

## JOSEPH LEE(1862-1937)

Inventor and "Father of the American playground movement," who introduced the first contemporary neighborhood playground in the U.S. Born to a wealthy Boston family, Lee believed that with fortune comes responsibility. To counter social problems of the time, he promoted recreation activities as nurturing experiences. A Boston charity, copying a German practice, established sand-pile play areas among the Boston tenements. In the early 1890 s, Lee extended this idea by establishing his own playground for research and demonstration purposes. In speeches and articles Lee supported the spread of the playground movement across the U.S.

"Play for adults is recreation-the renewal of life; for children it is growth-the gaining of life".

Leaders in social work, education and municipal reform were experimenting with the uses of recreation activities to transform the raw material of youth into vigorous adults who embraced high moral and democratic values and who were eager and able to uplift their fellow citizens as well as themselves. These interests were drawn together and for several years worked synergistically to propel play and recreation from its disdained status as a frivolous pastime to a tool for the social transformation of America. This period of joint activity to build the "play and recreation movement" could largely be attributed to the work of Joseph Lee. Lee was born to a wealthy Boston family and took to heart the admonishment of noblesse oblige, that with fortune comes responsibility. After completing law school at Harvard he set upon a lifetime of philanthropy. Lee viewed the problems of the time as the results of limited access to an environment in which people could develop into happy, responsible citizens. He saw overpopulation as one of the primary forces that limited people s access to the resources of this environment and thus he directed a portion of his efforts to the support of birth control, sterilization and restricted immigration. He devoted the rest of his attention to expanding people s access to the experiences that would enable them to develop their potentials as human beings. He saw recreation activities as major structures for delivering these nurturing, educational and character-building experiences (Knapp & Hartsoe, 1979).

Borrowing from a practice initiated in the crowded housing areas in Berlin, Germany, a Boston charity established a series of sand-pile play areas among the Boston tenements. In the early 1890 s, Joseph Lee became very interested in this development, so much so, that he established his own playground for research and demonstration purposes. Lee hired and trained leaders to supervise his playground and for several years he studiously observed and recorded the outcomes of this project. Lee s observations along with his study of the sociological, educational and philosophical ideas of the period led him to acknowledge

Aristotle s conclusion that play was indeed the "architect of man" (Rainwater, 1922). Lee s speeches and articles in support of the playground movement spread his thesis across the continent. When the American Civic Association sponsored a "model street" for the 1904 World s Fair in St. Louis, Lee designed and financed the street s model playground. Lee

became the director of the Association's Department of Public Recreation and drew together an advisory committee of leaders in recreation from the fields of social work and education (Knapp & Hartsoe, 1979).

Luther Gulick, an educator on that team, earned an MD degree at New York University before taking a faculty position at the YMCA college at Springfield, Massachusetts. There he transformed the physical education program from one of calisthenics to one based on games and sports. His creed on the interdependence of a healthy body, mind and spirit formed the familiar triangular logo of the YMCA. Gulick also taught that recreation activities had great formative power but he stressed that this power could have either positive or negative effects on the development of character. Skilled leadership was needed, he insisted, to insure that participants were enriched by the experience rather than degraded by it. (Knapp & Hartsoe, 1979).

Gulick proposed that a national playground association be formed to advance and unite the various recreation efforts emerging across the country. Several other leaders added their organizational skills to Gulick's vision and energy and in April of 1906 the founding meeting of the Playground Association of America (PAA) was held in Washington, DC. The eighteen educators, social workers and settlement workers present, eight of whom were women, were feted to a reception at the White House by Theodore Roosevelt and then set about the business of establishing this new association. Luther Gulick was elected president and Jane Addams and Joseph Lee, both absent, were elected vice-presidents. Gulick led the Association until 1910 and then passed the presidency to Lee who continued in that capacity for the next 30 years (Knapp & Hartsoe, 1979).

In April 1907 the group published its first issue of *Playgrounds* (later to become *Recreation*) and in June, held its second annual meeting in Chicago. The 200 delegates from 30 cities heard presentations on the relation of play to democracy, health, citizenship and social morality. The PAA established about a dozen national study and advisory committees, one of which focused on "play in institutions" (Knapp & Hartsoe, 1979). These social reformers not only further developed the ideas of Nightingale on the potentials of recreation experiences but added a new dimension that emphasized the need for trained recreation specialists to ensure that those potentials were achieved.

*Works Cited:*

*The Conceptual Development of Recreational Therapy*, Ann James, PhD, CTRS from *Perspectives in Recreational Therapy: Issues of a Dynamic Profession*; Frank Brasile, Thomas K. Skalko, Joan Burlingame *Idyll Arbor's Journals of Practice: Recreational Therapy Journal (IAJP/RTJ)*