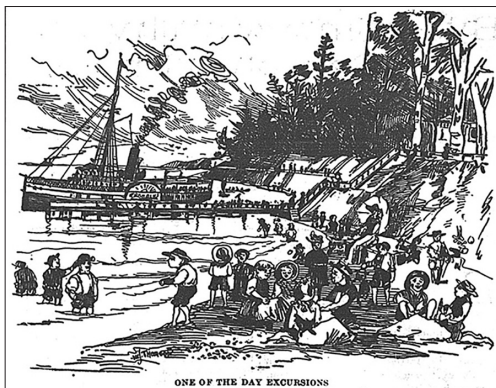


POOR CITY NEIGHBOURHOODS AND FRESH AIR FUNDS

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The Toronto Playground Association worked to establish a long term solution to address the lack of open bright play space for children living in the Ward and other poor neighbourhoods. Prior to the establishment of city playgrounds, there were other child focused initiatives which espoused both the physical and moral benefits of fresh air and nature. “Fresh Air” excursions were originally organized by individual religious charity groups and provided trips to the country for small numbers of children and their mothers, along with boat rides and picnics on the Toronto Island. These trips provided temporary escape from the heat, pollution and lack of play space for children in poor Toronto neighbourhoods.



These illustrations accompanied an article about the fresh air fund in The Globe newspaper on July 5th, 1890, p.3.

“All is animation at the very prospect of getting away from the hot city, the festering backyards, the stifling houses, the odours and evidence of decay. The very sun looks brighter, the world looks happier the pulse of the little ones beat faster, and to the faces of many worn-out mothers comes a smile”. (The Globe, July 5, 1890, p.3).

These day trips were the humble beginning of what is now known as the Toronto Star Fresh Air Fund, a charity that was founded in 1901. The origins of the Fresh Air Movement can be traced to the 1880s in Toronto and the 1870s in cities such as Chicago, New York, Montreal and London UK.

The Fresh Air Fund initiative in Toronto was originally organized by J.J. Kelso and Joseph Atkinson in 1888 when they were both reporters at the World newspaper in Toronto (Johnstone, 2015). In May 1888 Kelso used his connections and advocacy skills to organize a meeting where the proposal for a formal children’s “Fresh Air” Fund was discussed, resulting in the formation of a Fresh Air Fund Committee. Kelso became Secretary Treasurer of the fund, a position he maintained until becoming the Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children of Ontario in 1893. Over the summer of 1888, Atkinson and Kelso worked with the city newspapers to receive donations and encourage the public to coordinate fundraising drives.

Children's Fresh Air Fund.

For the purpose of providing summer excursions for poor children and also to establish children's summer home and picnic grounds. Subscriptions received by J.J. Kelso at the Humane Society Office, 105 Bay Street. Ladies, young people and societies invited to organize garden parties, bazaars or concerts in aid of the fund.

Fresh Air Fund ad in The Globe, Aug 1, 1889, p.6

"The lot of poor children in a large city like Toronto in summer is far from being happy. Their houses are small and stuffy, and many of them have practically no playground but the street, and without such assistance as the Fresh Air Fund gives, their chances of a trip into the country or a sail on the lake are few indeed". (The Globe, June 19, 1890, p.4: Fresh Air for Children).

The first Fresh Air outing in the summer of 1888 provided a boat ride and day trip to Long Branch. On June 11th 1888, four hundred children from poor neighbourhoods (such as the Ward) started the day by parading down Yonge Street toward the harbour, led by a fife band. The children and trip leaders such as Mr. Campbell, Mrs. S. Brett, Mrs. J.C. Clapp, Miss Howe, Miss Alexander and several other mission workers, were seen off by notable donors and fund organizers. Among those present, Rev. J.M. Wilkinson (early fund organizer), Mr. Edward Taylor (donor), Missionary G.H. Whisker, Alderman and Mrs. Piper, J.J. Kelso (Secretary Treasure of the Fund) William Gooderham, (distiller and donor), W.H. Howland (former Mayor of Toronto), and Rev. Dr. Parker.

An article in The Globe described the children on the trip:

"As might be supposed, the children composing the picnic were not of the most refined order, but they behaved themselves much better than expected. The big boys came well stocked with cigarettes, which they smoked in spite of warning or exhortation, but to make up they worked hard in carrying boxes of provisions and cans of milk. The girls although wild and untamed, were careful to obey orders and were uniformly good". (The Globe, June 12, 1888, p.4).

"A prominent feature of the children's excursion parties is the "eldest girl", who attends as the representative of her mother in the guardianship of the younger brothers and sisters. She is usually a hard-working, conscientious girl of fifteen or sixteen, of prematurely old disposition. Very often one meets with a girl of this kind who is as truly a heroine as any woman in history, but her merits are never fully recognized or appreciated....The spirit of thoughtfulness and self-denial is a grand thing in any person, but it is doubly grand when we meet with it among the little social pariahs who have none of the advantages of refinement or education". (The Globe, July 5, 1890, p.3).



