

THE UNUSED RECREATIONAL RE- SOURCES OF THE AVERAGE COMMUNITY

BY

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The Unused Recreational Resources of the Average Community

By Clarence Arthur Perry

Russell Sage Foundation

When you read that Chicago put eleven million dollars into her park and playground system it is difficult to avoid the impression that providing recreation is an expensive business. This impression is not dissipated by hearing that a million dollars an acre have been paid for a playground site in New York City. The beautifully printed and gorgeously illustrated descriptions of steel and wrought-iron apparatus which come constantly to the desk of a director of athletics all reek with the odor of costliness. The average person can hardly pick up a catalogue of sporting goods without experiencing the sad reflection that such things are not for the poor man. Everywhere in modern life one comes upon the most striking facts, all tending to show that recreation is mainly dependent upon the extravagant expenditure of wealth.

The unfortunate effect of such evidences is that they sometimes blind communities to the ample means of enjoyment which lie before their eyes, and large numbers of individuals lead dull and monotonous lives, simply because they cannot equip themselves with a pouch of golf clubs or take out a membership in a suburban country club.

In view of these influences it has seemed to me that it might be profitable, as an approach to my subject, to examine several successful enterprises affording recreation, with the purpose of learning if possible just what their essential elements are. Does the provision of recreation depend necessarily, or even primarily, upon getting more ground, equipment, buildings, money—upon more things, or is there another and more important factor? Taking the grounds, structures, spaces, the materials which already exist in the average American community—what is

Unfortunate
impression that
recreation is
expensive

Is money the
most important
factor?

primarily needed to make them yield bodily enjoyments, more money, or something else?

Beating a standard instead of a mate

Most of you doubtless know about the Public Schools Athletic League of New York City. For the benefit of those who do not I may say that it is a group of professional and business men who voluntarily formed a corporation some eight years ago for the purpose of providing the school boys of New York City with athletic games and sports. Under their auspices are annually held a vast number of baseball and basket ball games, indoor and outdoor athletic meets, and several other kinds of sports. The most distinctive achievements of the organization, however, are the athletic badge competitions and a system of class athletics. In the former, every boy who can run sixty yards in eight and three-fifths seconds, chin a bar four times and do a standing broad jump of five feet nine inches is given a beautiful bronze button. In the other form of athletics, classes compete against classes of the same academic standing, from the fifth grade up, in the same events, running, chinning, and the broad jump. At least 80 per cent of the members of the class must compete and the mark of the class in each event is found by summing all of the individual marks and dividing by the number of competitors. The average thus obtained is compared with the averages made by all the other classes of the same grade in the borough and the trophy is awarded to the one which made the best record.

For the honor of the class

Both the badge test and the class athletics are extensive rather than intensive in their effects. They both give a wholesome stimulus to the average boy instead of an excessive stimulus to the already expert lad. The class athletics develop class spirit and school loyalty because they induce the more proficient boys to coach the weaklings.

Using existing facilities

The P. S. A. L. sports are carried on in a variety of ways and places, chinning by means of broomsticks across classroom doorways, jumping on mats in the basement or gymnasium, running in the street under an arrangement with the police, indoor meets in armories and outdoor meets in parks and fields.

At the present time the league has the use of four large athletic fields which were purchased for it by the city. The

really significant fact, however, is the abundance and cheapness of the athletic opportunities which were provided by the league before it came into possession of those four expensive athletic fields. During one of the earlier years an inspector and two assistants whose salaries totaled only \$4,200, arranged games and sports which involved over 100,000 boys and elicited the volunteer services after school and on Saturdays of 411 teachers.

Thus the league, simply through organizing and setting up games and sports, made available an unsuspected wealth of athletic facilities and opportunities, and that in a city where, more than any other in America, the spatial and material conditions are hostile to such activities.

Organization
did it

Neither money, equipment, nor material things of any kind were responsible, principally, for these magnificent results. They were due primarily to the connecting up, and gearing together, of two social mechanisms—the board of education on the one hand and on the other a new bit of machinery whereby the philanthropic impulses of a small group of wealthy men set in operation the wisdom of several experts in physical training.

An even better illustration of what can be accomplished by the same combination of forces is to be seen in the work of the Girls' Branch of the P. S. A. L. This organization has devised a system of athletics for schoolgirls which automatically provides a maximum of opportunity at a minimum of expense. Its chief features are folk dancing, basket ball, relay racing and similar team games. All competitions are between classes and never between schools.

At the beginning of the school year the Girls' Branch advertises a free course in folk dancing and athletics which is open to teachers in the public schools. One lesson a week is given them upon the sole condition that they in turn give the same amount of instruction after class hours to athletic clubs organized among their own girls. During a recent season, 1,100 teachers took advantage of this opportunity and the girls to whom they passed on their instruction numbered over 13,000.

