On August 26, 1831, educators attending a meeting of the American Institute of Instruction confirmed the need for physical exercise in schools, but wanted to determine what type of exercise program would be invigorating, utilitarian, interesting, and provide moral development. Advocates of manual labor programs stressed that physical labor provided serviceable and healthy exercise and aided in forming habits of industry. Few school labor programs in New England remained in existence for more than two seasons because they were financially unprofitable and drudgery for students. During the early 19th century children's recess activities included games and sports. Though rough-and-tumble activities near buildings were prohibited, school windows were broken and passing townspeople disrupted. Educators were seeking methods of controlling recess games, plus increasing moral development experiences. If games and sports could provide moral development opportunities, they would be considered of educational merit. The educational merits of sports have been debated throughout American history. This early athletic debate focused interest on games and sports as possible physical education activities. (Author/JD)
THE 1831 ATHLETIC CONTROVERSY
NEW ENGLAND EDUCATORS' DILEMMA

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On Friday, August 26, 1831 educators attending the American Institute of Instruction in Boston debated and discussed the following question.

Ought, Athletic Games, combining exercise with amusement, to be united with Manual Labor in the education of youth, as a means of forming and invigorating the body?  

Though no record has been located of the actual discussion, the Proceedings of the Institute indicate the topic was of prime concern to the educators. This athletic and manual labor question was discussed "with much animation" during both the afternoon and evening sessions.  

The purposes of this paper are to examine background leading up to this debate, interest and concerns about the merits of manual labor and of athletics, and probable issues involved in the Institute discussion. This will be done by examining what was advocated by education leaders and what was reported in selected New England catalogues and periodicals about manual labor programs and athletic programs. In the context of this paper the following definitions are used.

Manual labor - supervised physical labor programs consisting of farming and gardening, or tasks performed in work shops such as carpentry, leather tanning, metal smithing, and shoe or hat manufacturing.
Athletics - games and sports pursued by students primarily during recess or non-school hours. The term as used by early 19th century educators included most of the activities we would categorize today under structured play, games, and sports, such as running events, boxing, swimming, battledore, fencing, and ball games.

Academies - private secondary schools under the control of Trustees, and primarily financed by tuition and private donations. Many of the approximately 170 New England academies established by 1830 were private boarding schools located on multiple acreage, whereas public elementary schools seldom had any substantial surrounding land.

MANUAL LABOR

During the early 19th century ideas and practices concerning education and physical exercise were influenced by population, economic, political, and social changes that were rapidly occurring in the nation. This period in America's history was one of change, development, ferment, and social and humanitarian reforms including increased concern for the health of school children and introducing various physical exercise programs in some schools and academies.

Though America was primarily an agrarian nation, towns and cities were growing in size and importance as manufacturing, shipping, and cultural centers. New England
towns and cities began to swell with French, Scotch, and Irish immigrants who brought with them a fondness for games and sports, even on Sundays. As resistance against commercial sports and amusements abated and educators began seeking health reforms in schools some resistance toward sport and recreation in schools began to decline by 1831.

Underlying the entire humanitarian movement during the first third of the 19th century was a belief that if America was to progress as a nation its people would need to be educated in social efficiency, civic virtue, and moral character. During the Jefferson and Jackson administrations the common man (farmer and small entrepreneur) assumed increased political influence. In many states men who were not property holders gained the right to vote. Battle lines were being drawn between advocates of an agrarian nation and an industrial economy.

In order to educate the common man so that he could more wisely participate in the governing process, educators looked for a way to provide him with a practical education. In the burgeoning academies, established to provide practical education, one type of education proposed consisted of combining academic pursuits with agriculture and mechanical training.

Educators, who had traveled and studied in Europe, were impressed by Phillip von Fellenberg's school at Hofwyl, Switzerland, where vocational training was coordinated with...
academic study. Fellenberg promoted development of the physical capacities of his students through physical labor in the fields and workshops. Many American educators believed that Fellenberg's system would provide students with an opportunity to have physical exercise that was both serviceable and healthy. Having been reared under John Wesley's maxim "Do everything at the time ... never be unemployed ... never be triflingly employed," educators disapproved of idleness, or leisure time squandered in useless pursuits. Some believed that young men playing games or performing gymnastics were not forming useful adult habits, but young men who spent their free time in agricultural or mechanical labor were gaining physical health as well as forming habits of industry and useful employment.

