

# City Lends Pioneering Hand Aiding Growth of Swimming

By OLIVE DICKASON

This city is something of a pioneer in swimming.

As an example: Montreal's swimming program launched in the Catholic schools last year is being followed by Los Angeles.

Rene Belisle, physical education director for the Catholic School Commission, said that on a recent visit to Los Angeles, he found the city keenly interested in the Montreal program and using it as a model, not only for swimming but for its whole physical education schedule.

Another credit for Montreal: it pioneered synchronized swimming, which is to the sport in general what figure skating is to skating in general. It was started here in 1896, and has become an art developed to the point where a team is going over to Helsinki to demonstrate this type of swimming at the conclusion of the summer Olympics

## Compulsory

Swimming is compulsory in the city's Catholic schools for girls in grade 5 and boys in grade 6; the Protestant schools have it on a voluntary basis for grade 5, with the pupils being allowed to take courses during school time.

Both Mr. Belisle and J. G. Lang, physical education supervisor for the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, agreed that these grades were best to start teaching swimming, as the pupils learn it more quickly then. What's more, they just love it. If a school is lucky enough to have a pool of its own, such as the Montreal High School, then everybody learns.

As it is, Mr. Lang estimated that about 25 per cent of the girls and 35 per cent of the boys in the city's school swim in one fashion or another.

The city has about 34 swimming pools, 19 of which are operated by the city, the rest by groups such as the Y.W.C.A. Although this is more pools than in any other city

in Canada, facilities are inadequate because of the lack of beaches.

Mr. Lang said that 15 years ago there were more fatalities from drowning in the Province of Quebec than there were traffic accidents. The growth of motor traffic has changed that picture, however: last year there were 67 drownings in Greater Montreal and 184 traffic fatalities.

## Artistic Side

The artistic side of swimming was stressed by Mrs. C. R. Sellar of Montreal, president of the Canadian Amateur Synchronized Swimming Association. Quite apart from winning races and saving lives, the sport can be a thing of beauty. This is particularly so in the aquatic ballets. The newness of synchronized swimming is seen in the fact that it was put on a competitive basis in Canada in 1925, and in the United States in 1941. Its popularity is steadily growing, Mrs. Sellar said.

Montreal's great lack is beaches, in spite of the fact that it is situated on an island. Back River is banned because of contamination; in other parts, strong currents hinder the development of swimming areas, particularly for young children.

Despite these difficulties, however, Montrealers are quite aquatically-minded — and to their own benefit as far as health and pleasure in life is concerned.