

## **Rochester Parks as Playgrounds**

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President of the Board of Park Commissioners of Rochester

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## **The Playground and Its Place in the Administration of a City**

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Mayor of the City of Rochester

## ROCHESTER PARKS AS PLAY-GROUNDS.

BY ALEXANDER B. LAMBERTON,  
*President of the Board of Park  
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**I**T has been the aim of the Board of Park Commissioners of Rochester, N. Y., to not only bring its park system to the highest state of material beauty as regards landscape adornment and the cultivation of trees, shrubs, and flowers, but also minister to the intellectual and athletic needs of the people. Actuated by these sentiments, the commissioners inaugurated playgrounds not only in the great parks but in several of the smaller ones of the city.

In May, 1902, the Children's Playground League of Rochester was organized. This association became useful in co-operating with the Park Board in the developing of the playgrounds and assumed certain responsibilities for a time. The movement leaped into immediate popularity and Brown's Square and Washington Park were chosen for the initial practical work. The importance of the movement can be estimated when it is stated that in 1906 the attendance of children at Brown's Square numbered 61,287, an increase of more than 20,000 over that of the preceding year.

Under the auspices of the Park Board, the Rochester Physical Education Association was instituted, which brought about a new movement in our city in the interests of athletics.

At the Brown's Square playground a series of athletic events, both field and gymnastic in their nature, were organized, including basketball and relay leagues divided into three classes according to ages. A football squad was organized. Yachting enthusiasm sprang up around the spacious pool that had been provided and toy ship contests became popular. Bronze and rubber prizes and trophy shields were given successful competitors. Opportunities for shower baths and swimming were enjoyed by the children in summer. The

north triangle of the park was depressed for flooding as a skating rink in winter, and arrangements made for all kinds of winter sports.

A good building was provided for indoor amusements, containing piano and conveniences for playing quiet games.

It is now fully recognized that the establishing of playgrounds in the various localities of our city, of which that at Brown's Square takes the lead, is one of the greatest blessings that has been conferred upon Rochester by the Park Commissioners. The beneficent undertaking gave the death blow to a vicious social condition which compelled the children of the city in congested sections to congregate in streets, alleys, vacant lots, etc., to seek amusement that often led to mischief and vice. Devoid of all supervision their play often became quarrelsome, boisterous, rude and noisy, disturbing to neighborhoods, and, what was worse than all, endangering the moral characters of the children by association with those of vicious tendencies. All this danger is being gradually eliminated by the introduction of organized recreation in our public playgrounds. The expenditure of \$50,000 last year for this department of the playground work may be considered one of the very best investments of the public money that has ever been authorized.

The playground at Brown's Square is now so complete in its equipment that it may be considered a model by all progressive communities, and as the years go by it will doubtless be duplicated in every section of our city. A competent staff of teachers and supervisors for the playgrounds was organized at the inception of the movement, and continues in active service.

But to a far greater extent have the provisions for athletics and sports been extended in the great parks of Rochester which appeal to both children and adults.

At Seneca and Maplewood parks much has been provided to afford healthful diversion for mind and body. There

is a fine zoological collection, where may be seen black bears, cubs, foxes, wolves, monkeys, baboons and a variety of other wild creatures, and also a large flying cage in which birds exercise themselves, thus giving the sight-seer an opportunity to view them at any angle. Special care has been taken to provide grounds and appliances for athletic sports, and in the northern part of Seneca Park is a fine body of water that has many attractive features for children who sail their toy ships and boats in its quiet waters. There is also an artificial pool which is used for amusement purposes by the smaller children.

At Seneca Park there have been many athletic events, pony races, shooting contests and musical festivals which have attracted crowds numbering from twenty to thirty thousand people at a time. In that portion of the park known as Maplewood, there occur annually Indian celebrations, in which Indian life and customs are exemplified, and there are baseball and lacrosse contests. The winter sports in Seneca Park are amply provided for. The winter carnivals, consisting of coasting contests, hockey, snow shoe races, tobogganing races, etc., are among the most interesting athletic events, and are greatly enjoyed and witnessed by the thousands of people. Large areas of land within Seneca and Maplewood Park have been devoted to athletic purposes of every description, and near the entrance to the latter is a commodious building for indoor diversions in bad weather, while fronting it is a wide space of ground equipped with seats for concert purposes, and a variety of swings and appliances for exercise. These two parks—which in reality are one—are divided by the lower falls of the Genesee, and its noble stream made strikingly romantic in appearance by the wonderful geological formation of the cliffs below the falls, which give a history of past ages. In unmistakable language printed in layer and strata, it tells of the inconceivably vast periods of

time that it required for the river to cut its way down to Lake Ontario.

