

## THE PTA MOVEMENT IN MONTANA TO 1918

The PTA movement in Montana seems to have had its inception in various towns, possibly as early as 1910 or 1911. Certainly it did not exist in 1906 when Mrs. E. B. Weirick<sup>1</sup> of Butte, speaking before the Montana State Teachers' Association on December 18, 1906, said, in an address, "The Relation Between the Home and the Schools,"<sup>2</sup>

The committee in assigning me this topic suggested that I entitle it "The Relation Between the Home and the Schools," or "The Relation Between the Schools and the Home," and I know . . . that there is a need of a stronger union between the home and the schools . . . . Mothers and fathers must awaken to a realizing sense of their responsibilities if in the home is to begin aright the education of the child . . . . I am glad that several states have formed societies for child study and that there are mothers' Congresses and home departments of women's clubs.

However, Dr. Harold Tascher, in his biography of Maggie Smith Hathaway, Maggie and Montana,<sup>3</sup> asks, "What is the pace of the school-house in the district? Did Maggie Smith institute the PTA in Montana?" He quotes from some of her early writings:

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<sup>1</sup>"Mrs. Weirick is a member of the State Board of charity and Reforms, having been recently appointed by Governor S. V. Stewart. She is the first woman in the state to be appointed to this board." Helena Daily Independent, May 6, 1916.

<sup>2</sup>Inter-Mountain Educator, 1906, pp. 62-70.

<sup>3</sup>Harold Tascher, Maggie and Montana; the Story of Maggie Smith Hathaway. New York, Exposition Press, 1954, p. 1.

Our schoolhouses are our district universities, the centers of educational interest. We have advocated calling together the patrons on certain occasions that they might come in closer touch with the school activities, that they might become familiar with the work done for, and by, the children, that by their presence they might give encouragement to the efforts that are being put forth for the advancement of the pupils. We wish the parents and patrons could feel more and more the need of hearty co-operation along these lines. Meetings for the discussion of educational questions and current topics are always a living and practical feature in the school district . . . . The County Superintendent is ready at any time to assist by suggestion or public address at any of these meetings.

Certain other items reveal trends in thinking that were to lead eventually to the state organization. The program for the annual convention of the Montana State Teachers' Association for 1911 in Great Falls had for its general session program on Thursday, December 28, the following:

- The Distribution of Responsibility in Training for Citizenship
- a. For the Home--Mrs. H. B. Mitchell, Great Falls.
  - b. For the Church--Dr. N. H. Burdick, Presbyterian Church, Helena.
  - c. For the School--W. E. Ryan, Supt. of Schools, Deer Lodge

By 1914, there was a designated Parent-Teacher section scheduled as part of the annual teachers' convention.<sup>4</sup> Mrs. John Smith of Butte, as chairman, spoke on "Literature as a Factor in Child Development," while Mrs. T. C. Brockway led a round-table discussion on the

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<sup>4</sup>Program for Montana State Teachers' Association, 1914, 25th Annual Session, Butte, Nov. 23, 24, 25.

topics: "a. Play as a Social Factor; b. Importance of Play in the Proper Development of the Body; c. Constructive Play: How Best to Guide the Gang Spirit in Boys; d. The Value of Supervised Play; e. Playground Movement in Montana." Earlier that same year, H. A. Davee, State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Montana, was chairman of a Conference of Parent-Teacher Associations at the Inland Empire teachers' Association.<sup>5</sup>

The first tangible proof of a specific PTA unit's being formed is in two sources--a Founders' Day address given by Mrs. Clara M. Munger in Helena,<sup>6</sup> and in the Independent Record for February, 1953. Mrs. Munger said:

John Dietrich, Superintendent of Schools here (Helena) called a meeting of Helena parents in 1914 to form a Parent-Teacher group. At first there was only one organization, but soon each school organized its own unit. By 1916 the Helena Chapter entertained its first State Convention . . . . Since then PTA groups have constantly worked at various tasks to benefit the community for our youth. Among the accomplishments in the early years were furnishings for the schools not included in the budget of those days. These included pianos, refrigerators, pictures, draperies, stage curtains, and kitchen equipment. The establishment of school lunch programs was a number one program for many years--safety zone areas near various schools another. Each year the

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<sup>5</sup>Program for Inland Empire Teachers' Association--16th Annual Meeting, April 15, 16, 17, 1914.

