

The Contributions of Oberlin College to Physical Education

by

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One of the mysteries surrounding the early history of physical education in the United States is the unique role that was played by Oberlin College. This small unheralded liberal arts college in the north central part of Ohio made a greater contribution to physical education than any other college or university in the country.

It built one of the first college gymnasiums in the country, organized one of the first intramural programs and appointed the first woman physical educator to be made a member of a college faculty. Oberlin was the first college to approve a bachelor's degree with a major in physical education. It appointed the first Director of Athletics who was a member of the faculty and organized the first unified department of physical education and athletics.

The intriguing question is, why Oberlin? The answer is twofold: first, the nature of the college itself. It was truly a pioneer institution, even a radical institution in an era of great reform. It was the kind of college that could accept an innovative program like physical education and then produce the leaders so essential to the development of any new field. The second reason is the amazing number of Oberlin men who became prominent physical educators. A complete list would read like Who's Who in Physical Education. Just to name a few of the most outstanding you would have to include Thomas Wood, Luther Halsey Gulick, Fred Leonard, Jesse Feiring Williams and Jay B. Nash. To put it another way, seven Oberlin graduates have been president of the A.A.H.P.E.R., ten have been president of the National College Physical Education Association, and five have been recipients of the Luther Halsey Gulick Award.

When all of the evidence has been examined, it becomes quite obvious that no other institution in the country can match Oberlin's contributions to physical education.



The head table at the Seward Staley luncheon address.