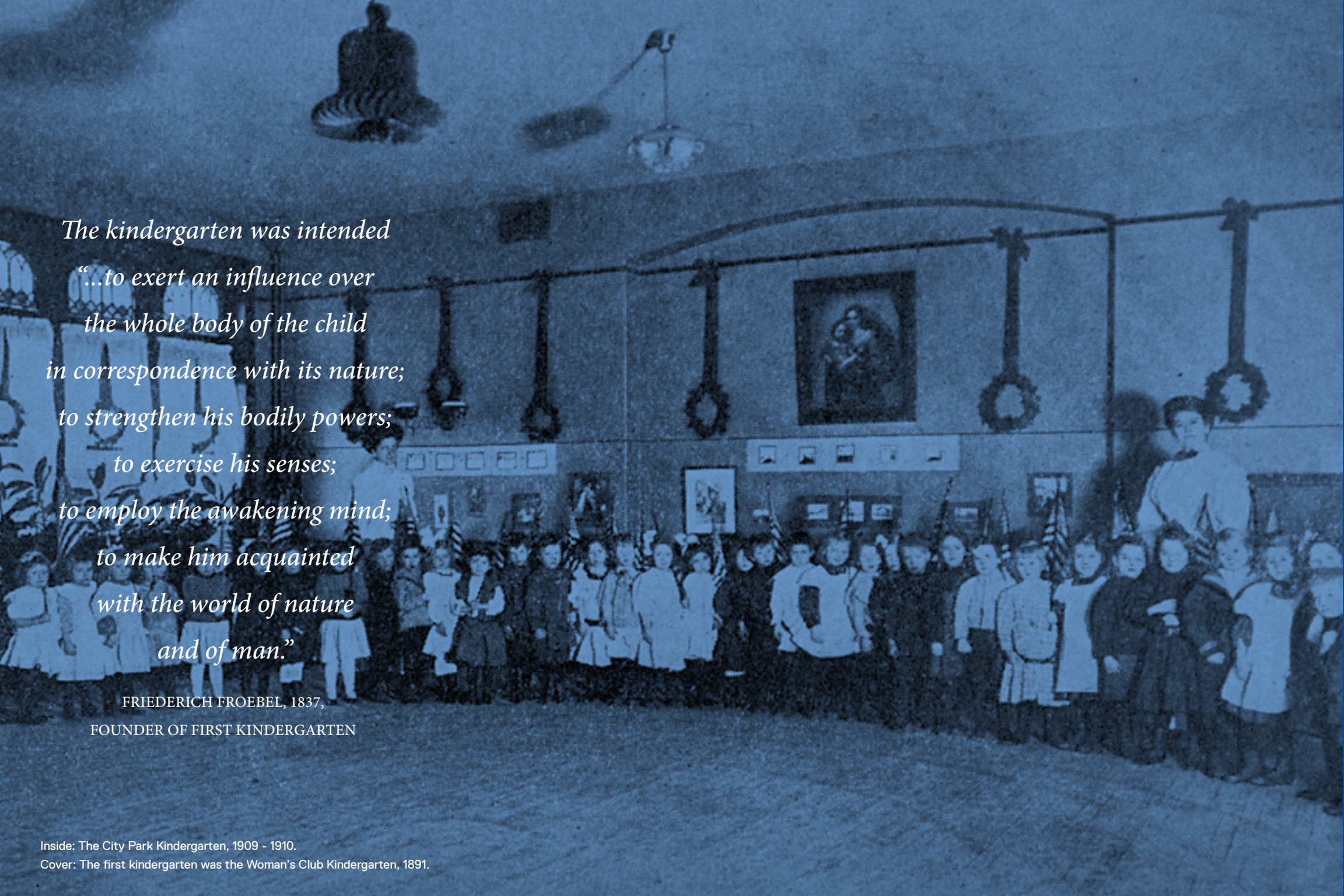


A large group of children and adults, likely members of the Brooklyn Kindergarten Society, are posed for a group photograph. The children, mostly young girls in white dresses with large collars, are arranged in several rows. Adults, including women and a few men, stand behind the children. The background is decorated with numerous American flags. The entire image has a blue tint.