<sup>6</sup>President, Montana Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1955-1958.

PTA's sponsor the Christmas seal sale and were instrumental in getting our present City-County health system. Boy and Girl Scout troops and Camp Fire groups are sponsored by the various PTA units. When new school buildings were needed, it was these groups that "put over" many of the bond drives. During war time the PTA's were active in the block leader programs. Today (over 40 years later) our efforts lean heavily toward scholarships to help the present teacher shortage

The Sunday issue of the Independent Record (Helena) for February 15, 1953, devoted page six to inviting visiting legislators and City residents to the PTA Council meeting the following week and to recording the early history of Helena units, Founders' Day, and beginnings of the National Congress. As Mrs. Munger said, the schools soon formed their separate units. The Independent Record reported:

Through the years minutes and scrap books of early meetings of the various PTA meetings have been lost or misplaced, but Central and Kessler units still have records of their first meetings.

the first meeting of the Parent-Teacher circle for Central building convened in the auditorium in December, 1914. Mrs. M. H. Gerry acted as temporary chairman. The following officers were chosen: Mrs. J. Saunders, president; Mrs. H. L. Sherlock, vice president; permanent secretary, Mrs. Gerry, and Mrs. J. G. Brown, treasurer. The constitution was read and adopted. Principle [sic] M. H. McConnell invited all patrons to visit daily rooms.<sup>7</sup>

Central's PTA organized and the women started to work. They made the "manual training room into an assembly room," sent \$5 to the National Child Labor organization, donated 54 books to the Women's TB sanitarium at Galen, bought a scale for weighing in children and gave a silk flag to the school. Cups had to be purchased and the dues were raised from 15 to 25 cents.

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<sup>7</sup>Meaning of newspaper article is not clear.

In 1918 \$6.80 was sent to the state treasurer for 68 members of Central's circle to join national. In 1926 members totaled 198. A luncheon was given that year for the teachers of Central.

In the fall of 1933, Prof. C. H. Marple spoke on the Subject "Literature for Children," and was submitted this as a project for these years and it was accepted. Seven hundred books were catalogued that year through the work of a committee of Miss Lacy Kreiman,<sup>8</sup> Mrs. S. C. Ford, Mrs. C. M. McCoy, Mrs. Celia Nelson, Miss Gooman, and Professor Marple.

Kessler unit had a similar beginning in 1928. Mothers of children attending Kessler school were invited by Mrs. Stevens to attend a meeting Nov. 2. Plans were made to organize the mothers into an association to be called the Kessler School circle. First officers were: Mrs. William Converse, president; Mrs. R. Reed, vice-president; and Mrs. J. Barker, secretary-treasurer. Sixteen members were present. Numerous dances, card parties, and money-making ventures were held to get needed equipment for the school. At one time they taxed each member 25 cents per month until a piano was paid for.

Among many other projects described in the same newspaper were the weekly matinee for school children, the first clinic for children in 1916, establishment of a dental clinic in 1930, an all-city Christmas party, and a scrap drive during the war years. In 1944, PTA groups canned peaches to augment school lunches. Among those helping in this project were Mrs. Ethel Miller, cannery supervisor;

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<sup>8</sup>Newspaper misprint. Should be Miss Lucy Kreiman.

Mrs. Ralph Gilbert, Harry Ross, Linus J. Carleton, Mrs. O. F. Barnes, Miss Harryet Stewart, and members of the Helena High School home economics class.<sup>9</sup>

Were the records available, a story similar to that just recorded would undoubtedly be recounted of the origins of PTA units in various parts of the state. Even some of the topics of discussion—"What Do We Expect the Public Schools to Do For Our Children," "Evening Hours with My Children," and "Training of Boys and Girls for Definite Service" have a familiar ring.