"Good times"
for girls
automatically
provided

An English clergyman who had seen much of the London poor was astonished when he went through our New York

**Making the
poor to smile**

slums to see how happy the children were. He found them laughing, and running, and dancing to hurdygurdies when he expected to find them pale, pinched and listless. There is probably no work which has done more to put happiness into the lives of the New York schoolgirls than that of the Girls' Branch. The instruction is so popular among the teachers that many of them who cannot find the time to teach the girls' clubs ask to be enrolled and pay a fee in lieu of service.

**Not money
but thought**

The inspector of athletics and her six assistants who hold the teachers' classes are paid by the Board of Education though they work under the direction of the Girls' Branch. The dancing and games are held in the school basements. Practically no equipment is required. Thus through the use of existing space and materials, with the comparatively slight expense of six or seven salaries, recreational resources of enormous importance are being realized and made to contribute to the health and happiness of present and future generations. The prime factor in it all is not *money* but organization.

The Boy Scout movement, with which you are all familiar, is another example of a scheme for providing wholesome recreation which does not require new space, new buildings or any other expensive material. It makes use of the streets, the back yard, the vacant lot, the tent in the woods or the open countryside. All nature is the scene of the Scout's activities and he requires only a leader to be set in motion. Organization is again the lever and not money.

In the city of Cleveland we find an illustration of the same principle in a system of entertainments for adults. Every winter the Board of Education organizes a course of lectures and entertainments open to the public, which are held in school assembly rooms. Concerts, musicals, readings, and various kinds of entertainments are afforded by the D. A. R., the Fortnightly Musical Club, the Rubinstein Club, the Normal School Glee and the high school orchestras, as well as many instructive addresses by prominent clergymen, professors, bankers and teachers. During a recent winter one hundred of these programs were given to audiences aggregating over 30,000 persons and all they cost the city was

the expense of heating, lighting, printing and running stereopticons. How was it done? The chairman of the Board of Education Committee on Lectures and Social Center Development is a woman of marked executive ability. She discovered that there were many people in the city who loved to play and talk and who wanted auditors. She discovered also that by persistent work at her desk and telephone she could get the principals to provide appreciative listeners in their schoolhouses. Thus she connected up the two groups. In every community there are people of these two classes waiting for some tactful person to bring them together.

Connecting the supply with the demand

And so one might go on and give many other instances of successful enterprises in public recreation, all demonstrating that the prime factor is not money, equipment, grounds, buildings or any other expensive thing, but rather organization, the hitching up of existing forces, the articulation of loose but complementary groups, the gearing together of social machinery which is already in operation. Among the recreative resources of a community we must include not only the parks, playgrounds, schoolyards and gymnasiums but all of the various groups of people, social forces and local conditions which under the quickening touch of organization could be made to cooperate and produce enjoyable activities.

Viewed from this standpoint, the unused assets of the average community are stupendous. There is not a grammar school in the country whose boys are ignorant of the badge test and class athletics which would not be benefited by membership in a public schools athletic league. And yet of the 700 cities of over 8,000 population only about twenty have such leagues, while the number supporting girls' branches is even smaller. Of course many places have schoolboy athletics of the old competitive sort but, as has been pointed out, these do not do much for the average or weakly boy.

Unused assets stupendous

Lectures and entertainments of an occasional nature are afforded in the schoolhouses of over a hundred cities but there are less than a score in which extensive, popular, gratuitous courses of entertainments are annually offered to

the grown-up sections of the community. And yet every one of these places has some schoolhouses with auditoriums, some talented persons willing to donate their entertaining abilities, and many dull citizens needing amusement—all waiting for an organizer to bring them together.

Three and one-half cents per "good time"

In the evening recreation centers of New York boys and girls are given opportunities for checkers and dominoes, ring games, "gym" sports, basket ball games, folk dancing and amateur theatricals at an expense to the city of three and one-half cents per head per evening. Organization making use of idle basements and classrooms makes it possible. There is no other American city which supports as much evening recreation in its schoolhouses as New York and only a dozen or so, all told, in which a beginning has been made.

Making the recess period count

Some years ago the teachers in a Pensacola school noticed that the recess period seemed to make the pupils quarrelsome instead of rested and ready for work. They tried to get boys and girls to play games but struggled along for a couple of years without making much headway. Finally a Y. M. C. A. man came along who was a real play promoter and gave them his assistance. Following his suggestions the yard fence was torn down, the ground graded, jumping pits dug, volley ball courts established and a May-pole put up, while the teachers and older girls began to study folk dancing and new games. Individual events by grades, such as jumping, chinning, short runs and shot-putting were started among the boys, while team games and dances engaged the attention of the girls. Other interesting events, too numerous to detail here, were introduced into the recreation intervals of school life with the result that in a short space of time the whole atmosphere was cleared up and brightened. Narrow cliques ceased to gather in aimless knots about the yard, the girls became bright-eyed and the boys lost their rough edges.

