

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 129 818

SP 010 534

AUTHOR Barney, Robert Knight  
 TITLE Adele Parot: Beacon of the Dioclesian Lewis School of  
 Gymnastic Expression in the American West.  
 PUB DATE May 73  
 NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Symposium of the  
 North American Society of Sport History (1st, Ohio  
 State University, Columbus, Ohio, May 26, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS American History; \*Calisthenics; \*Educational  
 History; \*Exercise (Physiology); Health Activities;  
 Human Body; \*Physical Education; \*Physical Fitness;  
 State Legislation; Teacher Education; \*Womens  
 Athletics

IDENTIFIERS Lewis (Dioclesian); Parot (Adele); United States (Far  
 West)

ABSTRACT

In the late 1800's, Dioclesian Lewis developed and introduced into the schools his new concept of physical education. Dr. Lewis thought in terms of preventing illness and maintaining bodily strength and health through physical fitness. His "new gymnastics" were based on programs of exercise movements. Employing light equipment suitable for use by women and children, he created a system of calisthenics centered on the development of flexibility and grace of movement, rather than strength. These gymnastics could be performed in the school room and did not require large areas of space. He founded the Normal Institute for Physical Education in Boston where teachers of physical education were trained. His students spread out through the United States and foreign countries introducing the philosophy of a sound mind in a sound body to students and other teachers. One student of his, Adele Parot, carried his teaching to California. She was instrumental in bringing about California's legislation for mandatory physical education in the state's public schools, the first legislation of its type in the United States. (JD)

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ADELE PAROT: BEACON OF THE DIOCLESIAN LEWIS  
SCHOOL OF GYMNASIIC EXPRESSION IN THE AMERICAN WEST

ROBERT KNIGHT BARNEY  
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
LONDON, ONTARIO

Introduction

In the late summer of 1878, high on a mountainside in the heart of California's magnificent Yosemite country, a bearded, robust-appearing man, accompanied by a somewhat diminutive, fragile-like lady, sought a campsight for the night on the edge of a mountain meadow, a pristine pasture bathed in the shadows and beauty of the gathering twilight.\* For a considerable period of time, on both foot and horseback, the couple had been exploring the mountain wilderness areas, losing themselves for a brief moment in one's life from the fetters of their far away, long acknowledged, home environment of New England, an environment becoming increasingly unwholesome due to the concerns of job, urban residence, and the progressive encroachment of technology and industry. The time for their return to such concerns was drawing ever nearer as their "Sabbatical" into the West was rapidly coming to a close. But for now, their thoughts were preoccupied with the magnetic qualities of the envisioned campfire, the evening's repast, and pleasant conversation with "old friends." Earlier that summer day they had met a lone, oxen-pulled prairie schooner carrying a frontier family bent on "migrating to other parts." To the bearded man and his wife an

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\* A research paper presented at the first annual symposium of The North American Society of Sport History, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, May 26, 1973.

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evening's social union with the wagon's occupants would be as welcome and as interesting as those liaisons conducted under similar circumstance in past weeks - liaisons with such standard residents of the California wilderness as the lonely shepherd, work-hardened miners, weather-roughened guides and trappers, and ambitious land speculators. This particular evening promised added dividends because the events of that afternoon had forged a unique and reciprocal bond of awareness and recognition between the two parties. For, as the initial introductions had been made that day, a sudden gleam of excitement had appeared in the "wagonmaster's" eyes, prodding him to exclaim, "Why all our children have been brought up according to your books, but we reckoned we'd never see you with our own eyes" (Eastman, 1891, p. 342).

Was this episode a chance meeting in the wilderness of the American West between an itinerant covered-wagon family and Horace Mann; or Henry Barnard; or some other noted educational theorist or practitioner? Those students of American educational history might have perceived such. This, however, was not the case. The author to whom the wagoneer referred as having influenced the lives of his youngsters was, in fact, Dioclesian Lewis, inventor and developer of a prevention for languor and atrophy, commonly known as the "new gymnastics."

A more detailed investigation of the extension of Lewis' "new gymnastics" into the American West is merited, particularly in an assessment of the comments of Lewis' biographer surrounding

the incident described above, pertinent to which she stated: "It was plain that wherever Dr. Lewis' books might have gone they had found their way into the homes of people along the Pacific slope (Eastman, pp. 342-343).