#### First State Congress Meeting

Interest in the PTA movement apparently grew during the year of 1914 so that an organization committee with Mrs. John Smith of Butte as chairman began plans for the formation of a State Congress. The Butte Miner is one of the few sources of information for this first meeting on May 7, 1915.<sup>10</sup>

At the High School auditorium this evening at 8:00 o'clock, the members of the Butte Parent-Teachers Circles will receive officers of the national body and women prominent in the work started in Butte some months ago. The distinguished visitors will arrive at 7:15 o'clock and in the party will be Mrs. Frederick Schoff of Philadelphia, President of the National Association; Mrs. Milton T. Higgins, vice-president of Worcester, Massachusetts; Mrs. Orville T. Bright of Chicago, another vice-president; Miss Bessie Locke of New York,

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<sup>9</sup>Op. cit. p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Butte Miner, May 7, 1915, p. 1.

Director of the Kindergarten division of the United States Bureau of Education. Mrs. A. W. Richter, a leader of the organization in Bozeman, and women from nearby cities will also be in attendance at the meetings which will last through Saturday.

Following the program<sup>11</sup> at the high school this evening, a public reception will be tendered the visitors at the Silver Bow Club.

On the following day, the paper reported that Butte people gave a "rousing welcome" to the visitors "who head the national organization which is encouraging the establishment of child welfare work all over the country."

The address of the evening was made by Mrs. Schoff. She had a most attentive audience as her message was expected to be of the greatest value in the future conduct of the local organizations which have done so much for the schools in Butte since their incipency. Mrs. Schoff did not disappoint . . . While she dealt largely with a history of the work of her educational bodies in the East and especially as regards her home city of Philadelphia, this was all instructive. She also furnished to her audience many important hints as to the conduct of local work in outlining what has been done by the national organization and its branches.

Reportorial style of the period gave flowery praise to all of the speakers on the two-day program, but reported little of the content. An exception was the speech of Miss Bessie Locke.

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<sup>11</sup>Butte Miner, May 8, 1915. See Appendix C, p. 223.

In the course of her remarks, Miss Locke said that it would probably interest a Butte audience to know that 15 years ago she had requested Senator W. A. Clark to support a kindergarten in New York City, and that it was established by Senator Clark in memory of Mrs. Katherine Stauffer Clark. Since that time, the speaker said, probably more than a thousand children had been trained in that school which ever since has been maintained by Senator Clark. . . .

There is no part of the United States where there is a larger Generosity in the department of education than in this great progressive West. . . . You should be alert to the importance of the kindergarten as the chief factor in the formation and development of the character of the children of your land. Your colleges are among the best, but how few of your children will reach them; the earlier and more important steps of childish education lag. . . .

It has been suggested that boards of education would probably establish kindergartens upon petition of parents with special legislation, so I have brought with me some blank petitions and suggest that everyone living near a public school needing a kindergarten, will present a petition signed by the parents or guardians of 25 children and work for its favorable consideration. . . . It is reasonable to believe that in so up-to-date a community as this great salutary propaganda must receive your hearty indorsement.

In effecting the formal organization of the Montana Branch of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teachers Association, a constitution must have been adopted, because reports of conventions during the next two years make reference to this document. The earliest

copy extant<sup>12</sup> is not dated, but since it provides for an annual convention, it probably was in use after 1920 and before 1927.<sup>13</sup>

The first officers of the Montana Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teachers Association as given in the Sunday, May 9, 1915, Butte Miner were

