

Chapter 5

Discovery

Children's Experiences in Western Pennsylvania

Abstract: This area examines the history of children's experiences in Western Pennsylvania focusing specifically on: 1. how children were prepared for adulthood during different periods, and 2. the experiences of children. The 6 children presented in the "Kids in Western Pennsylvania" section of *Discovery Place* serve as case studies.

LONG AGO IN A LONG HOUSE

- Native American Children (more information in curriculum package)
- Iroquois people inhabited Western Pennsylvania
- Children grew up learning from their parents
 - Girls learn to farm and make food from mothers
 - Boys learn to fish and hunt with father
- Male children left home on their vision quest to reach adulthood
 - Dream vision quest came at about 13 to 15 years
 - Included fasting and solitary thought
- Games
 - Snowsnake
 - Dolls
 - Lacrosse (men and boys)

MEET THE KIDS OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

- European Settlement
- European settlers brought with them different attitude toward children than that of Native Americans who were rather tolerant of childish behavior
- Focus on hard work ethic
- Obedience

Topic: School for children in the 18th and early 19th century

- Earliest school opened in 1761 in Western Pennsylvania
 - Very small and private endeavor
 - Schooling was neither regular nor mandatory
 - Only children of wealthy families attend
 - Most children worked alongside their parents either at home, on farms,
or in shops; they didn't go to school
- Many children were indentured at an early age to learn a trade, "housewifery," "dairying" or so forth. The indenture was a legal contract for a certain amount of time during which children lived with adults other than their parents. The children worked in

these households and received training, which often included a basic education, instruction in a skill set or trade, and religious instruction.

- The Pittsburgh Academy opened in 1789. It eventually became the Western University and then the University of Pittsburgh—high school level school.
 - All male
 - Studied Latin, French, Greek, literature, geography, mathematics, science and Ecclesiastical History
- By 1816 there were 20 academies citywide
- Female schools much different
 - Needlework
 - Sometimes French, music, and drawing
 - Practice and repetition very important

Harriett Lenfesty attended girls' school

- Born in 1813
- Needlework shows the European emphasis on working hard and diligently
 - Stitches are very fine (petit point)
 - Sampler commemorates the death of George Washington
 - Needlework was important for all girls, but Harriet's family had the means to allow her to take her time doing a very complicated needlework picture. Less well-off girls may have practiced darning.

Topic: Children's work in the 18th and early 19th century

- Many learned through apprenticeship or indentured servitude (either formal or informal)
- Informal apprenticeship, boys generally worked 7 years (14-21)

Child Labor Laws

- Comprehensive laws not enacted until early 20th century
- By late 1920's almost no children under 14 worked in Pittsburgh
- Only 5% of 14-15 year olds worked by early 20th century
- 1915 law stated that 14-15 year olds must finish 6th grade
- Boys as young as 12 could still work street trades (shoe shine, newspaper)
- By the mid 20th century kids salaries became their own pocket money

Mark Spencer

- Attended school throughout childhood
- Born on February 14, 1892
- Father was a sales agent for H.C. Frick
- House was located in Shadyside and was very large
 - Heating
 - Indoor plumbing
 - Servants (cook, chambermaid, wet nurse, nannies)

- School became mandatory in 1895 for those between 8-13
- Mark attended a local public school for elementary school and then went to private school
- Reading and literature, language composition, spelling, arithmetic, music, drawing, science and geography
 - Geography lessons were connected to international events
 - Sketched and drew maps for geography
- Music and dance lessons important for girls at home—boys sometimes took lessons. Important to be cultured
- Eventually went to Princeton University & Union Theological Seminary

Lillian Weizman

- Worked at the H.J. Heinz Factory
- Born September 23, 1888
- Began at age 14 after finishing the 8th grade—the schooling she was required to finish. Going to high school then was like going to college
- In 1908, only 5% of the children went to high school
- Until the 1930's, domestic service remained the largest employer of girls and women—continued to be for the African American women who could not get work elsewhere
- By 1900 many women went to work in factories and stores
- Worked 10 hours/day with half the pay of unskilled men
- In 1900 H.J. Heinz employed 1,000 women
- Worked 7:00-5:40, Monday-Friday (7:00-4:40 on Saturday) and made \$.50/day to start
- Had to buy caps and make uniforms from wages
- In 1918 Lillian was made forewoman
- Stayed with Heinz factory and retired at age 65

Thelma Coffey

- Born in 1906
- Worked in a hair salon in Hill District at age 16
- 18 years younger than Lillian, but goes to school longer
- African American from Hill District
- Had friends of many ethnic backgrounds
- Quit job in hair salon as soon as she was married
- Difficult to find a child in 20th century who worked during the day

Dick Nicklos

- Born 1939 in Bloomfield, 3 siblings
 - Bloomfield was a very integrated neighborhood
 - Mother, single parent, worked in domestic service
- Went through high school, went into service and received undergraduate and graduate degrees from University of Pittsburgh; became a principal of a Pittsburgh Public Schools elementary school
- Worked as a paperboy and then a pin setting in bowling alley (15017)
- Learned the skills needed for adulthood in school
- The children of the 1930's and 1940's were allowed more freedom than today—strict parent supervision not required at every moment

- Child labor laws of the early 20th century protected kids and was brought on by conditions of the Great Depression (adults needed jobs)
- Change in attitude about children contributions to family; not all money goes to support family

Joe Hredzak

- Born in 1960 in suburbs south of Pittsburgh
- Croatian/Slovakian ethnic background
- Represents the post-war generation
- Dr. Spock era—great shift in attitudes toward children and family role
- Parents work to create best possible environment for child development
- Joe lived in the age when many moms were at home and dads worked
- Children are encouraged to recognize their talents
- Children help around the house to learn responsibility, Joe cleaned the bathrooms among other chores. In elementary school, he got \$.25/week and had to \$.10 to church. In high school got \$5.00 and had to pay for school lunches
- Joe's primary job as a child was to stay in school
- Joe's family had their own home in the suburbs. That was thought to be better for children. Dick Nicklos lived in an apartment in the city and played under the Bloomfield Bridge
- Now Works for U.S. Air

Summary from 1820-1996

- Children previously prepared for adulthood primarily through work experience whether at home, on a farm, in a mill or in someone else's home, now they go to school
- Previously when children made money, they had to give it to their parents. By the 2nd quarter of the 20th century, money is primarily the child's for spending on their own needs
- Previously adult roles and behavior were inculcated into children whereas now, children are encouraged to find and identify their own talents
- In the 19th century children take on responsibilities because their work is essential to the livelihood of the family or the operation of the household; after World War II they do "chores" to prepare for adult responsibility