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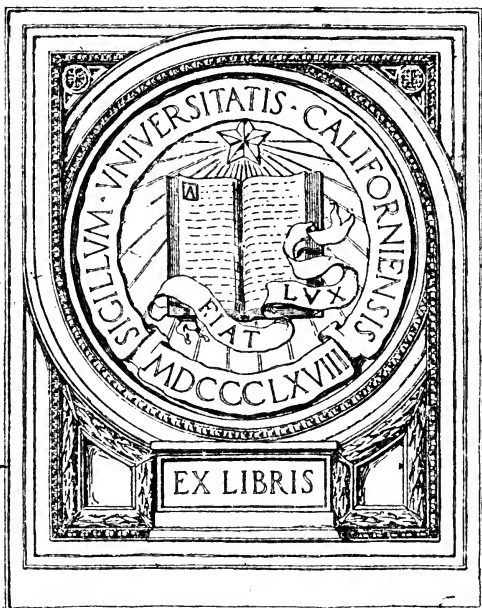
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THE SCHOOL AS A FACTOR IN NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

BY
CLARENCE ARTHUR PERRY



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THE SCHOOL AS A FACTOR IN NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Clarence Arthur Perry, Russell Sage Foundation, New York City.

There are two ways of regarding the school as a social center. According to one it is the machinery which society has contrived for preparing its immature members for the responsibilities of citizenship and it operates through little working plants which are centrally located in the communities they serve. Points from which certain intellectual and other commodities are distributed—such are schools in the older and broader sense.

In this sense the school's function is rapidly broadening. School plants are now in various places centers of both mental training and bodily training, and for adults as well as children. But also they are becoming the places where neighbors vote, discuss common affairs, view beautiful pictures, hear music, dance and play. As an institution through which society discharges certain functions it is gradually changing its character and while the dynamic forces are social needs the reason why the school has been selected as the place for meeting them is to be found in its central relation to those portions of the population which are known as neighborhoods.

In the second and narrower sense the name "social center" is given to certain schools where, after the day sessions are over, staffs of paid or volunteer workers come in to carry on various civic, social and recreational activities. That is, it is the term applied to that part of the school's organization which is discharging some of the newer functions being performed by the school in the first-mentioned and larger sense. Social center in the second sense is included in social center in the first sense.

In both of these meanings school centers affect neighborhood development, but in the limited time at our disposal only the more salient points under each can be touched upon, and under the first and broader signification my remarks will merely enumerate some of the more striking events that are indicative of the rapidity with which school extension is actually taking place.

Elevating Political Life

During the winter before last school buildings in 31 cities to the number of over 500, were used for voting purposes. Boston has for several years now used a large number of schoolhouse basements for this purpose, and has developed special equipment which is stored



away when not in use. In Milwaukee the basements are also used. There is no question but that the growing extension of the suffrage to women is furthering the use of school buildings for political purposes. This was notably exemplified in Chicago during the recent municipal election. One hundred and forty-two political meetings were held in school buildings and the Board of Education reports that in no case was it necessary to require the forfeiture of the \$25 deposit because of damage or infraction of the rules of the board. No smoking was permitted, and no indications of disorder were apparent after the audiences had left the premises. Seventy-five of the Chicago schools were also used as polling places and in only six instances were there any complaints about smoking or other violations of the rules prescribed by the school officials. Chicago is certainly to be congratulated upon the excellent example it has set in the devotion of its school buildings to political purposes. Throughout the country there is a growing tendency to resort to school buildings for deliberation upon matters of civic and political import. At the present time discussions of the proposed new charter for Buffalo are being held in public school buildings of that city. During the past winter Springfield, Illinois, has considered various referendum propositions in its school buildings with decided success. In preparation for the constitutional convention in Ohio discussions of proposed amendments were held in many schoolhouses throughout the state. And it is notable also that wherever the initiative and referendum prevail there you will find a tendency to resort to the natural meeting place for the neighborhood when it wants to talk things over—the public school.

New Community Services

Another striking feature of the movement is the growing tendency to adapt the school plant physically for a more general community use. The new Washington Irving High School in New York City has a lobby specially constructed to serve as an art gallery and it is now being so used. Its stage is completely equipped for presentations of *bona fide* drama. Its offices include an employment bureau and a room for the local neighborhood association, also used as a museum. Here were exhibited the manuscripts of Washington Irving, whose residence still stands across the street from the school. The evening school is so organized here that the night students can come directly from their places of work, have supper in the lunch rooms, recreation in the gymnasiums and take up their studies with refreshed minds and bodies.