President, Mrs. J. A. Smith, Butte  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice-president—Mrs. Wilson, Great Falls  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-president—Mrs. T. C. Brockway, Butte  
3<sup>rd</sup> Vice-president—Mrs. A. W. Richter, Bozeman  
4<sup>th</sup> Vice-president—Mrs. Farnsworth, Missoula  
5<sup>th</sup> Vice-president—Mrs. Cunningham, Helena  
Corresponding Secretary—Miss Jessie Faddis, Butte  
Recording Secretary, Superintendent Winais,<sup>14</sup> Livingston  
Treasurer—Mrs. Gaily, Anaconda

Protection of school lands and the funds from the sale thereof occupied the attention of delegates to the second annual state convention of the PTA, meeting in Helena May 5 and 6, 1916. The Press Committee—Miss Emma A. Perry, Mrs. E. N. Grandegge, and Mrs. J. Chivers—publicized the meetings well for good accounts are found both in the Helena Daily Independent and the Great Falls Tribune of that period.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Appendix I, p. 239.

<sup>13</sup>See Report of Executive Committee, p. 36.

<sup>14</sup>This is apparently a typographical error in the newspaper, for a check with the Montana Educational Directory for 19155 gives<sup>5</sup> the name as B. A. Winans, Superintendent at Livingston. (p. 23)

<sup>15</sup>See Appendix D, p. 225 FF.

With a view to supporting the state land board in its efforts to protect the unapproved land selections from the activities of land locators and other unscrupulous persons in their efforts to secure congressional action which would mean of a loss of \$5,000,000 or \$6,000,000 to the permanent school fund the following resolution was passed yesterday afternoon by the Montana branch of the National Parent-Teacher Association which is now in session in this city.

"Resolved by the Montana Branch of the PTA that we do hereby most heartily approve of the provisions of Senate Bill No. 2380 and House Bill No. 8491 providing for an expeditious adjudication of the pending state selections of school lands in accordance with the law and practiced so uniformly adhered to in the past."

Be it further "Resolved that we most vigorously protest against any amendment to said bills, whereby settlers may go upon, and initiate any rights to any state land selections previously made, thus repudiating the action of the honorable Secretary of The Interior, in approving similar selections and which will subject the state to a possible loss of over 600,000 acres of unapproved selections of land, and a loss to the children of the state of millions of dollars by opening the flood gates to counter claims." Great Falls Tribune, May 6, 1916.

Members of the Resolutions Committee included Mrs. Farnsworth, Missoula, chairman; Mrs. Dozois of Roundup, Mrs. Rutledge of Bozeman, Miss Kathryn Johnston of Helena, and Miss Faddis, Butte.

Since the newspaper accounts state that Mrs. T. C. Brockway of Butte, President of the Montana Branch of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, presided, it must be inferred that Mrs. John Smith, elected to the office the previous year in Butte,

had resigned some time during the year of 1915. The Great Falls Tribune<sup>16</sup> for May 7, 1916, listed the officers elected at the second annual state meetings

Mrs. T. C. Brockway, of Butte, was elected president of the Montana Branch; Mrs. C. H. Bowman of Butte, vice-president; Mrs. L. M. McAlister, of Great Falls, auditor, and Miss McDonough, of Butte, historian.

A copy of the program for the Montana State Teachers' Association,<sup>17</sup> meeting in Missoula for its 27<sup>th</sup> annual session, on the dates of November 27, 28, and 29, 1916, includes a PTA program given before the Country Life Section on the afternoon of the 27<sup>th</sup>. Mrs. Farnsworth presided as chairman for the meeting which had for its theme, "Control of Childhood's Environment (a) by Recreation, (b) by Health Conditions." Addresses were given by Professor W. H. Mustaine, Montana State University, on "Recreation"; and Dr. W. F. Cogswell, Secretary of the State Board of Health in Helena, on "Common Physical Defects in School Children—How They Hinder Mental Development." Mrs. Farnsworth, State PTA vice-president, discussed "The Meaning of the Parent-Teacher Movement," an abstract of which is given in the Inter-Mountain Educator for January, 1917, p. 23.<sup>18</sup> She said in part:

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<sup>16</sup>Op. Cit. p. 225.