In Buffalo the recess intervals in certain schools have also been filled with interesting games and sports through the help of the playground workers. There are, however, few other cities in the country where the recreative values of these short but important periods have been realized in the

highest degree. One of the most surprising changes in ethical opinion is that which is now overtaking the matter of public social dancing. For a long time some of the most serious guardians of morals have regarded this activity as inevitably productive of social evil. There has now arisen an equally serious group of social workers who advocate the provision of this enjoyment under wholesome conditions as an antidote to immorality. In accordance with this belief the Committee on Working Girls' Amusements in New York City are running model dance halls, while mixed dancing parties already form over 60 per cent of the social occasions held in the field house assembly halls of Chicago.

**Social dancing
an antidote for
social evil**

In Hoboken and Milwaukee huge popular dances are being held under the auspices of the municipality. In the latter city there is an immense auditorium, half owned by the municipality, where 4,500 people, old and young, have gathered and spent the evening in dancing and health-yielding merriment. Interspersed among the waltzes and two-steps were exhibitions of folk dancing by Greeks, Poles and other foreign-born persons in native costumes. Non-alcoholic refreshments were served at popular prices. A fee of fifteen cents for wardrobe privileges was sufficient to cover all expenses. Thus the promoters of these affairs simply by arranging a congregation of a vast number of persons made available the power to give enjoyment which is latent in the isolated individual but active when individuals are present in large groups.

It is not necessary to point out, at this time, the advantages of dancing as a physical exercise. I appreciate the fact also that however favorably an individual may personally regard this pastime, his denominational connections may make it inexpedient for him to take any steps officially to promote it. Since, however, the attitude of the church is not hostile in certain localities and a shifting seems imminent in many others, it may not be amiss to point out the unused recreational opportunities which abound in this field.

**The church
generally
favorable**

It is a cardinal requirement in all governmentally supported enterprises that their benefits shall be given to the public without discriminations in favor of any particular classes or individuals. But a ballroom which is open to the

public ceases at once to be for many people an attractive resort. That is one of the chief difficulties connected with tax-supported social dancing. There is need of a selective principle which shall secure a certain social homogeneity and at the same time not result in exclusion.

**Public dancing
for private
groups**

In Chicago this problem is solved by giving the use of the assembly halls in the field houses to societies or groups instead of to individuals. Anybody is welcome but anybody must belong to some social body before anybody can come. In the New York recreation centers the mixed dances are given by the girls of the senior clubs and their guests are the young men who have been recommended by the principals of the centers they attend.

The opportunity for extending this kind of recreation consists then in connecting up congenial groups of persons with a dancing floor, an orchestra and a body of patronesses. The kindergarten rooms and gymnasiums of elementary schools make excellent places for dancing, and the parent-teacher organizations which meet in them would greatly increase their popularity if now and then they would close their deliberations upon the best interests of the child with an exhibition of that childlike nature which bubbles over—even in grown-ups—in a rollicking round of Virginia reel.

**Extending the
opportunity for
wholesome
companionship**

Competent observers like Miss Jane Addams have pointed out that a part at least of the social evil arises from the deprivation of opportunities for wholesome companionship with members of the opposite sex which is experienced by so many young people in our large cities. I realize that both the Y. M. C. A. and the Y. W. C. A. are already doing much to prevent sexual immorality, but they will never reach the height of their opportunity in this field until they have combined to give their members opportunities for a joint, healthy social life. One of the best means to this end would be social dancing. Both organizations have suitable floors, musical facilities, groups of chaperons, in fact all of the social machinery necessary to run a well-ordered dancing party. The introduction of a series of such occasions would, I believe, greatly extend the radius of efficiency of both organizations. There are many young fellows and many young women who would see a new attractiveness in Asso-

ciation life if they knew that it was a door to acquaintance under proper conditions with members of the other sex.

Another kind of enjoyment, far from being exhausted, which depends almost entirely upon organization, is that of the walking club. A committee of the Chicago Playground Association arranges Saturday afternoon walking trips in the forests, fields, hills and valleys about the city. Each year it puts out a printed schedule which shows for each trip the time and place to take train, the destination, length of walk, amount of expense, hour of return, and the names of the leaders. The people who are invited to these walks are usually members of well-known groups, such as the local Geographic Society, Architectural Club, Woman's Outdoor Art League, Social Service Club and a dozen other organizations of similar standing.