BROOKLYN KINDERGARTEN SOCIETY

125 YEARS OF SERVICE
TO THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF BROOKLYN



*The kindergarten was intended
“...to exert an influence over
the whole body of the child
in correspondence with its nature;
to strengthen his bodily powers;
to exercise his senses;
to employ the awakening mind;
to make him acquainted
with the world of nature
and of man.”*

FRIEDERICH FROEBEL, 1837,
FOUNDER OF FIRST KINDERGARTEN

The Brooklyn Kindergarten Society represents a long tradition of service to Brooklyn’s children, beginning 125 years ago with the establishment of the first network of free kindergartens in our community. Through all these years, BKS’s mission has remained the same:

*To assist children from low income families
develop their social, emotional, physical and
cognitive skills by providing a secure, nurturing
and educationally-rich environment, and doing
so in ways that actively involve parents and
caregivers.*

Inside: The City Park Kindergarten, 1909 - 1910.

Cover: The first kindergarten was the Woman’s Club Kindergarten, 1891.

As universal grammar school education spread across Western Europe and North America in the early and mid-nineteenth century, the standard practice was to begin formal instruction at age six with first grade. Younger children were not part of the movement.

Beginning in Germany, and first appearing in the United States in German-American communities, kindergartens were created combining pre-school education and daycare with particular emphasis in America on meeting the needs of neglected young children in the rapidly growing cities.

These children, from struggling immigrant families, were often left on the streets or in crowded living quarters while their parents worked. The term “forgotten child” was commonly used by kindergarten advocates.

To quote from BKS’s annual report of 1900:

“... some of our kindergartens are in neighborhoods where the mothers go to work, locking their doors in the morning and leaving their children on the streets till their return. These waifs are found on the steps waiting for the kindergartens to open.”

Kindergarten or “children’s garden”

was not conceived as a traditional school but as a place that would stimulate a child’s imagination, perception, concentration and perseverance. According to another early annual report:

“... the children now leaving after three years of kindergarten ... have developed neatness and accuracy, gained powers in creative use of materials, in seeing connections, in responding to the thought presented, and also in self-control and thoughtfulness for others.”

Top Left: Philander Priestly Claxton (1862-1957) was a noted American educator. He constantly pointed out the cost of illiteracy and the importance of public education in a democratic society. He was the Federal Commissioner of Education (1913-1921).

Top Right: Backyard of kindergarten family, 1910 - 1911.

Bottom: Indoors on a rainy day, May 1921.

Free Kindergartens Needed for All These:

For the children of the poor in the cities where the home environment is bad; for the children of laborers who are left all day alone, fathers, mothers, and older brothers and sisters being away in the mills and shops and mines; for the children of the indulgent rich, over-dressed, supplied with an overabundance of toys, and left to the unintelligent care of servants; and for the children of the over-careful, whose parents would shield them from contact with nature and the possibility of contamination from association with other children, and rear them in jealously guarded exclusion, there is great need for the sane, normal exercises and lessons of the kindergarten.

P. P. CLAXTON
Federal Commissioner of Education



*The first kindergarten in Brooklyn was founded in 1877 by two mothers, followed eight years later by a free kindergarten for 25 children “. . .from homes whose influence is not always the best.” Operating five mornings a week, its annual budget was \$300 (equivalent to \$8,000 in current dollars).**

In 1891 BKS (then called the Brooklyn Free Kindergarten Association) was established “. . . to create and promote interest in kindergarten work and, as far as possible, to establish kindergartens in the City of Brooklyn.” Annual dues (really minimum contributions) were \$3, and soon there were over three hundred members. During BKS’s first decade, donations as high as \$20,000 (over half a million in today’s dollars) helped launch and sustain the organization. Since that time generous community contributions have become an important part of the fiber of BKS, making possible the development and maintenance of high quality programs.

By the end of 1892, there were seven kindergartens affiliated with BKS, a number that would grow to 16 by century’s end and 22 by 1918. Each kindergarten was independent but looked to BKS for ongoing organizational and instructional support including teacher training and recruitment. One form of assistance was help in forming mothers’ clubs where parents could learn about child care and receive English language instruction. BKS members volunteered as teaching assistants and provided breakfast and health care. By the end of World War I, visits by trained nurses to the individual kindergartens were also funded by BKS.

