

CHAPTER IV

HISTORY OF MONTANA CONGRESS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

1918-1922

The war effort seems to have continued to take its toll in progress of the PTA, for in 1918 there is little to be found except the following notice printed in the April, 1918, issue of The Inter-Mountain Educator, p. 45:

The annual meeting of the Montana Branch of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association, usually held in the spring, has been postponed until early fall by vote of the executive committee. While some circles report a very successful winter's work in several communities, a series of epidemics has seriously interfered with the meetings, and very generally Red Cross work and other war activities have been given right of way. It is hoped that in the fall conditions will be more favorable and that the beginning of the school will logically bring enthusiasm and inspiration for the planning of the year's work.

----Alice R. Keach, Secretary

In 1919, the Montana Branch of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association met in Helena November 24, 25, and 26, as a section of the Montana State Teachers' Association. The program of this section was devoted to reports of committees, talks on different phases of child welfare work being carried on in the state, and election of officers.¹ Mrs. H. B. Farnsworth of Missoula, chairman of the section, was re-elected President. Other officers chosen were:²

¹The Inter-Mountain Educator, Vol. 15, No. 3, November, 1919, pp. 104-105. See also Appendix F, p. 231.

²The Inter-Mountain Educator, op. cit., p. 147.

. . . first vice president, Mrs. Wilbur Plum, Helena; second vice president, J. E. Keach, Missoula; third vice president, Mrs. J. P. Downey, Butte; fourth vice president, Mrs. C. M. Butler, Miles City; fifth vice president, Mrs. T. D. Stockbridge, Havare; secretary, Mrs. Walter Grant, Missoula; treasurer, Mrs. Max Jacobs, Helena.

The Inter-Mountain Educator, in its December, 1919, issue, gave a brief summary of the business meetings:³

The State Parent-Teachers association planned some far-reaching reforms for the school children of Montana for the coming year.

In addition to plans for a constructive program of work through out the state with the child as the central object, the association decided to seek more information and literature regarding the work and to give it wide distribution in Montana. Plans were made for division of the state into eight sections, each with its own officers, to have one or more delegates to the annual meetings.

Some of the reforms to be taken up are better moving picture films for children; reforms in dress; better supervision of dances given under school auspices. The reforms in dress, which were the subject of much discussion included death to the "peekaboo" style of waists, elimination of extreme styles, lower skirts and higher necks, thick materials for girls' clothing.

It was brought out that one girl in Helena was compelled to leave school because she could not keep up the sartorial pace of her schoolmates. The dress reform will start with the mothers, rather than the girls.

During the discussion relative to minimum salary for teachers the following expressions were heard from teachers:

Why must teachers be satisfied with a living wage?

We want a saving wage, as well as a living wage.

Teachers who have come from the east are obliged to send home for help.

Salary scales planned with vision last winter are out of date now.

Teachers in one town formulated budget of expense, which was much in excess of \$1000.

³Ibid., p. 155.

During the years 1918, 1919, and 1920, the Montana Congress worked in close and active cooperation with the Department of Public Health. The following extracts from the Bulletin of the Department of Health for that period give an idea of the nature and extent of this work. "Thanks are due Dr. John J. Sippy, Montana's first State epidemiologist, later of Stockton, California, for use of the bulletins, some of which are also on file at Montana State University."⁴

ANNUAL HEALTH CONFERENCE A DECIDED SUCCESS⁵

The Annual Conference of Health Officials held at Missoula on July 7th and 8th was the most successful in the public health history of Montana.

.

Perhaps the most far-reaching result of this conference was the formation of the Montana State Public Health association, uniting all the various public health organizations of the state. An unique feature of this new movement is the retention of identity of these organizations, each constituting a separate section with its own program, but all uniting in at least two general sessions at the same time and place.

.

Vice-President of Sections
Public Health Administration, Dr. L. W. Allard, Billings
Tuberculosis, Dr. Caroline McGill, Butte
Sanitation and Waterworks Engineering, Surveyor-General Harry Gerharz, Helena

⁴Quoted on a note from Mrs. Paxson, past State President of MCPT, in 1932, to Mrs. H. R. Patton, former State PTA Historian.

⁵State of Montana Bulletin of the Department of Health, Vol. 11, Nos 6-7, June-July page reference not given by Dr. Sippy.

