

TOBOGGANING: THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Long before the introduction of a legal trend from the United States that newspaper editor, Howard Elliott calls "creeping litigiousness", tobogganing in Hamilton was a well organized winter activity.

More than a century ago we had the ideal setting for toboggan runs at the base of the escarpment on what was then the edge of Hamilton's urban development. The long sloping gradient from the foothill to the lake plain, guaranteed more than a kilometer of thrilling tobogganing at unheard of personal speed. Highly structured, the chutes were relatively safe too.

Not so today! Irresponsible and reckless fools try to test how dangerous they can make their self-contrived obstacle course on public golf courses and park sites.

In 1882 when the toboggan craze became so popular, wooden slides were built at the base of the escarpment. The Victoria Toboggan and Snow Shoe Club built a slide at the head of Victoria Avenue, while the Hamilton Toboggan and Snow Shoe Club was located at the head of Queen Street South. Well organized, the club members wore distinctive club colours and monitored the activity .



*Photo by Jean Firth courtesy Hamilton Art Gallery
The Hamilton Toboggan Club slide in 1882 at the foot of the escarpment on Beckett Drive, (Queen Street South).*



*Photo by Hazel Kompass
In the 1930s there was a toboggan slide at the base of the Chedoke ravine on the Chedoke Golf Course.*

Liability has now curtailed tobogganing in a city that is geographically molded for the sport. City administrators choose to put up NO TRESSPASSING signs which have no effect on deterring million dollar litigations. Why not spend the money on creating supervised toboggan chutes that were so successful in the good old days.

As for toboggan accident litigation against the city, that legal nonsense has to be curbed before it spreads to car accidents on city streets which are far more dangerous.



*Photo by Robert Williamson
Queen Street at the foot of Beckett Drive as it appears today. The toboggan slide would have been where the sidewalk is now.*

Mountain Memories, written by historian Robert Williamson on behalf of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society, appears monthly in The Mountain News.