



New Jersey Council of Education

THE COUNCIL EMERGES:

ITS LIFE BEGINS

Dr. Meleney knew that in a democratic society one lone man – even a man with a impelling vision – can do little. He must call upon friends for help. Friends he had in profusion – wise, potent, and strategically placed. From among them, the President of the State Teachers' Association selected six to meet with him in the office of William N. Barringer, Newark Superintendent of Schools, to discuss the possible the possible organization of the contemplated Council.

Superintendent Barringer served as chairman of the Committee of Seven, which met in his office on March 3, 1887. The Committee, whose appointment and authorization was a formal action of the State Teachers' Association, consisted of Dr. Meleney, Andrew W. Edson, James M. Green, Charles E Bass, B.C. Gregory, Henry E. Harris and Chairman Barringer.

The Committee had been commissioned by the State Teachers' Association to "proceed with the organization of a Council if propitious." Both the Association and the Committee, however, were acutely conscious of the inherent sensitivities involved in a relationship between a "parent" organization and a Council purposely created to exercise an influential voice of its own. This recognized problem led the Committee of Seven to appoint three of its members – Messrs. Edson, Green, and Gregory – as sub-committee to draw up a proposed constitution, together with a list of purposes.

The sub-committee, realizing the essentiality of its test, worked expeditiously and, on June 18, 1887, reconvened with the full committee. Its draft was thoroughly discussed, amended in several particulars, and finally, reconvened with the full committee. Its draft was thoroughly discussed, amended in several particulars, and finally, unanimously adopted.

The name given to the new organization was the "New Jersey Council of Education." Temporary officers were elected for organizational purposes: Mr. Barringer as president, Mr. Gregory as secretary, and Mr. Green as treasurer. The Council's functions and purposes, as announced by the Committee, would be the investigation and consideration of topics relating to education, the dissemination of information on education, and advancement of the educational interests of the State, and the modification of educational policy in keeping with the advancement of educational thought.

The new constitution provided that the Council, at first, would be limited to a membership of thirty-two outstanding educators. Since the Committee of Seven, by virtue of their original appointment by the Teachers' Association and their organizational activities, were already, in a sense, ex officio members, the task of selecting twenty-five additional members remained.

Because of the State Teachers' Association's parental relationship, the original constitution of the Council carefully delineated, in respect to membership, the selective process. Of the thirty-two members, the document stated, one-half were to serve one year, beginning January 1, 1888 and the other half would serve two years, from the same date. The Committee of Seven retained itself the privilege of selecting the first twenty-five members. The selection process, in great degree, however, remained in the hands of the State Teachers' Association. At the December, 1887, meeting of the State Teachers' Association and at each subsequent annual meeting, sixteen new Council members would be selected for three-year terms, eight to be nominated by the State Teachers' Association and eight by the existing members of the Council. These, added to the original thirty-two Council members, would then form a continuous body with a maximum membership of forty-eight, limited "to persons engaged in actual professional work as educators of recognized standing, residing or teaching in the State of New Jersey."

The Committee of Seven had to meet several times in 1887, simply to select the members of what President Barringer called "the most important educational body ever organized in the State of New Jersey." Membership suggestions were carefully screened. Some were approved by the founding Committee in June, 1887. Others were added in July, September, and December. To the thirty-two whose original selection lay in their hands, the Committee added the eight who were elected by them at the annual State Teacher's meeting. Thus, when the original membership list was announced, it included forty "charter members."

On September 7, 1887, The Committee of Seven, in order to maintain provisional status until the December meeting of the State Teacher's Association, formally notified the State Board of Education of its organization, and included in the notification an outline of its proposed purposes and scope.

The forty charter members, as of January 1, 1888, truly belong in a Hall of Fame of those who wrote bright pages in New Jersey's education history.

Austin C. Apgar
John Enright
William N. Barringer
Dr. Samuel A. Farrand
Charles E. Bass
Dr. M.E. Gates
Rev. F.R. Brace
B. C. Gregory
Geoffrey Buckwalter
Chris Gregory
Dr. Nicholas M. Butler
William N. Griffin
Joseph Clark
F. W. Hanson
Vernon L. Daley
Henry E. Harris
Wright Eckersley
B. Holmes
Andrew W. Edson
Charles Jacobs
Alex Johnson
August Scarlett
Edward Kelley
Randall Spaulding
Samuel Lockwood
C.C. Steinmetz
Clarence E. Meleney
W. S. Sweeney
Dr. James McCosh
George Taylor, O.F.
S.R. Morse
Dr. John H. Vincent
A.B. Poland
Andrew F. West
Dr. J. A. Reinhardt
Rev. George W. Whitney
Henry R. Russell

These were men of stature, educationally, personally, and politically. All were educators, living in New Jersey, although one Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, worked outside the borders of the State. Nevertheless, he had a tangible relationship with New Jersey education, having previously served as an elementary school principal in Elizabeth. Also, included in the charter membership were two college professors, several Normal School teachers, and a substantial number of county and city superintendents. A later secretary of the Council, in depicting the history of the Council up to 1938, characterized the original members as "educational giants." Even as giants, they possessed some of the common human frailties are evidenced by the fact that a year later, a block of them was dropped for "non-attendance at meetings and non-payment of dues."