Tomorrow Mrs. Breckinridge will tell you about the new Lincoln School in Lexington, another school plant which has been specially designed to meet neighborhood needs of more than academic character. Every now and then in the educational journals one sees accounts of school buildings in the smaller communities similar to the Cordaville School at Southboro, Massachusetts, where a public library and town meeting place are provided in addition to the usual equipment. The

schools at Gary, Indiana, with their extensive playgrounds and luxurious gymnasiums and swimming pools are well-known and are the precursors of a type which is increasing in popularity.

In Natchez, Mississippi, a former wealthy citizen has recently built a model school as a memorial to his family which is remarkably well equipped as a neighborhood center. The most striking feature is the library, with its reading room, reference room, stacks and delivery desk. The success which Grand Rapids is having in using its public schools as branch libraries justifies this sort of addition to the public school building. A large swimming pool and fully equipped gymnasium are also to be found in the Carpenter School at Natchez. The assembly room, which is composed of two class rooms separated by a sliding partition, is unfortunately located on the second floor. While in this respect the building does not come up to the standard which holds now in many cities for ward school buildings, the other features are indeed notable.

Class-rooms Becoming Club-rooms

Another marked development that is adding to the utility of class-rooms is found in the increasing vogue of movable chairs and desks. The Washington Irving High School already mentioned is equipped throughout—with the exception of several special rooms—with flat-topped tables and ordinary oak chairs. The Moulthrop movable chair is now to be found in over 200 communities, in several places entire schools having been equipped with them. New York City has just given a contract for Moulthrop chairs for a new Brooklyn school, and it has been adopted for all of the city's open-air schools. In Chicago and other cities where it is being tried, it is reported successful from both the academic and social standpoints.

A new movable chair has been developed by Mr. Van Evrie Kilpatrick, a long-time principal of one of New York's public schools, which seems destined to a wide usefulness. New York City has already contracted to equip one entire school with this new desk and chair. It is of a two-unit type, and has the advantage that the desks can be put in a line around the walls and the chairs brought out into the room for meetings and club purposes.

Such briefly are some of the more salient aspects of the broadening function of the school. The list is especially incomplete in that it does not include the very striking development of recreational and social activities, a fault which will be repaired, however, in the second half of the paper to which we have now come.

— Taking up now the social center in the narrower and more popular sense, as an institution having a specially trained staff operating on the school premises after the day classes have departed: How do the various social centers differ in the service they perform for their neighborhoods and the relation which they bear to them? To illustrate the principal varieties of this work from the standpoint of neighborhood

development I have selected several types of social center administration. The inclusion or the omission of any city is not to be regarded as a commentary upon the character of its work. The cities selected are those with whose work I happened to be best acquainted and in discriminating between them and in my characterizations of them I do not wish to be regarded as either criticizing or praising the persons who are directing the various systems. Often the type of work they are conducting is determined by circumstances over which they have no control.

Furnishing a Wholesome Evening Environment

Perhaps the most prevalent type of social center work is illustrated by that which is carried on in the Chicago schools. Here we find in some two dozen public schools groups of principals and teachers returning to the schools twice a week for the purpose of affording young people from fifteen to twenty-five the privileges of a reading room, parlor games, gymnasium, club rooms, choruses, amateur orchestras, dramatics, debating clubs, dancing, etc. While the principals of the various centers are given entire freedom in getting up their programs, the work is nevertheless much the same in all the schools. The principals hold conferences three or four times a year and through the comparison of notes and the similarity of the accommodations in the various schools a uniformity of administration naturally arises. Amateur theatricals are stimulated by making it possible for a good play to be presented in several schools, and in the Smyth center opportunities for social dancing are provided on an extra evening for the definite purpose of off-setting the influence of nearby dance-halls. The Chicago Women's Aid is co-operating with the Board of Education in the maintenance of this center and through their help activities have been provided for adults as well as young people.

What these centers mean to the twenty-four neighborhoods in which they exist is embraced largely, however, in the effect they are having upon the standards of demeanor and personal conduct of the young people of the various neighborhoods in which they exist. These boys and girls are coming in contact with forms of etiquette and social life which are probably superior to those which obtain in many of their homes. While most of the principals do not live in the neighborhood of their centers, yet through their day contact with the children they are intimately acquainted with the social and living conditions in their respective districts. So far not much effort has been made to reach the adults through the Chicago centers, but a start is now being made through the encouragement of parent-teacher associations.

In Detroit one finds a similar kind of development, that is, the aim is to provide a wholesome, enjoyable environment for boys and girls of the adolescent period. Much emphasis is laid upon the activities promoting physical education; civic motives are also quite prominent.