Benjamin Rush, in a widely circulated lecture on physical exercise, stated in 1772:

Man was formed to be active. The vigor of his mind, and the health of his body can be fully preserved by no other means, than by labour of some sort.... [Agriculture] has always been looked upon among the first employments of mankind.... It employs the body in a manner the most conducive to its health.... It is most friendly to the practice of virtue.

Rush recommended that children exercise daily by performing some useful and serviceable recreation such as mechanical and agricultural activities. He believed that amusements with no connection to future employment begot vulgar manners.
Wilbur Fisk, founder of Wesleyan Academy and University, wrote in 1831 that the usual amusements pursued by young men "degrade and dissipate the mind." He asserted that the "best kind of gymnastics are the exercises of the field and shop in some sort of useful labor." Fisk stressed that manual labor would contribute to health, relax the mind, "habituate the body and familiarize the mind to bodily exercise," and would "sober down the wild imagination of the young, to the important concerns of life." A New England physician concurred with Fisk, observing that student health failure was caused by insufficient sleep. He suggested substituting labor for gymnastics in schools because it would physically tire the body and induce young men to retire earlier.

In 1829 E. Cornelius, in an article in The Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society, stressed man's need for exercise was a fundamental law of nature. He believed gymnastics were harmful because they were excessively strenuous and exhausted the participants causing "premature decay." For exercise to be beneficial he suggested that it should be gentle and extended over a period of three to four hours each day, and if it was also monetarily profitable it achieved two good ends.

Other proponents of manual labor also stressed its physical and financial benefits, including Theodore Weld, the famed New England abolitionist. Weld did a study of
manual labor in New England academies, then listed its merits as a school physical exercise program.

1. Manual labor furnishes exercise natural to man and adapted to interest the mind.
2. Its moral effect would be peculiarly happy.
3. It would furnish the student with important practical acquisitions and promote habits of industry.
4. It would promote independence of character and originality.
5. It is adapted to render permanent all the manlier features of character.
6. It would afford facilities to the student in acquiring a knowledge of human nature and greatly diminish the expense of education\(^\text{15}\).

Not all labor advocates agreed on its monetary benifits. Beriah Green asserted that if labor was done to defray educational expenses it would lose its enjoyment aspect and become an odious task. Rather than have indigent students labor to earn room and tuition Green urged schools to search for more liberal endorsements and scholarship grants\(^\text{16}\).

Proponents of labor programs in schools stressed the healthful aspect of prolonged daily physical activity. They believed manual labor was superior to gymnastics and athletics because it was utilitarian, developed life long habits of industry, and helped scholars appreciate the labors of
working men. Educators had seen gymnastics spring into prominence, only to fade from sight at many schools after a few years. They were searching for an activity that would provide physical exercise during a student's school days and later during adult life. The utilitarian concept of manual labor made it an acceptable activity to pursue, and the necessity of daily labor for three to four hours provided a regular systematic exercise program not proposed by advocates of other types of physical exercise.

Between 1820 and 1831 over twenty New England schools listed manual labor in their catalogues. These schools included Gardiner Lyceum, Wesleyan Seminary, and Theological Seminary in Maine, Phillips Academy, Andover Teachers Seminary, and Wesleyan Academy in Massachusetts, and Fellenberg School and Agricultural Seminary in Connecticut. Because of the dearth of school catalogues and records before 1831 it is impossible to hypothesize how widespread this movement became. From records that have been preserved it can be ascertained that few labor programs lasted more than one or two seasons.

