

Reducing Illiteracy Through Adult Education

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TUNE — "ON WISCONSIN"

"On to victory, Education!" is our battle-cry.
Ignorance the foe we'll conquer — Knowledge set on high.
And we'll fight it without ceasing till within our State
Obsolete will be the word, illiterate. —Clara Struble

IN JANUARY 1919 at the annual conference of the county superintendents held at the capitol of North Dakota a state program of adult education was adopted. It may be truthfully said that the existence of conditions making such a program a necessity resulted in part from the World War. One of the main divisions of this educational program was Americanization which was subdivided into elimination of illiteracy and the establishment of night schools. Since that time every effort has been put forth to promote this program of adult education.

In 1917 a law had been enacted providing for the establishment of evening schools, which carried with it an appropriation of seven thousand dollars to carry on this work. Therefore, at the time of the adoption of the Americanization program this law had been in operation two years and several night schools had been established throughout the state. These schools had not reached the illiterate population so the first problems which confronted the workers were the location of these persons and arousing of interest of the people of the state in the illiteracy problem.

To assist in the latter, North Dakota was fortunate in securing the services of Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart, the originator of the famous Moonlight Schools of Kentucky. Mrs. Stewart spoke at the annual meetings of the State Federation of Women's Club, the North Dakota Education Association, the State Press Association, the five Normal Schools of the state, the annual conference of the County School Superintendents, and the teachers institutes in twenty-seven counties.

To arouse further the people of the state in this great work, songs were written and sung at educational meetings and all the county institutes, so that the teachers could learn them and carry back to their students the spirit of this crusade. Grateful acknowledgement is given to Miss Huldah L. Winsted, Dean of Women, State Normal School at Minot, and Miss Clara Struble, a member of the school faculty of Grand Forks, who contributed the songs which were sung everywhere in the state.

The following song entitled "No Illiteracy in North Dakota in 1924," written by Huldah L. Winsted, to the melody of "There's a Long, Long, Trail," became in no time a popular campaign song and contributed materially to arouse public sentiment and support for the educational work that has been done in this state with such telling effects:

O'er our North Dakota bad lands,
And o'er her prairies far and wide
Rings a challenge, rolling onward
Like the never-ceasing tide;
From the banks of the Missouri
Unto the old Red River's shore:
North Dakota'll have no illiteracy
In nineteen twenty-four. (Ritard)

"Every one prepare to teach one"
On the farm, in school or store,
Be it native North Dakotan
Or one born on foreign shore;
Then let each one heed this slogan
And rally to the call once more:
North Dakota'll have no illiteracy
In nineteen twenty-four. (Ritard)

Although the goal of "No Illiteracy in North Dakota in 1924" was not reached by June 30, 1924, at the close of the school year, however, great progress has been made. The splendid work which has been started is still continuing. The statistics which were gathered from the county superintendents' reports for the school year ending June 30, 1924, tell the story of reduction, showing that the number of illiterates credited by the Federal Census of 1920 to 1938 has been cut down to 5456.

It will be noted that the number has been decreased 4,482, and of this total number left there are over thirteen hundred native Americans, the Indians. The percentage had been reduced from 2.1% in 1920 to 7% on June 30, 1924. Ten counties have not yet made the survey and check. There are twelve counties which report less than ten illiterates and Golden Valley has the distinction of being the first county in the state to stamp out illiteracy. The goal has been reached by that county. The last person left in the county who could not read and write was taught by the county superintendent.

Many North Dakotans, exclusive of school people, have given of their time and energy in the illiteracy campaign. In the fall of 1921 when Mrs. Stewart was touring the state in the publicity campaign, she organized a class for illiterates at the night school at the State Penitentiary. Volunteer teachers carried on this work. The State Board of Administration passed a resolution requiring all illiterates, inmates of the penitentiary, to attend the night school. The instruction on reading, writing and citizenship opened up a new world for these men.

Federated Club women, members of the American Legion and Auxiliary, the State Bar Association, and other fraternal organizations have done "their bit" by teaching in night schools and arousing the public in this great cause. In one county where many foreign-born were located, fifteen night schools were conducted in the open country by the teachers who did not receive pay for their services. Great assistance has also been given in the crusade by Mr. Robert Coleman, Federal District Director of Naturalization, St. Paul, Minnesota. Federal Citizenship Text Books have been given out free of charge to men and women who wished to become citizens of the United States.

Many stories of human interest could be given of evening schools. The illiterate Indian found on the Government Reservations is one of the greatest problems North Dakota has in Adult Education. Many of the illiterate Indians cannot even speak the English language, and have no desire to learn to read and write it. However, there are some bright spots in the work