Initially the Fresh Air Fund was coordinated by several religious charitable groups and had a strong Christian mission. The belief was that the fresh air would act as salvation of both body and spirit for the children of the “slum” neighbourhoods. As such this first outing included the singing of gospel hymns and Rev. Mr. Wilkinson “addressed the boys on the evils of swearing, lying and drunkenness. The picnic was conducted on thoroughly Christian principles, and cannot fail to have some good effect”. Beyond the spiritual and moral merit, the organizers of the Fresh Air Fund also believed that providing city children with two weeks in the country would help to develop boys and girls into good citizens of the future. Atkinson wrote of supporting the Fresh Air Fund,

“The dividends will be large with health and happiness for the unhealthy and the miserable. Stronger boys and girls mean stronger citizens. Stronger citizens mean greater enterprise and comfort for the city”. (Daily Star, June 29th, 1901, p.14).

During the summer of 1888 the Fresh Air Fund provided special excursions to 1600 children with a total cost of \$234.55. While the Fresh Air Fund continued to exist with seasonal fundraising sponsored by the Toronto Globe and other newspapers, through the late 1880s and 1890s, the fund lost some of its popularity at the beginning of the 20th century the Daily Star adopted the fund.

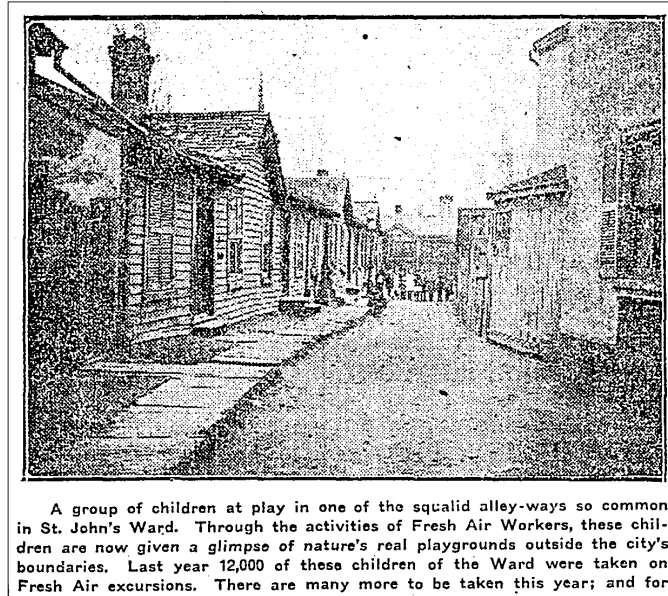
In the summer of 1901, a heat wave in Toronto resulted in several deaths. On July 2nd 1901 alone 28 people died, of whom 12 were children (Daily Star, July 3, 1901, p.1). A Daily Star reporter Madge Merton (the wife of Star Publisher Joseph Atkinson) also known as “Elmina Elliott” and “Elmina Atkinson” published several articles in her column “For Women, by a Woman”. The articles raised awareness of the conditions and vulnerability of children in poor neighbourhoods. The Star solicited readers for financial support to provide city children and their mothers with a temporary escape from the sweltering polluted conditions in their neighbourhoods.

After reading the report of numerous heat related deaths, and observing firsthand the conditions in the Ward, Atkinson announced that the Daily Star newspaper would take donations for the Fresh Air Fund and become the official newspaper sponsor for the charity; "The Fresh Air Fund is the ally of the physician and the protector of the city's health. The Star will willingly receive donations."

From 1901 onward, the Star published articles often prominently on the front page describing the conditions in neighbourhoods like the Ward. The stories described the circumstances and living conditions of poor families. The articles highlighted problems such as poor sanitation, lack of play space, clean air and supervision for children. During July 1901 there were frequent articles profiling doctors who advocated the medical benefits of fresh air and the value of the fresh air fund for their poor patients. One article stated "Pure air is more potent than drugs; and where medicine, too, is necessary, the pure air gives the medicine a chance. Crowded and unsanitary homes handicap the sufferer. Pure air and wholesome food handicap the disease". (Daily Star, July 10, 1901, p.4).

In later years as photography became more common, the Fresh Air Fund articles were often accompanied by photographs depicting children playing in alleyways. Some photographs showed children enjoying time at country and lakeside settings. Regional newspapers in rural areas wrote stories about city children and encouraged families to sponsor and host city children for short holidays to the country. The Star readers were encouraged to donate money to the fund and the names of donors were published in the newspaper on a regular basis.





The Toronto Daily Star, May 27, 1912, p.2

In its first year, (1901) the Toronto Star Fresh Air Fund raised \$1025.50 providing the opportunity for 26 children to spend time on a Whitby farm and gave hundreds of other children boat rides on Lake Ontario, picnics on the Toronto Island and trips on the Belt Line railway. The Fresh Air Fund expanded their work to provide opportunities for children to spend time at summer camps.

Today the Toronto Star Fresh Air Fund sends 25,000 children to summer camp each year continuing the tradition that started over a century ago.

Brehl, R. (1987, June 15) Fresh Air Fund set up after heat wave deaths. Toronto Star, p A2.

Fresh Air. (1901, June 29) Daily Star, p 14.

Fresh Air Fund Ad. (1889, Aug 1) Globe, p 6.

Happy Children: The Good Work of the Fresh Air Fund. (1890, July 5) Globe, p 3.

Hosts of Happy Children: The first of the "Children's Fresh Air Fund" Picnics. Toronto. (1888, June 12) Globe, p 4.

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Many Deaths Yesterday & What Fresh Air Costs. (1901, July 3) Daily Star, p 1.

Photo and Caption: Five Dollars Gives A Child a Vacation. (1912, May 27) Daily Star, p 2.

Sickness in the Homes of the Poor. (1901, July 10) Daily Star, p 4.

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