The plight of the labor program at Wesleyan Academy in Wilbraham, Massachusetts is an example of similar program problems throughout New England. At the opening of Wesleyan, in 1826, Wilbur Fisk stated, "to secure habits of bodily activity, let every scholar, while obtaining an education, spend part of his time in agriculture or in some
mechanical business."21 A large field adjacent to the boarding house was prepared for gardening. Students selected and prepared their own plots. The seeds were sown and soon blades appeared increasing enthusiasm among the students. Interest in the project remained high during the first hoeing, but abated by the time the second hoeing was begun. Long before harvest time the weeds had crowded out much of the crop. After touring the fields Pisk wisely ended the experiment and turned his energies toward preparing good scholars rather than indifferent farmers.22

Theories concerning manual labor did not coincide with the actual outcomes of the programs in most New England academies. The drudgery of labor and poor financial returns for work were given as reasons causing the demise of this type of exercise program during the 1830's. Many students were not adept in mechanical or agricultural activities and the required daily labor of three to four hours did not leave much free time for more enjoyable pursuits. Students even stooped to hiring other students to farm their plots.23 By 1831 educators began looking for other types of physical exercise activities to offer in place of, or in conjunction with, manual labor.
ATHLETICS

During the early 19th century children played games and sports during recess time. Questions arose concerning how to control these rambunctious activities, of what benefit they were other than to let off steam, and should any of these activities be condoned as useful tools in moral and physical development. Religious and moral leaders began advocating some utilitarian sports in order to keep people from sinful diversions, and educators and physicians became increasingly concerned about the health status of children in cities and towns. These changes in society and thought helped pave the way for examining games and sports as possible condoned school physical exercise activities by 1831.

Two early American advocates of sports for their health benefits were Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush. Franklin, in his letter to Oliver Neave, outlined benefits and techniques of swimming; Rush suggested "voluntary labor" for those not involved with agricultural pursuits including swimming, fencing, skating, tennis, bowls, quoits, golf, and boating. Advertisements in local newspapers cited merits of sports such as horseback riding, battledore, badminton, bathing, nine pins, billiards, and ball games. Many of these advertisements stressed the value of games in promoting health "by means of gentle exercise."
John Griscom, principal of New York High School, stated in 1825:

To think clearly, to feel generously and to act vigorously, man must be in health.... By vigorous exercise, [and] by the encouragement of athletic games in the intervals of school hours, an astonishing change might be produced on the health and strength of our youth.... There can be no reason why the sports of children, so essentially related to their health, should not as well be the subject of regulation and judgment, as the quantity and quality of food. 26

Though Griscom was in favor of games and sports for children he considered them recess activities controlled and regulated by the use of student monitors.

An article in the American Journal of Education in 1827 stated that sports "tend directly to preserve and invigorate the health, to refresh the young mind for the renewal of its studies, and to promote its powers." 27 The author advocated running, pursuits of chase, fencing, swimming, wrestling, handball, football, tennis, shuttlecock, quoits, bowls, nine pins, and billiards as suitable sports for school children. These sports were considered as appropriate because they stimulated and excited the muscular and nervous systems and "by consequence, on all the various systems of organs.... They gave him knowledge of himself, ... they fit him for accomplishing meritorious actions in this world, and prepare him for the enjoyment ... of bliss." 28

William Alcott and William Russell advocated using games to develop health, cheerfulness, and tran-
quility in young school children. Both educators were appalled by the lack of playground area surrounding most common schools and campaigned throughout their careers in educational journals to correct this problem. Common schools were frequently located on small plots of ground near roads or places of business with little or no outdoor space for recess play. Children playing during recess often trespassed on non-school property or played in the road, causing many towns and schools to pass ordinances against non-sedate play activities near school buildings. Town records contain references about replacing school windows, and fining young delinquents who broke the prohibiting ordinances. A famous example occurred in Atkinson, New Hampshire in 1799. John Adams Smith, President John Adams' grandson, was fined nine pence for playing ball too near the Atkinson Academy.

The usual games played during recess consisted of one-old-cat, hide-and-seek, marbles, tag, and ball games. Not so innocent endeavors consisted of rock throwing for distance, wrestling, tug-of-war, bully, snow balling, kickball, and target throwing (frequently using passing pedestrians as moving targets). Russell and Alcott believed that if enough playground space was provided children would pursue their games in the enclosure and not create such disturbances among the townspeople.

George Bancroft, one of the founders of Round
Hill School, wrote in 1829 that exercise was necessary for "preserving the purity of morals, in disciplining and regulating the imagination, and in establishing the just proportion between the influences of the intellectual powers and the body." Bancroft advocated dancing, fencing, field sports, and gymnastics as suitable exercise but warned against excess - all exercise should be indulged moderately. "The Athletic man has great vigor of frame, but is of an inactive spirit." He believed that sports and games were a part of school life but should not impinge on academic learning.