Child Welfare, Mrs. H. G. Farnsworth, Missoula, President, Montana
Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association⁶
Industrial Hygiene, Dr. P. H. McCarthy, Butte
Personal Hygiene, Dr. E. G. Steele, Plentywood

.
FOLLOW-UP WORK FOR WEIGHING AND MEASURING TEST.

Great Falls has established a permanent Children's Clinic. The State Parent-Teachers' Association put on a dental clinic in connection with the Child Welfare Conference and exhibit at the State Fair (in Helena). It was a great success and was attended by hundreds of children. This clinic demonstrated the feasibility of a portable dental clinic, which could be easily taken through a county for rural work. One of the greatest achievements of the clinic was that of arousing the dentists to an expression of appreciation of such work.⁷

Back-to-School Drive and Stay in School Campaign

This work was most systematically organized in our State. A few counties took a deep interest in the movement, and through a progressive County Superintendent literature and posters were thoroughly distributed. More than twenty-five thousand pieces of literature have been sent from our office for distribution over the State. No surveys were made. Miss Eleanore Hunter from the Children's Bureau made quite an extensive tour of Montana speaking on this subject.

Mrs. H. B. Farnsworth, of Missoula, President of the Parent-Teachers' [sic] Association, has graciously accepted the State Chairmanship, and the "Back-to-School" and "Stay-in-School Drive" will now go forward satisfactorily. Literature and survey cards have been sent to other Presidents of the 156 Parent-Teachers' Associations throughout Montana.⁸

⁶Underlining of statement by writer.

⁷A notation in pencil from Dr. Sippy Stated: "One of the finest pieces of work we ever did."

⁸The only statistic found thus far on the number of PTA units in Montana for the year 1919.

The Tenth Biennial Report of the Montana State Board of Health, for the Years 1919-1920⁹ gives further explanation of why the Public Health Association was formed.

It has not been long since the hardest work of the health department was to combat the indifference of people toward public health work, but there has been a revolution in the attitude of the people toward such public health work. Now, the greatest task of the health department is to guide and direct public health activities which are springing up on all sides. To coordinate the work of these activities, so that there may be no overlapping and dissipation of energies, is one of the great problems of our health department

The State Board of Health and the county and local health officers succeeded last summer in completing the organization of the Montana Public Health Association. This organization has a base broad enough to take in all public health activities. As constituted at the present time the association has six sections, namely, Child Welfare section, taking in the State Parent Teachers' Association; the Municipal Engineers and Water Works Officials' section, taking in the local and county health officers; the Public Health Nursing section, where the public health nurses can get together and discuss their common health problems; and the Personal Hygiene section, which takes in representatives from life insurance companies.

The same biennial report contains frequent mention of the State Parent-Teachers' Association in conjunction with the work of the Division of Child Welfare as reported by Laurie Jean Reid, Director of that Division.¹⁰ Among the public addresses she made were those

⁹Tenth Biennial Report of the Montana State Board of Health, for the Years 1919-1920, pp. 11-12.

¹⁰Ibid. pp. 35-40.

before Missoula and Butte PTA units, and at a "joint meeting of Parent-Teacher Associations and physical directors"—no place mentioned. The educational secretary of the same Division of Child Welfare, Marion L. Fox, in her report mentions talks and programs arranged for ten Parent-Teacher Association,

Little Mothers' League material sent out to nurses, Parent-Teacher Associations, and other interested in the work . . . Interest in health work stimulated in schools through medium of Parent-Teacher Associations.¹¹

Under "Fair work, Helena" she lists

Little Mothers' League demonstration under direction of Miss Zogarts. School lunch demonstration under direction of Parent-Teacher Association Circles and Miss Swan, County Demonstration Agent.¹²

A note to Mrs. Farnsworth from Dr. Sippy who supplied much of this material, states, "The P-T-A co-operated very actively in all of this work," meaning the conferences held at various fairs throughout the State during 1919, and the conferences on health work at various schools. Referring again to the Bulletin of the Department of Health,¹³ this report on the work of the child Welfare Division has its amusing side:

¹¹Bulletin of the Department of Health, Vol. 11, Nos. 9-10, September-October, 1919, pp. 17-18.

¹²Bulletin of the Department of Health, Vol. 11, Nos. 9-10, September-October, 1919, p. 18.

¹³Ten Biennial Report of the Montana State Board of Health, for the Years 1919-1920, p. 40.