In Genesee Valley Park there are two refectory buildings for the use of the public, open both in summer and winter. The athletic grounds and stand are valuable features of this park. In winter the grounds, in part, are flooded and used for winter sports. There is a commodious swimming pool with arrangements for the safety of bathers. A baseball park is available for the separate games, and the golf grounds are pronounced by experts as fine as any public golf course in the country. There is also a cricket field, tennis courts, and a large space for children's playground, containing a merry-go-round. Two suitable boat liveryies have been established. In accordance with the park laws, the commissioners have leased and permitted the erection of buildings to the Rochester Athletic Club, the Y. M. C. A. Athletic and Boating Club, Genesee Valley Golf Club, and to about a dozen private boat clubs having a sufficiently large membership.

Under these privileges there are over one thousand canoes and small boats used in this part of the Genesee River.

Among the notable events that have occurred in this park are the annual fox chase, kite day, water carnivals and illuminated regatta, aquatics, hurdle races, running broad jump, shot put, and the usual ball games.

The water carnival last year was brilliant beyond description, which, with its accessory attractions in athletic sports, drew an attendance of over 60,000 people.

In concluding this brief summary of our park diversions and playgrounds, want of space precludes the mention of many details, and particularly the provision made for Saturday and Sunday concerts by a regularly organized park band.

Musical programmes are rendered in our parks on all occasions of festivity, celebration and recreation. This gives an additional charm to all events, affording cheerful vibrations and cultivating the taste for the beautiful.

## THE PLAYGROUND AND ITS PLACE IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF A CITY.

By HIRAM H. EDGERTON,  
*Mayor of the City of Rochester.*

**T**HE city of Rochester is very justly proud of the provisions for playgrounds which it has made during the last few years. That there is need of these open spaces for children in cities, where there is an ever-increasing population, no one can doubt. Exercise in the open air is good for all of us, it is especially beneficial to the child who is cooped up in a dense mass of houses much of the time, and whose days are otherwise spent in over-heated rooms, or dodging vehicles in crowded streets.

Nor is it health alone that the child obtains great benefit from these playgrounds, for they have a direct bearing upon its mind and character. Careful play supervision, at this period when the mind is plastic, naturally affects the child's tastes and habits, and gives it a better start for the battle of life. These playgrounds, in the congested districts of a noisy, dusty city, form small oases where children can catch a glimpse of nature and a breath of air, and where, under thoughtful supervision, they may be vastly strengthened in mind and body. Play is essential to the child. It is his natural right. Deprived of it, and he becomes prematurely old, a mere automaton, without the sparkle and zest which render him attractive and fit for development into successful manhood.

Not all of the good results of playgrounds necessarily belong to future

generations. There are many substantial present benefits which the city administration feels. The police reports, for instance, show a marked decrease in the number of juvenile arrests during the years since the playgrounds have been established, and this is especially true of those periods of the year when the playgrounds are open.

One of our coroners has gone on record with the published statement that "Rochester playgrounds, and the swimming-pools in the parks, have resulted in a much smaller number of accidental deaths of children during the past year than usual." His record for the summer of 1905 showed that only three children were drowned in the canals and other waters about the city, while the average in other years has been fifteen or twenty.

The great value of playgrounds has been established beyond reasonable question. Undoubtedly there are difficulties to overcome, corrections to be made, and administrative improvements to be brought about through a wider experience with the problems presented. I believe these will be accomplished, for a movement, fraught with so many possibilities for good, will not be retarded by these objections which time will overcome. A large number of our philanthropic citizens are deeply interested in the development of Rochester's playgrounds. Their enthusiasm has been deepened and rendered more effective by practical effort, and the city administration is glad to co-operate with them in this important field of municipal development.