In Boston there is a Field and Forest Club which in addition to its round table classes and open meetings arranges similar trips to nearby points. In England there is a Coöperative Holidays Association which has been in existence since 1887 and now has thirteen centers in Great Britain, and Switzerland and Germany. The Saturday afternoon rambles with which the enterprise began soon developed into annual excursions lasting several days, and the guest houses which were gradually called into existence serve as centers from which the excursions are made.

Rambles
require only
arranging

Every community, nearly, has all of the natural facilities that are needed for rambles and it only needs a tactful, representative organizer to set in motion the utilization of these superb recreational resources.

One of the most effective ways to bring about a completer realization of a community's assets lies in the tactful stimulation of the persons or bodies which have them in charge. Many park boards and officials still regard themselves as custodians of public property which is to be kept from injury at all costs—even at the cost, to the community, of a greatly restricted use. It is not a strange situation when one remembers of how recent an origin, in this country, the movement is which has set out to teach people how to enjoy life.

Property is
for use—not
preservation

One morning the park superintendent in Hartford, Conn.,

A well-used
haystack

found the boys sliding down the side of a twenty-foot haystack in an out-of-the-way portion of the park. It was wild grass which had been piled up there until it could be used as bedding for the horses belonging to the department. The boys had cut notches in one side of the stack, up which they clambered and then slid down the other side. They seemed to be having the time of their lives but they were not improving the trimness of the stack. It is a pretty fair wager that the average park superintendent would immediately have set the police on those boys and banished them from that part of the grounds. But the Hartford man had the play instinct. The stack was left standing throughout the year for the use of the kids and the stablemen got their bedding elsewhere.

In the parks of Berlin and other German cities the broad walks through the groves are lined with heaps of sand in which large numbers of children play all day long without the necessity of direction or the possibility of injury, while parents and governesses idle on the nearby benches. Sometimes piles of sand twenty feet high are deposited in open spaces among the trees and here the older boys model cities, forts, moated castles, islands and other geographical formations.

A play material
that is as
cheap as dirt

As a means of play sand is, if you will pardon the pun, as cheap as dirt. There are few communities so remote from sand banks or the seashore that an ample supply could not be had at a slight expense. Once it is deposited in a suitable location children gather around it like flies and it immediately and automatically begins to yield its vast stores of fun. In spite, however, of these facts there are very few parks in the country which have approached the capacity they might have for giving recreation in this way.

The unrealized resources for recreation still existing in our public schools and some of the ways of making them available have already been pointed out. In some cities the dock department also has bathing facilities which are not fully used but could be if the public demanded them with sufficient insistency.

Another resource which has only been touched is illustrated by the athletic fields and tennis courts which are pro-

vided by several large corporations in Rochester for the benefit of their employees. In one instance the expense of laying out the grounds, and providing the equipment has, to some extent, been borne by the employees. Those at Kodak Park have an association which governs all athletic activities, and a baseball league composed of six uniformed teams, as well as several tennis clubs, are maintained.

Employers and employees can cooperate in providing athletics

Illustrations of the same sort of coöperation between employer and employed can be found in other cities but they are not yet so general that the possibilities of extending recreative opportunities in this way are within sight of exhaustion.

Sometimes the organizing agency requires only to give a little effective publicity to secure at once that connection between resources and needs which results in utilization. As soon as knowledge of the Boy Scout scheme reached the ears of Park Commissioner Higgins of New York he immediately offered the organization the use of Pelham Bay Park with its 1756 acres of fields, woodland and streams which are so ideally adapted to camping, hiking and the other scouting activities.

When Dr. Henry S. Curtis took up playground work in Washington, D. C., he plotted off on a map all of the spaces then used for play in the city. Then he traveled around on his bicycle and located all of the vacant lots, park spaces and other areas which could be used for play purposes. Besides these he indicated on the map the density of population in the various sections of the city. When completed it gave a graphic statement of the city's outdoor needs and its resources, used and unused. Doctor Curtis then began a campaign of publicity. The map was published in pamphlets, newspapers and magazines. The total cost of the study was less than \$500, but in a short period after its publication there were donated for use as playgrounds vacant lots and public sites amounting in value to \$100,000.

Connecting resources with needs through publicity

If I have indicated only a few of the unused recreational resources which exist in our communities it is because it has seemed to me that there was a peculiar pertinency and an even greater value in emphasizing on this occasion the importance of organization as the way to make all of our

Social integration the ultimate goal

assets available. Not only because my hearers, both on account of their personal qualifications and the facilities at their command, are eminently well adapted to do the work of organization, but because in the tasks of integration, harmonizing, articulation, connecting up, and cementing together, they are most genuinely and fundamentally helping to produce that ideal state of society for the upbuilding of which all the forces of righteousness are at present working.

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