In the annual report marking the end of BKS’s first decade, it was noted that

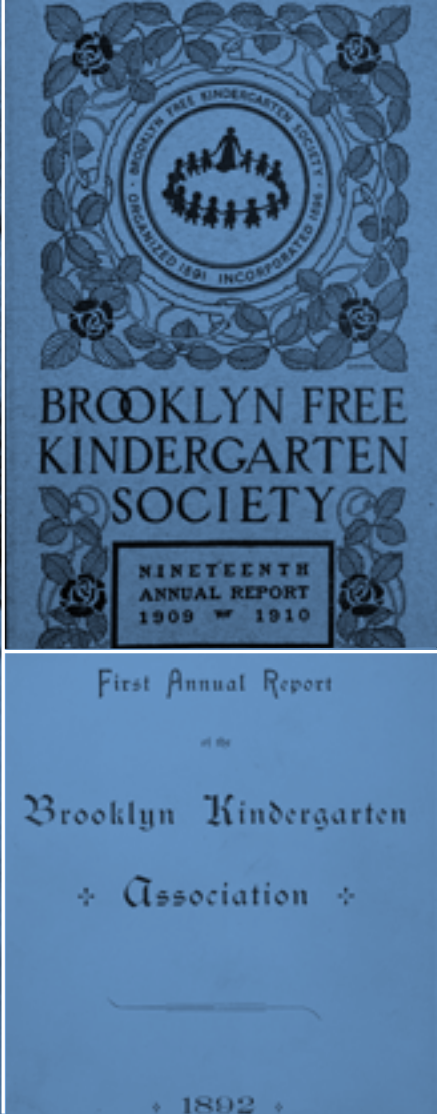
the children from many different ethnic and religious backgrounds “. . . would not even sit next to each other the first of the year. At the end they seemed to appreciate that ‘character’ didn’t depend on nationality.”

Of the nearly 10,000 children attending BKS affiliated kindergartens in the 1890’s, there were representatives of 26 different ethnic groups with more than half coming from Europe:

17% German	6% “Hebrew”
13% Irish	6% African-Americans
11% Scandinavian	and a smaller % from
6% Italian	Spanish-speaking countries

The largest occupational group of parents was day laborers, followed by factory workers, clerks, longshoremen, tailors, painters, bartenders and stonebreakers. Parents were expected to pay a penny or more a day “. . . as a lesson of thrift, and to discourage the spirit of dependence – of receiving and not giving.”

* “Second Annual Report Brooklyn Kindergarten Association” 1893.



Through work and play in our free kindergartens little children are given the opportunity to grow into finer citizens.



For more than 30 years BKS advocated strongly for the expansion of kindergarten in public schools.

In 1900 there were twenty public schools in Brooklyn offering kindergarten, reaching only three percent of children of kindergarten age.

By 1923, the number had risen to 12%, but by the end of the 1930's public school kindergarten was universal throughout the borough. This, of course, had a profound effect on BKS's mission.

As early as 1925, the BKS annual report stated: "The last thing the Society wishes to do is to duplicate the excellent work of the public schools. It is its avowed policy to turn over the work in any center of its activity to the city just as soon as the city is prepared to carry it on."

The focus of BKS changed from establishing and maintaining kindergartens to operating educational programs in day care centers.

In 1946, the supervisor of BKS wrote: "... the Brooklyn Kindergarten Society feels it is no longer necessary to demonstrate the value of pre-kindergarten education; it is now an accepted fact ... we will (now) concentrate all our energies on the expansion of our services to the children in the {then} Four Day Care Centers in cooperation with the Department of Welfare."

Thus began BKS's seventy-year partnership with what was originally called "The Division of Day Care of the City's Department of Welfare".

- ~ BKS founded Brooklyn's first public-private center in a New York City Housing Authority public housing complex.
- ~ Working with Bank Street and several other colleges, BKS supported the training of early childhood teachers.
- ~ It also entered into contracts with the city to provide educational programs to help children and their families break the cycle of poverty at centers located in public housing projects in the borough's most vulnerable neighborhoods.

Previous page top left: Playing Merry Go Round, May 1921.
"Merrily Merrily Let Us Form a Ring"

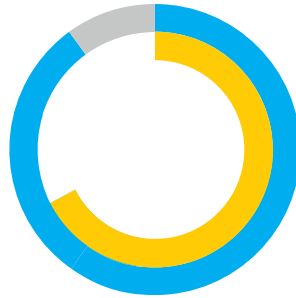
Previous page bottom right: Italian Children - Bliss Kindergarten, 1905 - 1906.

Right Page: The Hans Christian Memorial Kindergarten, 1908 - 1909.



BKS continues this work today, serving nearly 400 two, three, and four year olds in Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Crown Heights, having a profound and tangible effect on the at-risk children it serves.

Although **2/3RDS** of the children who enter BKS centers test “at-risk” for developmental delays, BKS reverses this delay



more than **90%** complete the BKS program on par with their peers from families with higher incomes.