An effort is made to give the girls from immigrant homes lessons in cooking and dressmaking, while the boys are afforded opportunities for manual training; in that way the assimilation of the more recent immigrants is promoted. But the adults of the various neighborhoods are not very generally reached.

The Boston evening centers are all housed in high school buildings, so that their patrons come from sections instead of neighborhoods. As might be expected, the activities have a decided cultural emphasis. Orchestras, brass bands, banjo clubs, and choruses, as well as dramatic and art embroidery clubs, are very common. The club idea is prominent and an effort is made to inculcate the principles of self-government in all the groups. Adult welfare clubs which meet regularly to discuss current civic questions are connected with several of the centers, but they have practically no part in the management of the work. The Boston centers have large attendances and are successfully exercising a valuable educational and recreational influence upon the lives of their clientele. There is a conscious motive to promote self-government, but it has not yet changed the plan of work to the point of giving the young people real administrative responsibilities as a means of attaining that end.

Stimulating Civic Spirit

The Rochester social centers, as organized by Mr. Ward, while including a very thorough recreation program, revealed nevertheless a more conscious effort to affect neighborhood development than had hitherto been shown in school extension work. The aim there from the outset was to make the schoolhouse the center for all classes of people—adults as well as young people. So that while there were game rooms and gymnastic classes, the most significant features were to be found in the civic clubs which were organized among the men, the women, and the young people. These clubs came from the immediate neighborhoods, and they discussed local questions, the majority of them having a municipal import rather than a strictly neighborhood one. The women's clubs entertained the men's clubs, and both took turns in conducting the general Saturday night occasions. There was a league of the men's civic clubs which accomplished much in promoting playgrounds, securing better street car service, establishing public comfort stations, and similar municipal improvements. While a very strong civic interest was thus developed, these clubs did not participate largely and responsibly in the management of their own activities, and therein may be found one of the reasons why, when the board of education cut off the funds for their administration and direction, they practically all went out of existence.

In Louisville the Board of Education gives only heat, light and janitor service. All the expense of direction and supervision is borne by the voluntary organizations which brought the centers into existence

and are now conducting them. The work began three years ago and is growing larger each year, five centers now being maintained. To establish a center a neighborhood has to develop a petition with one hundred signatures, raise a certain amount of money, and promise the board to support the center long enough to make a thorough trial. Nearly one hundred volunteer workers coming from the kindergarten association and the girls' and women's clubs are performing the work. Each center has a council of its own made up of members from its own organizations, and the local council sends two representatives to the central social center council, which is composed of these representatives and the school officials immediately concerned. In that way a large number of people have become vitally connected either in the direction or maintenance of these centers, and over 90 per cent. of the attendance at each center comes from within six blocks. While Louisville has not enjoyed the services of a salaried director, it has been most fortunate in having in Miss Pauline F. Witherspoon a volunteer who is an expert in social center organization.

The evening recreation centers of New York City for over a decade have been doing in the main precisely what the social centers of Chicago and Detroit have been doing—that is, inculcating better standards of behavior and giving young people a wholesome place in which to spend their evenings. They afford a quiet game and reading room, gymnasiums or indoor play rooms, basket ball, folk dancing, and kindred indoor games. Clubs of all sorts are also found, as well as quiet study rooms for day-school children. Two-thirds of the centers are exclusively for boys and one-third of them for girls. Of late years the girls of the senior clubs have been allowed to have recommended boys from neighboring centers in at their mixed dances. The recreation center staffs have been most successful in bringing in the young people and but few adult organizations have been formed. The various club entertainments help to develop an initiative on the part of their members, but only occasionally do these doings have reference to their immediate neighborhoods. The members of the staff are trained mainly in recreational activities and club work, and on account of the vacation schools and school playgrounds during the summer months they have all-year-round duties in connection with the schools. The supervision, now in the energetic hands of Dr. Edward W. Stitt, is highly centralized so that naturally a considerable uniformity of method prevails.

Developing Neighborhood Responsibility

With a view to learning to what extent these centers could be made larger factors in neighborhood development a couple of rather significant experiments have been recently carried on by volunteer committees in several of the New York school buildings. Upon the initiative of the People's Institute a committee composed of specially interested persons was formed to carry on a social center experiment at Public School 63. Three wealthy citizens provided a budget of \$3,000. The committee