#### School Physical Education Prior to the New Gymnastics

Portions of the West, most notably California, historically have been among the more progressive enclaves of physical education innovation and reform in nineteenth and twentieth century America. However, systematic approaches to physical education as part of the daily school program in the West, as in other parts of the country, depict an early history of hesitancy, abortiveness, and severe limitation. Further, to compound the problem of continuity of approach to physical education programming, as well as a consistent philosophy underwriting such efforts, was the fact that various individuals and interest groups carried on independent crusades, most of them in sharp conflict with each other, but all aimed at enlisting the support of the nation's educators toward accepting their particular exercise expression as "the" system of physical education most beneficial for American schoolchildren.

During the historical era under consideration (the 1860's and early 1870's) only California, in 1866, made provision for mandatory physical education in their schools through the vehicle of state legislation. In fact, only Ohio, in 1892, and North Dakota, in 1899, would make similar provisions before the twentieth century (Rice, p. 239).

But that is not to say that physical education was not present

in some school settings during a time in history not too long removed from America's original commitment to the principle of free schooling. The efforts of Karl Beck at the Round Hill School in Northampton, Massachusetts, of Alden Partridge in private military academy settings in New England and New York, of John Swett at San Francisco's Rincon School, as well as those of several distinguished women in private seminaries, stood out among other neophyte programs.

During the era under scrutiny at least four forms of exercise expression gained some degree of foothold in public school settings. Certainly the aspect of military drill routine must be listed as one such expression. The Civil War years did much to fan the enthusiasm of those who championed this approach and, indeed, for as long as the debilitating conflict lasted detachments of high school and college students could be seen engaging regularly in martial drill and exercise. Military drill, however, was a sore point with many American educators of the 1860's. In 1864, for example, two bills looking to the introduction of military drill into the public schools of Massachusetts, had passed to a second reading in the Massachusetts Legislature, prompting William Lloyd Garrison, storied educator of a prior day, to exclaim, "After thirty years of retirement I will buckle on my armor and go from Berkshire to Nantucket sands to help wipe the barbarous statute from the State" (Eastman, p. 87).

Secondly, the impact of the German gymnastic experience in North America cannot be accorded short shrift. Although the

ramifications of Turner exercise expression did not realize its "day in the sun" of public school physical education until after 1880, nevertheless, by the middle 1870's Germans in America had established a gymnastics normal school and Turnvereine exercise expression, if not in pure form, had been in part welded to other forms of exercise, to form a hybrid type of public school physical education approach (Barney, pp. 267-273 and Zeigler, pp. 32-36).

Of significant import also, was the work of Catherine Beecher, ardent espouser of daily calisthenic programs for young women. Pursuant to this prejudice, Beecher was successful during her eminent thirty year career in Connecticut and Ohio in organizing and conducting exercise classes for young women in seminary-type institutions. She also published two books, one of which (A Manual of Physiology For Schools and Families) dealt specifically with public school physical education programming. And, at every opportunity during her travels in the East, she attempted to arouse the feelings of teachers and board of education members on the subject of daily physical education in the schools - a subject to be administered under the teaching expertise of especially prepared instructors of the subject. Beecher's particular exercise vogue was one which embraced the standard outline forms of European calisthenic exercise.

#### Dioclesian Lewis and the New Gymnastics

Joining the three previously stated forms of exercise expression, evidenced in the public schools of America before

the last quarter of the nineteenth century, were the "new gymnastics" of Dioclesian Lewis. Lewis' ideas on exercise could well be held in esteem today, especially in the face of rapidly accelerating health care costs. In general, Lewis was disgusted by studying to cure the sickly. He felt that time and effort spent on correcting deficiencies in health and physique after they had occurred were approaches lacking in wisdom. To that end, Lewis might be likened to a modern-day car owner whose auto care efforts might properly focus on preventive maintenance rather than repair. Lewis then, thought in terms of preventing sickness and affliction through fitness and health practice. Studying the German gymnasium and its exercises, Lewis perceived that neither were particularly well adapted to children, women, or fat and old men. Subsequently, he fashioned what he labelled the "new gymnastics," a program of exercise centered on the development of flexibility and grace of movement, rather than strength. Employing light equipment in the form of stones, rings, wands, wooden dumbbells, Indian clubs, chest and shoulder pulling apparatus, posture crowns, still and semi-swinging rings, beanbags, balls, and spirometers for strengthening respiratory muscles, Lewis created a comprehensive series of exercise movements.

Based on the research efforts of several historians, it now appears that the "new gymnastics," as espoused by Dioclesian Lewis, former orator-leader in America's pre-Civil War temperance movement, became a somewhat popular method of exercise during the 1860's, and further, was often implemented as an important component in the heritage of public school physical education.