The BKS program is strategically designed to provide academic and social enrichment that is rooted in best practices and is the hallmark of high-quality preschools nationally. Professional teachers, developmentally appropriate curricula and strong parental involvement are all essential components in making a true difference.

Multiple longitudinal studies show that an early childhood program that combines superior education and strong family support makes a positive difference in the lives of participants for a lifetime (e.g., a child is nearly four times more likely to graduate from a four-year college than one who has not benefitted from a high-quality program).

BKS has long relied on public funding — sometimes generously from the Great Society and Head Start programs, to fulfill its mission. Private contributions have made a significant difference in terms of the quality of what BKS does, especially in areas such as teacher recruiting and training, enrichment programs and language competencies. The Yuletide Ball, a major Brooklyn Christmastime gala, has been held in various forms since 1920 and also provides essential financial support.

Left: Yuletide Ball, 1950

Right: Yuletide Ball, December 2015. Photo: Susye Greenwood.

BKS employs more than 130 people – center directors, head teachers and their assistants and aides, social workers, cooks and their helpers, custodians, bookkeepers, part-time nurse and nutrition consultants, and central office personnel. The entire program is overseen by an active voluntary board of directors with twenty members and a parent policy council with volunteers from each of our children’s centers.

BKS has been exceptionally well served by its trustees in terms of policy setting, operational oversight and financial support. Its employees past and present, some of whom have devoted their entire working lives to BKS, have set the standard of excellence in the field of early education.

In the last few years BKS has continued to seek even higher levels of effectiveness in helping children and families break the cycle of poverty. BKS was recognized by Root Cause - Social Impact Research as one of the top seven school readiness programs in New York, after more than 1,700 programs were examined in the greater metropolitan area. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the gold standard for excellence in early childhood education, has accredited three of our five early learning centers. (In the state of New York only 1% of eligible centers are NAEYC-accredited and only 8% nationwide.) Just eighteen months ago, the Robin Hood Foundation presented BKS with its annual Robin Hood Heroes Award – a truly distinctive honor.

BKS's history is a source of pride for all who have contributed to the organization's successes for 125 years, and the future of BKS looks bright.

In this past year a new initiative was launched to strengthen the quality of home-based programs within the low income communities we serve. Ultimately impacting many hundreds of additional young children, this effort adds to an already robust program of services to younger children and their families.

In September of this year, we will be opening our sixth center in Brooklyn, in Weeksville Gardens. In addition to educating children in a traditional classroom setting, this location will have a special focus on science for children from ages two to five. And finally, BKS has become a far more data-driven organization that is able to adapt its programs continuously to meet the needs of individual children in developing their social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills. This is a good time in the history of BKS.

Five years ago, the BKS board president asked:

"How has an organization that started with a simple but noble mission managed to survive and thrive for 120 years? How does this same organization become an acknowledged leader in community-based, early childhood education in New York?"

A huge part of the answer, she went on to describe,

"... lies in the heart and hands of the thousands of people who have given generously of their time and money to make the Brooklyn Kindergarten Society into something so valuable."

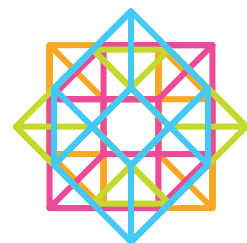
As an award-winning model of community-based early education, BKS will continue to change the lives of thousands children and improve family outcomes for many years to come.

Onward to the next 125 years!

Right: Our BKS Children, February 2016. Photo by Jean Ervasti

Written by [MALCOLM MACKAY, HISTORIAN](#)





**BROOKLYN
KINDERGARTEN
SOCIETY**

© May 2016, Brooklyn Kindergarten Society

Written by Malcom MacKay

Images: BKS and Brooklyn Historical Society Archives Photo right: Yuletide Ball December 2015, Photo by Susye Greenwood

Special thanks to Sue Fox, Harry Shulman, and Laura Trevelyan.


Design: Coen-Shabaka Design

*The Yuletide Ball is truly
a unique event.*

*Pre-ball dinners are hosted
by donors before dancing
at the Heights Casino.*

*This allows BKS to use the majority
of funds raised through ticket sales
for its programs
benefiting children and families.*





*TODAY, THE JOY OF ATTENDING
A BKS CENTER IS STILL EVIDENT
IN THE HAPPY FACES OF
THE CHILDREN WHO
COME THROUGH OUR DOORS.*