In succeeding years, as the State's population burgeoned, the number of schools grew. And, as professional staffs increased, it became evident that the forty-eight membership limitation was serving as a brake for the surging activities planned by the Council. In 1900, the membership was enlarged to seventy-five. In 1913, one hundred became the limit, then 125 in 1921, 200 in 1938, 210 in 1941, and 225 in 1962, when the Council celebrated its 75th anniversary. The limit, since 1970 is 300.

Very evidently there were pressures constantly pushing the enrollment limitations upward. Predominant, of course, were the Council's prestige reputation and its "long waiting lists" that today remain symbolic of the high regard in which membership is clothed. Undoubtedly, the enlarged capacity of meeting halls, with fine dining facilities, made expansion possible, as did the recognition that a larger membership was necessary to spread the Council's influence throughout the State. Frequently, however, some members have recalled the nostalgia, the close, intimate relations, which the smaller membership encouraged. In fact, in 1910, when the limitation was seventy-five, a motion was made to cut back membership to the original forty-eight figure. The motion was defeated, and since that time the inevitability of increases in size has been tacitly accepted.

Since its origin in 1887, only about two thousand educators have been admitted into membership, and their names constitute an Honor Roll, a true Hall of Fame, in the history of education in this State. Strange as it may seem, the membership, which consisted chiefly of school administrators and Normal School and college teachers, did not discriminate on the basis of sex. In a published document of 1900 appears the statement that "... In the early history of the Council ladies and male teachers were chose to membership, but the former dropped out, by choice, not caring to the kind of work imposed upon the membership." In perusing the early membership lists, one find only four names which could with confidence be attached to feminine personages: Miss Julia E. Buckley, Miss Phoebe Hancock, Miss Ella A. McPherson, and Miss Alice C. Wilson. In early 1974, the Council of Education was a totally masculine enclave. This status was shattered at the Council's March 8, 1974 meeting when Mrs. Adele Magnolia, Rahway principal, was admitted. From that time forward, it was obvious that the Council would be truly coeducational.

Practially, all Council members have been directly associated with public education. There have been a few exceptions: notable among thse were the previously mentioned Dr. Nicholas Murry Butler of Columbia University. Others, rather clearly identified, have been Willis Farrand, headmaster of Newark Academy; Charles T. Hook of Bloomfield Theological Seminary; and Dr. A. L. Suhrie of New York University, Dr. Frederick L. Hipp, executive director of the New Jersey Education Association and Dr. Mark Hurwitz, Executive Secretary of the New Jersey School Boards Association, can also be considered present exceptions. There are, however, a sizeable contingent who, having retired from public education, continue their valued membership while serving in other posts particularly in private and college education. There are also a few individuals, employed in private institutions, especially in the preparation of teachers, that have been admitted to membership privileges.

In its long history, the Council of Education has been seemingly imbued with indefatigable energy, perhaps because problems crying for amelioration have been always abundant with crisis characteristics. During two brief periods of time – 1894-95 and 1924-25 – there appeared to be noticeable diminutions of activity. On both occasions, however, strong leadership quickly revitalized the organization and its activities. The scheduling of meetings on fixed dates, rather than on call of its officers, eliminated one obvious weakness in the organization structure. Since that determination, attendance has been fantastically high. Except in the case of dire emergency, members uniformly considered their attendance at all meetings to be a matter of custom. Of course, stimulating and contemporary programs of tested appeal, presented by acknowledged authorities, have given to each meeting a professional coloration and significance from which no member feels he/she can safely absent himself.

A marked adaptation of Council procedures to be imperatives of a changing world of education probably occurred in 1925 when Dr. William J. Bickett, then Superintendent of Trenton Schools and President of the Council, conducted a spirited evaluation of Council procedures, with Ira T. Chapman, New Brunswick Superintendent, spelling out as speaker a host of invigorating and vitalizing program recommendations. The "improved program" recommended by Superintendent Chapman, with refinements which arose in the subsequent discussion, was authorized for implementation by the Executive Committee shortly thereafter. Although, as a result of various committee reports, changes in procedures and policies have continuously affected Council activities, they have customarily been of an evolutionary nature.