Underscoring this point are the remarks of Colonel Thomas Westworth Higginson, a Massachusetts educator of the period, who wrote in the Atlantic Monthly of March, 1861:

"It would be unpardonable . . . not to speak a good word for the favorite hobby of the day, Dr. Lewis and his system of gymnastics . . . Dr. Windship had done all that was needed in apostleship of severe exercise, and there was wanting some man with a milder hobby, perfectly safe for a lady to drive. The Fates provided that man in Dr. Dio Lewis, so hale and hearty, so profoundly confident in the omnipotence of his own methods and the uselessness of all others, with such a ready invention and such an inundation of animal spirits that he could flood any company no matter how starched and listless, with an unbounded appetite for ball-games and bean-bag games. Wherever Dr. Lewis' methods have been introduced important advantages have followed. His movement is undoubtedly the most important single step yet taken for the physical education of American women."

It is doubtful if Lewis' chief interest lay in the physical education of American women. His particular zeal was channeled toward the development of a teacher training institution, from which young men and women, trained in teaching the "new gymnastics," would graduate and subsequently fan out across the country, and even the world, to carry the "faith" to those receptive to its message.

In August, 1860, Dioclesian Lewis first gained more than the local attention of metropolitan Boston in the area of physical exercise expression when he was accorded a half hour segment of time on the program of the annual meetings of the American Institute of Instruction, in order that he might explain the "new gymnastics." Several years later, when reflecting on this important experience in his professional career in physical education, Lewis stated:



". . . But when the half hour had expired, they said . . . 'Go on;' and I went on until two hours had passed, and then they voted that the next morning they would meet at half-past eight (having announced important business for nine o'clock) to hear more about the new gymnastics. The next morning was foggy and dark, but the hall was full, and they passed over their important business and gave me nearly two hours more, and at noon, another hour. With such an opening as this, it is not remarkable that the interest spread over the entire country . . ." (Lewis' Gymnastic Monthly, 1863, p. 7).

Lewis, in the presentation of "his" system to that august body of American educators, utilized the talents of pupils trained especially by him in night classes which he taught in various Boston suburbs. One of those trainees, acting as a demonstrator, may have been Adele Parot, but that cannot be definitely substantiated. Lewis' presentation, there at the Tremont Temple in Boston, the site of the largest convention yet held by educators in America, moved D.B. Hagar, Esq., President of the Institute, to point out the great need for physical education and for the body to be educated. "There can be no mental vigor without bodily vigor," he declared. "The Lewis system fills the bill" (Lewis' Normal Institute, p. 150).

Less than a year later, in July of 1861, Lewis succeeded in realizing his fondest dream. The Normal Institute for Physical Education, the first of its kind in North America, was opened in downtown Boston, in fact, in the very temple on Tremont St. where he had so enlivened the interest of school educators the previous August. Lewis' school realized a history of seven years, during which time a total of 421 students were graduated, of which about

an equal number were men and women (Leonard and Affleck, p. 263).\* J.D. Philbrick, Esq., Superintendent of the Public Schools of Boston during the 1860's, in an address at the second commencement exercises of Lewis' Normal Institute, stated:

"You may not know it, Ladies and Gentlemen, but the institution is famous in every part of the land. There is not a live educator in America who is not looking to see what is to be the result of Dr. Lewis' Institution in Boston. These exercises can be introduced into any schoolroom with desks. The problem is solved. I trust, Ladies and Gentlemen, that this is the commencement of a new era, and that the system taught by Dr. Lewis, will be universally introduced into our schools" (Lewis' Normal Institute, p. 270).

Perhaps Philbrick's statement may have been a bit melodramatic, relative to "famous in every part of the land," and "live educators." Nevertheless, the record does indicate that the influence of Lewis' exercise expression was such that many public schools in New England, in towns and cities along the eastern seaboard, and in California and other parts of the West, embraced it, if not in pure form, then at least in part.

Lewis' biographer, Mary Eastman, infers to us that the "new gymnastics" assumed much more than domestic popularity. Chiefly as a result of the efforts of some of Lewis' former students at his Boston Institute, the exercise systems penetrated into areas of the world other than the United States and Canada. There is evidence that Lewis' "new gymnastics" achieved some degree of

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\*After Lewis' Normal Institute closed in 1868 Lewis stated that more than 250 persons had taken the Diploma as a result of the nine sessions held from 1861-1868. Eastman, Lewis' biographer, poses the 421 student graduate figure.

popularity in London, England, where they were referred to as "the musical gymnastics," being that most of the exercises were carried out to musical accompaniment. Dr. John Garth Wilkinson, a former student of Lewis', in addressing the British College of Preceptors in 1864, stated:

"Dr. Lewis has inaugurated in America a great national reform, as distinct, as influential, as glorious as that which was wrought in Germany by Salzman and Jahn, or in Sweden by the poet and gymnasiarch, Ling" (Eastman, p. 83).

