

Brian Sutton-Smith. *A History of Children's Play: The New Zealand Playground, 1840-1950*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981. Pp. 331. \$21.00.

In the early 1800s the world was full of frontiers like New Zealand. These frontiers were the domain of adventurers and wealthy entrepreneurs seeking excitement and additional wealth. By the mid-1800s, New Zealand was recruiting British subjects to fill "planned settlements" in their "land of opportunity." Scores of families left the problems of nineteenth century England behind and sailed with their dreams to the "land of the long cloud." The envisioned affluence was an incubus to the gathering masses. Sutton-Smith's history of children's play begins in this 1840 frontier setting. Through the use of a "reminiscence sheet," Sutton-Smith and his assistants collected hundreds of reports both written and oral, visited schools, collected school jubilee celebration booklets, and amassed a creditable amount of resource material to document his history. The first-hand information reported through the use of reminiscence sheets gives the personal quality that is analogous to "oral histories."

*A History of Children's Play* is presented in three parts. The first section shuttles back and forth from narrative to reminiscence, weaving a tapestry of frontier cloth. The pioneer urchins formed a rather barbaric society that combined games from their mother country with those observed among the local Maori inhabitants. In many cases the children, left to their own means, engaged in a lot of fighting and other forms of mischief. By 1877 elementary school was compulsory and it was viewed mainly as a means of keeping children under control and in their place. The schoolyard and the playground, as sterile as they were, became the centers of children's play.

Part two, covering the years of 1890-1950, discusses the intrusion of organized play: the structuring of activities, the elaboration of playgrounds and the notion of recreation. During this time New Zealand moved from frontier poverty to a status of modest prosperity. Whether the changes in the economic, social, and political status were the causes of the change in play patterns is alluded to but not discussed at great length.

The third part of the book is in the form of an epilogue that muses over the three decades since 1950. The first two sections of the book were researched and compiled by Sutton-Smith in 1950 and this last addendum is just a speculative survey of play in New Zealand as observed by the author.

*A History of Children's Play* is scholarly yet entertaining. The book is well-organized and well-documented. This reviewer could only find three shortcomings in the book with the first alluded to by Sutton-Smith himself in his preface. There is a noted absence of information regarding the Maori children's play through the same period of history. If the book is truly a history of children's play in New Zealand, the importance of the Maori New Zealander's contribution should not be ignored. My other criticism is the confusing manner in which Sutton-Smith jumps back and forth from narration to "reminiscent reports" in the first part of the book. Thirdly, the book only considers play in the cities and does not concern itself with rural youth. As a history of play by Caucasian (essentially British) children in urban New Zealand during the years of 1840-1950, the book has found its mark, but there is a great deal more to be explored on the subject of play not only in New Zealand but in other Polynesian settings as well.

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