In 1830 Amos Bronson Alcott wrote that play was necessary during childhood and should be encouraged, but that it would be "unwise as impracticable to attempt systematic exercise." He noted that the primary outcome of play was enjoyment. The teacher could offer friendly guidance and aid in helping a child to the "true and lasting sources of enjoyment," but the teacher should not regulate innocent play activities.

John Warren agreed with other educators that teachers should permit and advise "frolic" at proper times. He advocated gentle games for girls and gymnastic and active sports for boys. Jeremy Taylor suggested selecting sports and recreations that were short, heartfelt, and refreshing. He also warned against over indulgence in athletic activities because they would steal time and
energy from more useful and severe employments. Each advocate stressed the healthful aspects of innocent moderate participation. Some educators noted the enjoyment aspect, and a few indicated moral development qualities. It appears from the tenor of their articles that these educators were attempting to find some educational value in activities students were already pursuing during recess time, but they were not suggesting that athletics become part of the school curriculum.

By 1831 some educators were seeking ways to use sports as an avenue for teaching moral virtues. Gambling, bullying, and fighting had been observed during athletic contests causing increasing concern about how to control these vices. The question arose concerning how teachers could control recess activities to prevent immoral behavior. Griscom had suggested using student monitors to supervise recess activities, A.B. Alcott suggested teachers guide children toward having enjoyable experiences, and other teachers suggested participating in sports with the students.

One teacher wrote in the American Annals of Education and Instruction that if a teacher joined his students in their sports he could provide a good moral example for the students to follow and be able to mold their characters easier during recess games than in the classroom. He wrote:
There is no place where a teacher may better study the characters of his pupils than in the playground.... He may mould their characters there more truly, more thoroughly, more permanently, than ...

Other teachers believed that they would lose respect of their pupils by participating in recess athletics because the students would look on them as companions rather than teachers. This writer responded that the merits that could be derived by participating with students in their sports depended on the character of the teacher.

Some sports and games were being supervised and even taught in a few academies by 1831. Samuel Moody taught swimming to his young boys at Dummer Academy in Byfield, Massachusetts. At Round Hill Joseph Cogswell included archery, tumbling, and running activities in his physical exercise program. In 1829 the girls at Greenfield High School for Young Ladies played battledore and coronella under the supervision of the teachers during their assigned exercise periods. Swimming was taught at a number of schools including the New Haven Gymnasium and the New Haven Classical and Commercial School. Other schools provided instruction or supervision in horseback riding, fencing, and boxing, but for the most part athletics remained unsupervised recess activities until a much later date in New England.
THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF INSTRUCTION

By 1831 educators had become increasingly concerned about the athletic activities of students, and about what physical exercise system was most appropriate for the healthful physical development of students in schools and academies. Advocates and teachers using various physical exercise systems, including gymnastics, manual labor, domestic economy, calisthenics, military training, and athletics, attended the American Institute of Instruction meetings. Because of their interest in the merits and problems concerning each of these systems it is not surprising that physical exercise activities were discussed during the Institute sessions.

The American Institute of Instruction was founded in 1830 by educators from throughout the Eastern states. Its stated purpose in its Constitution was for "the diffusion of useful knowledge in regard to education." At their first meeting in Boston John Warren spoke on the need of physical education programs and William Russell on the need of playgrounds for young students.

At the Institute's second conference in August 1831 physical exercise programs continued to be of concern for the educators. Jacob Jackson gave a lecture on the first day on physical education; unfortunately this lecture was not preserved. Following Jackson's lecture William Woodbridge, editor of the American Journal of Education,
proposed the question of combining athletics with manual labor as a viable physical exercise program that would combine "exercise with amusement ... as a means of forming and invigorating the body." \(^{48}\) The Proceedings of this meeting noted that Woodbridge opened the debate in the affirmative and that "six of seven gentlemen took part in the debate." \(^{49}\) The educators involved in the discussion were not listed in the Proceedings and the points raised during the debate were not recorded. Gideon Thayer, the recording secretary of the Institute did write "it was ... determined, that questions thus discussed should not be decided by vote of the Institute, but that the discussion should be closed at the discretion of the meeting." \(^{50}\)

From the writings of known Institute participants it is probable that the following members participated in the debate and discussion concerning athletics and manual labor programs: James Carter, William Woodbridge, Jacob Jackson, William Alcott, William Fowler, Gideon Thayer, and Reuben Haines. Each of these educators was concerned with instituting physical education in schools, and wrote lectures and articles concerning manual labor or athletics as appropriate physical exercise activities for children.

