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## There's a Thousand Million Dollars Invested in Our Public Schools

### When Will the Schoolhouses Be Fully Used?

Editorial, New York Evening Journal, January 20, 1911

In "The Survey" Clarence A. Perry supplies interesting information and makes important suggestions concerning the public schools and their uses. The greatest institution in the world is the public school.

The greatest enemy of superstition and ignorance, and the poverty and suffering born of superstition and ignorance, is the American public school.

One thousand millions of dollars is about the amount invested in the public schools of America. This does not include the many millions spent every year for salaries of teachers, for books and other school expenses.

The public schools are idle, unused, on an average about sixty-one hours out of every hundred hours. For, as a rule, the magnificent school buildings of the great cities and the picturesque and beautiful smaller schools of the country are used only during the short school hours.

The schools, as we have often pointed out in this newspaper, should everywhere be centres of social life. They should be used outside of school hours for the amusement of children, for meetings, discussions and instruction of one another by grown people in the evenings, on holidays and Sundays.

The people pay for these schools—not the rich people, who imagine they pay—because their property is taxed, but the little people, whose wages make property worth money and who pay the rents that make it possible to pay taxes on real property.

The thousand millions of dollars invested in public schools represents money contributed by the small people. And that great investment should be made as useful as possible to the mass of the population.

Public schools should be centres of amusement and of intellectual activity for the old and the young. They should be centres in which patriotism—intelligent patriotism—is developed.

Fortunately here and there a right beginning has been made. Sam Jones, the admirable Mayor of Toledo—the man against whom the Democrats and Republicans united and WHO BEAT BOTH OF THE PARTIES—was successful and loved by the people largely because he realized the value of the public schools, and made them centres for happy gatherings in the evening.

In Rochester admirable work has been done to make the public schools useful to the fullest extent.

Mr. Perry tells us:

"In Rochester, where every other schoolhouse has become a neighborhood social centre, an extensive use of classrooms is being made by men's civic clubs for non-partisan discussions of political questions.

"The schoolhouses are the places for political meetings," said a county committeeman in a Rochester social centre. "I do not mean that they should be opened to any one political party, but to all. Why should I be compelled to go to a barroom to address a political meeting? Why should I be compelled to go into smoke-filled rooms to talk on political issues when we have buildings like this, where those things can be taken up?"

"How easily the ordinary public school plant becomes the focusing point for the social activities of

the neighborhood is illustrated by the Rochester Public School No. 9. Besides being a day, evening and vacation school, and serving as a public clubhouse for men, women, boys and girls, the building is used as a moving picture theatre, a lecture hall, a gymnasium, a bathhouse, a dance hall, a library and a playground house. A free dental clinic is to be established in it, and it has already become a public health office. Its yard is used as a playground, an athletic field and a school garden. With a little more ground for a park, the whole plant would come close to a realization of the ideal social centre. Is there any other American institution that so naturally attracts to itself all the varied interests of the community?"

In Wisconsin, the intelligent, progressive and fearless State that has just sent La Follette to the Senate and Victor Berger to the House of Representatives, Edward J. Ward, who organized the Rochester social centres in the schools, has been engaged by the University of Wisconsin to assist the cities and towns in similar work of school organization.

In Lexington, Ky., and elsewhere, intelligent women are planning to make the schoolhouses at night, play centres for the children. The idea is to keep the children off the streets, to amuse them, to associate the schoolroom in their minds with happiness and unalloyed pleasure.

In days to come the perfected public schools will be as important at night as in the daytime. The playgrounds and public parks surrounding them will be centres of happiness. Children will be taught in the daytime, and men and women, with earnest discussion, study and lectures, will teach one another and be taught at night.

The great property of the people of this country is that investment of a thousand millions in schools. Hereafter that investment will be multiplied many times over, and thus will be multiplied the only real wealth of the people, which is KNOWLEDGE.

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THE COMMUNITY-USED SCHOOLHOUSE