<sup>17</sup>Found in an unclassified miscellany in the Montana Collection of the Northwest History Room at Montana State University.

<sup>18</sup>The official organ of the Montana State Teachers' Association until 1925.

Of all the forward impulses in modern education none are more heavily laden with promise for good than the wide-spread and well-organized movement for a better understanding and therefore better co-operation between parents and teachers.

The home was the first educational institution. It was in it that the children of an earlier race gained all needful knowledge and only as an advancing civilization made more and more exacting demands upon human efficiency that the school was established to supplement the work of the home; and it is probably not over-stating the truth to say that the efficiency of these two forces will be in direct ratio to the unity and the mutual understanding which exists between them.

. . . since the home and the school instead of stagnating are coming more and more to a realization of their duties and privileges, each is holding out its hands to the other its most natural ally in this nation-wide movement for the study of all conditions which relate to childhood and youth with a view to bettering them in every possible way.

This was the fundamental idea which actuated the founders of the parent-teacher movement . . . the secondary results have proven quite as important as the primary one. And the communities which have entered upon an unselfish study of the conditions which surround their children in the home, the school, and the neighborhood have soon discovered that they were bettering their own living conditions as well.

Mrs. Farnsworth also urged making the local school building "the center of the community's life where plans are laid for making the most of the community resource".

During the same year—1916—Mr. H. A. Davee, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, began the publication of a school bulletin. In the first issue<sup>19</sup> he devoted several pages to the Parent-Teacher Organization with suggestions on how to organize, preliminary

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<sup>19</sup>School Bulletin, Department of Public Instruction of the State of Montana, Helena, April, 1916, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 5.

work to be done such as sending out notices, program planning, and making arrangements for the meeting. He also included a model constitution. Among the topics Mr. Davee listed for discussion, the following are interesting:

School Visitation, the Home and the Newspaper, What Constitutes a Good Father, Ventilation and Lighting, The Value of Manual Training, . . . Where Do Our Children Spend Their Evenings? . . . Medical Inspection of Pupils, and Value of Domestic Science.

Mr. Davee's interest, however, extended even further. In this same issue of the School Bulletin,<sup>20</sup> he included a request, unofficial, for information regarding the PTA.

UNOFFICIAL REPORT

(To Be Sent to Supt. H. A. Davee, Helena, Montana)

Name of School \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
Name of Teacher or Principal \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
Address of Teacher or Principal \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
When was Parent-Teacher Association Organized? \_ \_  
\_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
Name of President \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
Address of President \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
Name of Secretary \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
Address of Secretary \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
Date of Meetings \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
Number of Meetings since Sept. 1, 1915 \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
What good work has been done \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
Plans on foot for more good work \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
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<sup>20</sup>School Bulletin, Department of Public Instruction of the State of Montana, Helena, April, 1916, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 5.

No account has been found of the information Mr. Davee may have received from the report, but it may possibly have prompted the inclusion of the paragraph in his Biennial Report as State Superintendent of Public Instruction:<sup>21</sup>

PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS

This organization was especially helpful during the past two years. Receptions for new teachers, added equipment, more inspirational school grounds, hot lunch, community, county, and state gatherings, better movies, and even financial assistance, are some of the good things that already stand to the credit of this enterprising young organization. The state officers of the Parent-Teacher Association have proved themselves to be men and women of real vision and they have been just as ready to help the small and remote schools as they have to assist those in large centers.

He continues, later in the report,

Hot lunch, home credit work, cooperation with other schools, sanitary inspection, and the organization of Parent-Teacher Associations have resulted from the activities named (state and county Country Life Associations . . . corn, canning, and potato clubs, educational exhibits, spelling bees, other social gatherings) . . . that without fear of successful contradiction it can be said, "The school that is too small or too poor to think that it can be helped and made better by regular and systematic cooperation of teachers, trustees, parents and pupils, is too small to justify its existence.,"<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Fourteenth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Montana, 1916, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 25.