Between 1864 and 1875, Germany, Africa, India, Russia, and Scotland, joined with England in giving the movement international substance. Elizabeth P. Peabody, on visiting Berlin in the late 1860's, stated that the first peculiarity which attracted her attention was a school for physical exercise, over the entrance of which was written in German, "Dio Lewis Gymnastics" (Eastman, pp. 86-87). Printed circulars, emanating from Scotland, advertised the services of "gymnastic entrepreneurs," billing themselves as the sole representatives in that country of Dio Lewis' system of gymnastics (Eastman, p. 87).

Almost as geographically far reaching as the transfer of Lewis' gymnastics to parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa was their extension to California. The pathfinder for the system's appearance on the Pacific Coast, some three thousand miles from the citadel of its inception in Boston, proved to be a young lady of singular resolution as well as of mysterious relationship to Dio Lewis himself. That lady was Adele Parot, or Mademoiselle Parot, as she referred to herself in professional consequence.

The circumstances surrounding Mademoiselle Parot's arrival in California are obscured but it is known that she appeared in San Francisco in the summer of 1862, ready to assume professional

duties related to the teaching of the "new gymnastics" at the State Normal School, a small institution operated under the general direction of the San Francisco Superintendent of Schools, and an institution which dealt specifically with the training of teachers for the city's schools (Report of the Superintendent of Schools, San Francisco Municipal Reports, 1863-1864, p. 294). In San Francisco she began to introduce the Lewis system of exercise expression, which ultimately would have more influence in initiating the early trends of exercise programs in the schools of California than any other particular approach, including the German system. After spending one year at the Normal Institute of San Francisco, she joined the faculty of the newly formed Pacific Female College, located across San Francisco Bay in nearby Oakland. Aside from instructing the "new gymnastics and physical exercise," she also lent her expertise towards teaching French and German (Circular of the Pacific Female College, Oakland - 1864, p. 1). Evidently, the Oakland institution was as highly impressed with Adele Parot as they were with her credentials and endorsements from sophisticated and formal New England. The circular announcing the school's curriculum, stated:

"Calisthenics and gymnastics exercise . . . will be under the charge of Mdlle. Parot, who comes to the institution recommended by Professor Dio Lewis of Boston as one of his most accomplished pupils" (Circular of the Pacific Female College, p. 13).

Adele Parot's pre-California life and authenticated relationship with Dio Lewis is perhaps lost in antiquity.

Substantiated records proving that a pupil-teacher relationship indeed did exist at one time between Parot and Boston's eminent Civil War-era physical culturist, do not exist, at least as far as this writer has been able to determine after extensive research activity in both California and Boston. In heeding Professor Dio Lewis' recommendation of Parot as "one of his most accomplished pupils," initial assumption would be to hypothesize that she must have been a graduate of either the first or second class of Lewis' Normal School. This would have been possible, timewise, as the second class did not graduate until March of 1862, leaving ample time for Parot to journey to San Francisco and assume teaching duties in the autumn of that same year. This assumption, however, proves to be incorrect as a review of the graduation records of the Lewis Institute do not show the name of Adele Parot.

A second assumption would be to hypothesize that if she had not, in effect, been a student of Lewis' at his Normal School in downtown Boston, perhaps she might have been one of his more gifted "student-teacher" types at the West Newton English and Classical School, located just outside of Boston in the educationally progressive community of West Newton. Dio Lewis served as lecturer and teacher of physiology and physical culture at the West Newton Institution for a period of eight years, commencing in 1860. But, Parot's name does not appear on the school's enrollment rosters for that period of the school's existence prior to her arrival in San Francisco.

Where then, did Adele Parot, the first beacon of Dio Lewis physical culture ideology in the American West, realize her

association with Lewis himself, an association which must have existed in order for him to have recommended her in the manner which he did. Was she a fraud who went West to seek her fortune, armed with a forged letter of reference from Lewis which would "open the way" for her to gain immediate employment and status? At this point, neither an hypothesis supporting her professional credibility, or one charging her as an imposter would be correct. A final effort at definitely linking her with Lewis as one of his students prior to her 1862 arrival date in San Francisco, would be to state that perhaps she might have been one of those students attending night classes in gymnastics taught by him in the Boston suburbs of West Newton, Newtonville, Newton, Newton Upper Falls, and Watertown (Leonard and Affleck, p. 259). Unfortunately, class enrollments of this phase of Lewis' professional efforts do not seem to exist, or, if they do, they have thus far eluded this researcher's efforts to reclaim them from the musty corners of their consignment.

