

Cornelia Foster Bradford

(Dec. 4, 1847 - Jan.15, 1935)

A dedicated volunteer, Cornelia F. Bradford helped set a foundation for early childhood education in Jersey City, reform child labor laws, and much more. She held a firm belief that people are their brothers' and sisters' keepers. She called Jersey City one of the gateways which leads from the old world into the new.

At the end of the 19th Century Paulus Hook was considered a site for urban development and Jersey City quickly became a city of immigrants. Factories abounded, providing employment for men, women and children. Ms. Bradford's investigation into the working conditions of children led to the formation of the Child Protective League and a comprehensive child labor bill.

A strong proponent of early childhood education, Cornelia Bradford believed that kindergarten was essential to a child's development and future success in life. When she established her social settlement - "The Whittier House", along with various forms of assistance programs for the poor, it featured the first free kindergarten, and with time the first playground in Jersey City. The settlement and the kindergarten welcomed all children, regardless of race, faith or nationality. An advocate for social and racial equality, Cornelia Bradford wanted to make sure that all children could have access to free early education and care.

In 1912 Cornelia F. Bradford became the first woman to serve on Jersey City Board of Education, appointed to the position by Mayor H. Otto Wittpenn.

School No. 16 located at 96 Sussex St. is called The Cornelia F. Bradford School. The name officially became effective on November 16, 1944. However, from the very moment of its inception in 1916, it was known as "The Bradford School", because Cornelia Bradford oversaw every stage of the building process. Her dream of putting a school in Paulus Hook that would welcome all children, regardless of social status, race, faith, and nationality, and providing them with an opportunity to learn in an environment of excellence, equality and inclusion, came true.