

DISCIPLINING RECREATION IN COLONIAL SOUTH AUSTRALIA:
CONSTRAINTS, CONTROLS AND CONVENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The last four decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a significant growth of leisure hours for a growing number of South Australians, particularly working class males; it was accompanied by an upsurge in both organised and informal recreation activity.

The upsurge owed much to major advances in communication during the period – in transport by rail, steamship and late in the century, the bicycle, to the network of telegraph stations which by the mid 1870s, spanned much of the colony, the country and finally linked the colony to much of the wider world, and to the growth of local and daily newspapers and specialist journals. Industry, government and commerce drove these advances, but recreation benefited from all of them and came to be a major element of commercial activity itself, as some activities generated not only participants, but spectators and audiences. These developments in turn stimulated a demand for facilities, both indoor and outdoor, which came to be met by private groups, public authorities and commercial operators, or combinations of the three.

However, not all sections of the South Australian community looked favourably on aspects of these developments. Some social, religious and political forces, both separately and later as an alliance, combined to target elements of the recreation activities which emerged within the new leisure, particularly those of the working classes. They feared a return to public disorder arising from unseemly and licentious behaviour which accompanied many of the activities of the occasional pre-industrial seasonal leisure periods. These forces drew on contemporary programs in America and Britain in their campaign to quell 'social evils' including intemperance, gambling and what they regarded as inappropriate behaviour on Sundays, the Lord's Day. They advocated the uses of statutes to constrain, if not eliminate what many in the community regarded as acceptable recreational activity. Others from the reforming forces determined on 'rationalising' the recreation of the working classes by introducing programs which they regarded as educational and self-improving, based essentially on their own middle class

experience. A further restraint were contemporary conventions which determined matters of dress, conduct and behavioural expectations affecting areas of recreational activities; they were particularly severe on women. Other conventions affected full participation by men in a small number of sporting activities.

The thesis examines the origin, nature and conduct of these forces in South Australia each of which sought to discipline aspects of mainly working class recreation of the period. It concludes with an assessment of the outcomes as they appeared at the time of Federation.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for photocopying and loan.

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