In deference to history, particularly in view of Parot's demonstrated knowledge of the Lewis system, and of her confidence and expertise in presenting it to California educators and students, perhaps the last stated hypothesis might remain in vogue for the time being, at least until such time as some enterprising scholar might, either by accident or design, uncover a clearer record than that which this writer must leave to history at this time.

In 1864 Parot's career in physical education in California continued with her appointment as director of physical education at the San Mateo Institute (later called Laurel Hall), a private

school for young ladies. The San Mateo school became quite progressive in its approach to physical education. Among its declared educational purposes appeared the following:

"As mind can only act usefully through a healthy body, physical education should take precedence. The neglect that has almost universally prevailed in this matter is known in its effects. Exercise is the only means for the development of every power; but if enjoyment is not derived, the duty is too frequently neglected. To obviate this a varied course of Dancing, Calisthenic and Gymnastic Exercises will be introduced. Gymnastics have deservedly become very popular and are considered an essential element in school training" (Catalogue of the San Mateo Institute, San Mateo, California, 1864, p. 10).

It is quite possible, although again unsubstantiated, that Adele Parot wrote the institution's statement of purpose relating to physical education. In the ten years following Adele Parot's appointment to its faculty, the San Mateo Institute built a gymnasium containing a bowling alley and indoor exercise apparatus. Also, an outdoor croquet ground was constructed and horseback riding introduced to the program.

Before terminating, this writer would be grossly remiss in not reporting what he believes to be Adele Parot's most significant contribution to the history of American physical education. That contribution relates to California's historic 1866 legislation for mandatory physical education in the state's public schools, the first state legislation of its type in the United States.

Several historians have pointed at John Swett, native New Hampshireite, popular San Francisco educator, and progressive

State Superintendent of Public Instruction during most of the 1860's, as being the sole force behind the enactment of the significant legislation. Certainly Swett's role should not be minimized. However, this writer feels that other factors were present which helped bring the laws to fruition. One of the most significant of these "other" factors was the influence of Adele Parot. Parot's role in the drama surrounding the 1866 legislation was played as an influencer and educator of Swett. The record indicates that Swett, anxious to investigate and implement new approaches to teaching methodology, became drawn to the system of gymnastics championed by the Dio Lewis school, the earliest California representative of which was Adele Parot. In calling a State Teachers' Institute (a primitive counterpart of today's teaching workshop or convention) in 1863, shortly after his election to the state superintendency, Swett made provisions for Adele Parot to be included on the program. It is doubtful that her descendance on the assembly had as startling an impact as had that of her "benefactor" on the Boston conference of educators in 1860, already alluded to. However, she appeared twice during the six day session, lecturing on and demonstrating the Lewis technique. In this regard she seemed to employ Lewis' technique of utilizing those students of physical education under her charge. Swett must have been impressed. His writing pertinent to physical education, after the Teachers' Institute of 1863, assumed a more sophisticated aura and reflected a decided change from a general "amalgamated" approach to the subject, to one which



embraced the outline form of the Lewis system. Terms such as wands, crowns, Indian clubs, grace of movement, etc., began to replace references to hikes, outdoor outings, heavy apparatus, etc.

At this point, a safe inference to proffer on the importance of Adele Parot in helping to bring about the nation's first physical education legislation, would be to state, that her activities in the private schools of the San Francisco-Oakland area, her instruction of physical education to young ladies of the San Francisco Normal School, many of whom became school teachers themselves with duties linked to physical education, her appearance at institutes, demonstrations, and discussions, and her contact with school administrators, the most important of which was Swett, helped immensely in arousing interest in, concern for, and knowledge pertinent to physical education.

### Conclusion

In concluding, it should be noted that the work of Adele Parot, who journeyed to California at a time when recent trends, fads and fashions, and new ways of living in the eastern United States were the latest things to be desired, was highly significant. Parot, beacon of Dioclesian Lewis gymnastics in the American West, probably had the same impact on San Francisco school physical education that a new style dress imported all the way from Boston might have had on the socially conscious ladies of the city. The inference is one of relativity, but there is no disputing the fact that she played what was probably the sole role in bringing

the Lewis system of physical education to California, a system which, in general, began to be displayed in the schools of the West during the post-Civil War era, whether those schools were multi-roomed institutions in developing cities or single-chambered structures in mining towns, mountain villages, or desert settlements. Nineteenth century pictorial literature documents quite vividly western schoolrooms featuring rows of students ranging from young, downy-cheeked, pre-puberty adolescents in the front rows, to those tall, overhauled-clad, often bearded young adults in the rear, all standing beside their desks brandishing the wands used in Dio Lewis' "new gymnastics."

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