

**A HISTORY OF THE PUBLIC  
EDUCATION  
ASSOCIATION OF  
PHILADELPHIA**

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A History of the Public Education Association of Philadelphia by Lewis R. Harley

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**LEWIS R. HARLEY**

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The development of facilities for the training of teachers at the University ;

The increase of opportunities for the training of teachers in vacation time in connection with the University Extension Summer Meeting ;

The greatly increased interest and pride of the community in our public school system stimulated by such exhibitions of the work of pupils as that held in Horticultural Hall in May, 1888—surely all these taken together constitute most substantial progress.

The time is rapidly coming when Philadelphia will take as much pride and interest in its public schools as does Boston or Chicago ; when the last vestiges of that harmful feeling so long prevalent in this city that the public schools are for the poor, will have disappeared—a feeling which can be easily explained on account of the origin of the public school system ;\* but a feeling which is certainly in these days no longer justified.

In the great work of these last years, the Public Education Association can fairly claim to have played an important part. It has aided all the movements for the better ; it has itself instituted and carried through some of the most important. In doing this, it has followed worthily in the footsteps of many preceding associations of similar aim ; for nearly every great

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\* Cf. C. S. Bernheimer, " Public Education in Philadelphia." With an Introduction by Edmund J. James. Published by the Public Education Association, 1896.

improvement in our public school system—nay even the establishment of that public school system itself—has been brought about by the efforts of some voluntary association of public spirited citizens, in sympathy with, though not a part of, the public school system.\* This is true even though the first thought of the improvement may in some cases have been owing to men engaged in the system either as teachers or as members of school boards. What the Association has done and tried to do is told more fully in the following pages by Dr. Harley, and on page 38 is given a brief summary of the directions in which it has been active.

The work is, however, not by any means all done. Eternal vigilance is the price of success. The existence of some such association as this is necessary to the highest welfare of the schools. Standing outside of the school system, this body is always watching its workings, willing to lend a helping hand whenever an old abuse is to be abolished or a new improvement introduced—ready to throw the weight of its influence in favor of those forces which make for progress in our schools and to ward off all attacks upon their existence or efficiency, whether they come from openly avowed enemies of the schools or from those still more dangerous enemies who, under the guise of friendship and sympathy, seek merely to use the schools to advance their own private or political ends.

The Association may rightly ask all public spirited citizens to aid in this work.

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\* Cf. C. S. Bernheimer, "Public Education in Philadelphia."

The immediate task before the Association is :

(1) To assist in the movement to reform the present system of educational administration in the city. For six years past the Association has labored to persuade the community and the Legislature that the relations between the local and central school boards are not such as they should be. The existing plan involves irresponsibility, wastefulness and inefficiency. The powers of the Central Board should be strengthened at least to such a point as to enable it to exercise a thorough and efficient control over the equipment of the school houses, the character of the teaching and the assignment of pupils;

(2) To assist in enforcing the new compulsory school law which, from present indications, is destined to remain largely a dead letter unless public attention is thoroughly aroused to its importance;

(3) To aid in the development of the rapidly growing interest in the training of children along esthetic, moral and physical, as well as intellectual, lines;

(4) A continuance in its persistent efforts to arouse and concentrate public interest in the schools; for after all, the rapid and permanent improvement of the public school system must rest upon an intelligent and pervasive public interest in the schools themselves.

In publishing this brief account of the work of the Public Education Association, it is proper to refer to the distinguished services of Dr. James MacAlister to the cause of public education in this city; first as Superintendent of Schools, and later as President of the Drexel Institute, which, under his direction,

has become a most valuable supplement to the existing agencies in this community for public education. Nor should we members of the Association forget the earnest and self-sacrificing labors of Miss Charlotte Pendleton, who first suggested the organization of the Association, as its Secretary during the twelve years in which it has been most active. It is not too much to say that without her important and continuous labors the work of which we have reason to be proud could not have been accomplished.

The Association should, moreover, hold in special honor the memory of two of its earliest and most active members: Edward T. Steel and Mrs. J. Dundas Lippincott. To their unwearied efforts the Association owes much of its success, and for their devotion to the interests of public education in this community every Philadelphian should be grateful.

EDMUND J. JAMES,

*Chairman.*

*University of Pennsylvania,  
January 1, 1896.*





## THE PUBLIC EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF PHILADELPHIA.

### EARLY HISTORY.

The desirability of improving the school system of Philadelphia has given rise to a number of voluntary associations, which have been actively engaged for several years in urging reforms and promoting the development of the schools in various ways. Among the most active of these organizations has been the Public Education Association of Philadelphia.

This association, like some of its predecessors, grew out of charity work.\* Its source was the Committee on the Care and Education of Dependent Children of the Society for Organizing Charity. When the charity organization was founded in 1880, it appointed five general committees to formulate and direct its work. Miss Pendleton was one of the five original members of the Committee on the Care and Education of Dependent Children, and at the first meeting of the Committee, she was appointed chairman of the sub-committee. At this meeting, held November 27, 1880, the following resolution was adopted:

*Resolved*, that a sub-committee of five be appointed to study and report upon compulsory and industrial education.

The chair appointed the following committee: Miss Pendleton, Miss Hallowell, Mrs. Gillingham, Jos. S. Whitney and Professor R. E. Thompson.

The work of the sub-committee was subdivided, Miss Pendleton taking up the question of Compulsory and Industrial Education, and Miss Hallowell the Care of Dependent Children. Out of Miss Pendleton's work grew the Public Education Association; out of Miss Hallowell's the Sub-Primary Society.

\*Cf. C. S. Bernheimer, "Public Education in Philadelphia," Public Education Association, 1896.

At the monthly meeting of the Assembly Committee of the Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charity, held January 8, 1881, to consider compulsory and industrial education great interest was shown in these subjects by those present. Addresses were made by Judges Pierce and Tourgee, Professor R. E. Thompson and Mr. Charles G. Leland. Speaking of compulsory education, Judge Tourgee said that he had positive convictions on the subject, as his life had been spent where education was conspicuous for its absence. As a mere police preventive against pauperism, he insisted that every citizen should know at least the "three R's," and that the right of a nation to impose education is simply the right of self-defence in another form.

Before the committee had finished their report, it was realized that here was a field of great usefulness, and that it should be extended beyond the limits of dependent children to the whole field of public education.\*

At a meeting of the Assembly March 7, 1881, Miss Charlotte Pendleton read the report on compulsory and industrial education under the four heads: (1) what is taught in the public schools; (2) what should be taught; (3) how many children are out of school; (4) why are they out.

Miss Pendleton reported that in 1879 there were 103,567 pupils in the city schools:

High School, . . . . .	495 boys.
Normal School, . . . . .	975 girls.
School of Practice, . . . . .	307 "
Grammar schools, . . . . .	7,243 boys and 7,838 "
Consolidated schools, . . . . .	3,869 " 3,551 "
Secondary schools, . . . . .	12,724 " 13,585 "
Primary schools, . . . . .	27,138 " 25,842 "

The grade of the schools was not uniform owing chiefly to the lack of a superintendent. Drawing was the only subject

\*The development was very similar to that in the early days regarding free schools themselves. Cf. Bernheimer's "Public Education in Philadelphia."