chose Mr. Clinton S. Childs, a trained social worker, to become the organizing secretary. Permission was secured from the Board of Education to carry on work in connection with the recreation center staff at the school chosen. Mr. Childs became a resident of the community and the results of his work are now—a year later—plainly visible. In an early stage of his efforts a mass meeting of the residents was called and a local association formed made up of volunteers and those whose names were presented by the people. Gradually more and more duties were placed upon the local association, so that it now assigns the use of the auditorium and other rooms for the special occasions of the clubs which meet in the center and supervises the social dances and motion picture shows as well as other doings of a general nature. From these activities and the other entertainments and the dues of the members the association raises money for the support of the work. During the past year it raised about \$700. Each club in the center has a representative in the association. This body has exercised an important influence in molding the policy of the work. With the inauguration of the social center work boys were admitted to the center, which had hitherto been limited to girls. Among the more important developments of the experiment may be mentioned very successful social dances in the courtyard and inside playroom; a people's forum wherein a local cloakmakers' union held fourteen largely attended discussions on the topic "Agreements Between Employers and Employees' Associations;" two orchestras encouraged or developed among the musicians of the district; several partisan political meetings; a New Year's Eve party; and motion picture entertainments. The center is now planning a large pageant embracing 2,500 people, in which the various races living in the community will present episodes out of their own respective histories.

In a school located in what is known as the Greenwich Village district—one of the few old New York neighborhoods which still retain their identity, about which streams of ever-changing foreign population have swirled but failed to tear it from its foundation, a district which has a notably large proportion of native born to foreign born—the second experiment which I wish to describe was carried on. A committee of women connected with a prominent Fifth Avenue church near this district raised the funds for employing an expert social center director, Mr. Boyd Fisher. He with one or two assistants developed a social center undertaking which for the past nine months or more has been carried on by a local body known as the Greenwich Commission. This organization is composed of twenty-five members who are elected by all those adults of the district who have registered at the center fourteen days prior to the election. This body employs three or four assistants and raises a budget through its entertainments, club dues and private contributions of about \$100 a month. Nineteen different clubs or groups have been formed. The largest of these is known as the Commonwealth, and it refers simply to the audiences of citizens

who come out on Thursday evenings to listen to the addresses from aldermen, state senators, city officials, and other speakers who are asked to come in and discuss the leading questions of the day. Each club member pays dues of five cents a week, which are turned into the treasury of the Commission. When entertainments are given 35 per cent. of the net proceeds are also given to the Commission. The privileges afforded young people include boxing instruction, games room, basket ball and indoor athletic sports. The Board of Education furnishes in the person of a recreation center principal expert direction of its recreational activities. The salary of this worker and that of the custodian are also provided by the Board of Education. In this undertaking at Public School 41 we have an excellent example of a self-governing neighborhood social center.

Neighborhood Development Dependent Upon Organization

To summarize: It would seem that there are two fairly distinct types of social center development: The first, as represented in Chicago and Detroit and the recreation centers of New York City, is characterized by the fact that there is no special effort to organize the neighborhood into a co-operative responsible element in the government of the center. In selecting activities, those are provided which are considered to be good for the people upon whom they are bestowed. Administration is centered in a central bureau, and under the direction of highly trained experts. The attitude of the officials is that of conducting improving and cultural activities for an unprivileged class of people.

The second type of development is that which is illustrated in varying degrees by the work at Rochester, Louisville and in the New York social centers at Public School 63 and Public School 41. Here there is on the part of the promoters a conscious purpose to develop neighborhood organization. In differing degrees the neighborhoods are called upon to support and participate in the management of their centers. In determining the character of the activities the needs of the people are studied with an attitude of detachment. The high-priced directing ability and wealth of initiative tends to be found at the school rather than in the central office. This more democratic type of social center calls for higher ability in the local director, it requires fewer paid assistants and shows a marked tendency to maintain such self-supporting activities as social dancing and motion picture entertainments.

There is a feeling abroad, sometimes expressed but more generally latent, that social centers tend to withdraw young people from parental influence. When considering what type of social center administration is to be preferred, should not this fact be borne in mind? Certainly that is not a worthy ideal which contemplates merely giving out culture or wholesome recreational opportunities or a finer type of social life without endeavoring at the same time to develop the ability of the peo-

ple to provide the same things for themselves. Are we performing our full duty if we do not develop in the parents' minds the same ideals for their young people which we ourselves hold? If we do not give them the experience of sharing in the work and the direction of the social center will they be able to give as taxpayers an intelligent financial support to it? If we do not enlist the co-operation of neighborhoods in the management of their own centers will not the opportunities they provide tend to be used more and more exclusively by the less privileged classes and the democratic scope of the institution be thus seriously impaired?

If in the self-governing centers the programs do not run off so smoothly nor the activities appear so well regulated as they do in the other centers we may well console ourselves with the thought that "self government is better than good government."

Wider Use of the School Plant

By CLARENCE ARTHUR PERRY

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