James Carter, a leading proponent of teacher training, established teacher preparation institutes in Lancaster and Andover, Massachusetts during the 1820s. Carter proposed courses in physiology and physical exercise
systems so teachers would understand both the necessity of exercise for physical development and how to administer these programs. William Woodbridge and William Alcott, both authors, editors, and teachers, had established a Fellenberg School near Hartford, Connecticut in 1830. Woodbridge and Alcott wrote numerous articles urging that physical education be introduced into schools and published accounts of exercise systems practiced in Europe and America. Jacob Jackson, a Boston doctor, was concerned about the unhealthy environment in many schools, the excessive length of time students were required to remain seated on uncomfortable benches, and the necessity of providing physical exercise for children.

William Fowler was Professor of Chemistry and Natural History at Middlebury College in Vermont. Under his leadership students were given various types of physical exercise including marching and military drills, gymnastics, gardening, and swimming and fencing instruction. Gideon Thayer, founder and principal of Chauncy-Hall School in Boston, supervised gymnastic activities during clear weather. During inclement weather the boys exercised by themselves in the school yard. Reuban Haines, Institute President and teacher at Germantown Academy in Pennsylvania, was an horticulturist active in the Philadelphia Academy of the Natural Sciences. While teaching at the Germantown Academy Haines involved his students in planting an orchard.
of Chancellor pears and starting formal gardens near the school.56

From the writings of these education leaders and physicians attending the 1831 Institute it is believed that the following issues were discussed.

1. The need for an exercise program that would be utilitarian and interesting for students to pursue.

2. The merits of manual labor for developing life long industrious habits.

3. The demise of many manual labor programs because of student disinterest.

4. The necessity of finding an exercise program that could be instituted in the small school yards surrounding most public schools.

5. The value of athletics for physical development.

6. The need to control student activities during recess time.

7. The possibility of using athletics as a tool for moral guidance.

8. The merits and problems of teachers participating in student sports.

Each of these issues had been the topic of articles in the leading education journals and of lectures given previously by Institute members at schools and conferences.
Use of manual labor programs in New England schools diminished during the early 19th century. The values of athletics as school physical education activities continued to be discussed throughout the century but did not become a dominant part of many programs until the 20th century. This debate at the American Institute of Instruction in 1831 appears to be one of the earliest serious considerations of athletics as physical education activities by New England education leaders.
FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid., p. xv.

3. Immigration into the United States From 1820 to 1903 (Washington: U.S. Treasury Department, 1904), 4336, 4339.


11. Fisk, Address ... November 8, 1825, op. cit., pp. 12, 14.


25. Examples of sports advertisements are in Connecticut Journal, December 11, 1827; Boston Commercial Gazette, October 5, 1829; and Boston Daily Advertiser and Patriot, January 14, 1832.


28. Ibid.


32. George Bancroft, "Doctrine of Temperaments," The American Quarterly Review, V, No. 9 (March, 1829), p. 120.

33. Ibid., p. 127.


39. Ibid.


42. *Outline of the Plan of Education Pursued at the Greenfield High School for Young Ladies with a Catalogue for the Year 1828-1829* (Greenfield: Phelps and Ingersoll, 1829), p. 3.


44. These schools included the Hartford Female Seminary, Hartford Grammar School, Greenfield Hill Academy, Salem Academy, Chauncy Hall, and Mount Pleasant Classical Institution.


48. Ibid., p. xv.
49. Ibid., p. xiv.
50. Ibid., p. xv.
51. James Carter, Essays Upon Popular Education Containing a Particular Examination of the Schools of Massachusetts and an Outline of an Institution for the Education of Teachers (Boston: Bowles and Dearborn, 1826), pp. 6-8, 51.
52. William Woodbridge was the editor of the American Annals of Education and Instruction, 1830-1837; William Alcott became editor in 1837. Alcott wrote an article on physical education for the first issue of the American Journal of Education in 1826.