

THE EARLY YEARS

MILWAUKEE RECREATION, formerly known as Milwaukee Public Schools - Division of Community Recreation, had its beginning in the Fall of 1907 when the state legislature passed a bill permitting the use of school buildings for civic and social purposes. On October 10, 1907, the Committee on Buildings presented the following resolution which was unanimously adopted by the Board of School Directors:

"Resolved, that permission for the use of the buildings and grounds of the Sixth Street School No. 1 (now Golda Meir School) for public meetings of a social and educational nature, in accordance with authority given under Chapter 244, Laws of Wisconsin for 1907 be and the same is hereby granted."

In 1908, upon the recommendation of the Finance Committee, the Board of School Directors granted the sum of \$2,500 to increase the number of activities in the "evening school" to include chorus, band, games, weaving, knitting, a reading room and gymnastics. Later, two more schools were opened, but lack of funds limited the program.

In 1911, a group of Milwaukee citizens asked the question, "What are Milwaukeeans doing with their leisure time?" Members of the Board of School Directors and the Common Council were particularly interested. To find the answer, Rowland Haynes of the National Recreation Association was called in to make a survey of Milwaukee's recreation facilities and recreation life. Mr. Hayne's report, submitted to the Board of School Directors in November of 1911, revealed that Milwaukee was almost entirely dependent upon commercial recreation. As a result, a bill was sponsored, which the State Legislature enacted into law (Chapter 509, Wisconsin Laws of 1911), giving cities of the first, second and third class the right to levy a special tax for the conduct of a public recreation program.

Upon enactment of the Law, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors immediately planned to conduct a referendum in April, 1912 to authorize the collection of a special tax for public recreation as authorized by the Law. The Board also appropriated funds to conduct two demonstration centers from January to May as an experiment and to show the citizens what such a program would mean to them. Mr. H. O. Berg, Mr. R. H. Witt, Mr. L. H. Kottnauer, Mrs. Julia Welch and Miss Dorothy C. Enderis were temporarily released from their regular teaching duties to conduct the activities in these demonstration centers. The referendum, which asked for a .2 of a mill tax levy to be used for recreation purposes, was passed and the Extension Department of the Milwaukee Public Schools was created.

The Milwaukee community education effort is noted as being one of the first of its kind in the United States. In 1935, the founders of the Community Education Program in Flint, Michigan, C. S. Mott and Frank Manley, visited the Milwaukee schools for ideas to incorporate into the Flint model. The Milwaukee Model, making multiple use of public school facilities for community services, has given the Recreation Division the distinction of being recognized nationally as the "City of the Lighted School House."

Individual and community involvement is a major ingredient in the success of recreation program services in Milwaukee. Throughout the years, the Division has worked cooperatively with existing neighborhood community groups, schools, governmental units, agencies and businesses to meet community needs. The results of these collaborative efforts are programs and services that would be impossible to provide without the sharing of resources.