A series of Child Welfare Conferences were held at the various fairs. . . . Approximately 1845 children were examined, weighed and measured. Local doctors, health officers, nurses and nurses yet in training gave their services to further the work.

It was the aim at this conferences to educate the parents by showing them that prize baby no longer means simply pinning a ribbon on the child, who by its winsome manner or curly hair appeals most strongly to the judges, but by point out to the individual parents how their child deviates from the standards of a normal child and by teaching them the importance of preventive measures in early childhood.

	Children from Four Months to Six Years	School Children
Helena	117	---
Billings	250	---
Missoula	300	700
Gilman	54	75
Ravalli	300	---
Circle	49	---

The report of the remainder of 1919 for the Division of Child Welfare records the efforts to arouse interest in physical examinations of children, improved nutrition, and better school facilities.¹⁴ With today's modern lighting, sanitary conveniences, fire-proof buildings, libraries, improved means of transportation for pupils, and a minimum school term of 180 days—to list just a few major advanced—it is sometimes difficult to visualize that, in 1918, Montana required a school term of four months,¹⁵ that "In 300 schools of the state there were no

¹⁴See Report of Division of Child Welfare, State of Montana Bulletin of the Department of Health, Vol. 12, No. 1, January, 1920, p. 23. (Reprinted in Appendix E.)

¹⁵Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of Montana, 1918, p. 124.

library books whatever and in 351 there schools there scarcely enuf [sic] books to be called a library,"¹⁶ that gross inequalities existed in ability of school districts to finance their schools, that corruption in expenditure of school funds seemed rampant in certain areas,¹⁷ that there were ported 248 "make-shift school houses,"¹⁸ that "in other cases, wealthy districts were not providing comfortable or sanitary quarters for their children."¹⁹

Miss Trumper, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, further deplored the teacher emergency when she reported²⁰

The very large increase in enrollment in the public schools of the state has meant an ever increasing demand for teachers which has not been met by our state institutions. In 1907-8 there were 1907 teachers in the state and in 191997-918, 5781, an increase of 203 per cent. . . . In Dawson county along the teaching force increased from 206 to 275 from 1916-17 to 1917-18 and in Sheridan county there were 84 more teachers than the previous year. In other counties the number of teachers has not kept pace with the enrollment so that hundreds of children are deprived of any school. In November, 1918, there were still 165 schools that were not supplied with teachers. The problem of furnishing a sufficient number of trained teachers is a very serious one, a problem that every thotful [sic] patron should study. Our one State Normal College graduated in 1918 only about 60 teachers, only about as many as were needed in the new schools created in Dawson county alone With all positions filled we need over 1800 new teachers annually. . . . As a temporary measure to help meet this great emergency, rural teacher training courses in high schools have been established, but these also are inadequate to meet the ever increasing demands.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 84

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 86-97; p. 119

¹⁸Ibid., lp. 81

¹⁹Ibid., p. 81

²⁰Fifteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of Montana, 1918, p. 26.

It is not surprising, therefore to find that the State Board of Health and the State Department of Public Instruction both tried to further interest people in the work of the Parent-Teacher Association. The following article appeared in the April-May Bulletin of the Health Department:²¹

"Health first in our schools" is the call heard with increased frequency in every community awakened to the value of health. The problems of health have to do principally with environment. The environment of the child is largely home and school. One of the most logical mediums, therefore, through which to do child welfare work for school children is the Parent-Teacher Association. The Parent-Teacher Association combines the two important factors in the child's life—home and school, and stands for progress in all matters pertaining to child betterment. In consequence, a life Parent-Teacher Circle can be of inestimable value to its community.

Parent-Teacher Associations throughout Montana are sponsoring various child welfare movements such as Little Mothers' Leagues, or Mother Craft classes, called the largest volunteer life savings corps in the world. A large share of the credit for reducing infant mortality in localities where they have been organized, is due to the faithful following of instructions by the "Little Mothers."

The Modern Health Crusade, a simple system for teaching valuable health habits, and the Hot Lunch Movement, which is so greatly needed in many places, are also sponsored by the State Parent-Teacher Association.

Doing specific things to attain specific ends is the function of each local, affiliated Parent-Teacher Circle. When every town has its Circle, affiliated with the State Association, and every Circle is making a unified effort to the same end, child welfare work in the schools will become a forcible factor in Montana.

²¹Bulletin of the Department of Public Health, Vol. 7, No. 12, April-May, 1920, p. 17.