

# NARRATIVE HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EXTENSION HOME ECONOMISTS

## ORGANIZATION AND EARLY YEARS

The National Home Demonstration Agents' Association became a reality on June 29, 1933, in Milwaukee, Wis., during the annual meeting of the American Home Economics Association (AHEA).

Twenty-one home demonstration agents from 13 states met at a breakfast in the Schroeder Hotel and discussed the possibility and advisability of forming a national organization to promote the interests of home demonstration work. States represented were: Alabama, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Vermont, Virginia and Wyoming.

This was actually the fourth meeting of this group. But no action had been taken at the other meetings.

In 1930, Extension workers had a house party in Denver, Colo., and a second house party in St. Clair Inn, Mich. in 1931. This was just prior to the AHEA meeting in Detroit, Michigan.

It was at this meeting that Miss Grace Frysinger, Washington, D.C., home economist of the central states, asked Miss Clara M. Brian, home advisor in McLean County, Illinois, to call a breakfast meeting of home demonstration agents to consider the organization of a National Home Demonstration Agents' Association.

Since the house party included home economics staff members, specialists, federal and district agents, Miss Frysinger felt the home demonstration agents should have a program of their own.

Miss Anna Searl, home advisor, Livingston County, Illinois, was named temporary chairman. She then appointed committees to make plans, work on a Constitution and report at the next meeting.

The next house party was at Tate Mountain Estates in Georgia in 1932 just before the AHEA meeting in Atlanta, Ga. But apparently not too much was accomplished—not much more than talk. But the idea was still alive because in 1933, the organization began to materialize.

## ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

In the general discussion at this organizational meeting

on June 29, 1933 many values of a national association were discussed. But the most legitimate reason was planning the pre convention conference and program in conjunction with the AHEA meeting each year. Also through an organization, home agents possibly might have a voice in forming state policies.

Some thought a temporary committee should be appointed, but since most of the experienced home demonstration agents present were already convinced that a national association would be of great value and that it would be impossible to have as large representation of states together at any other meeting, they said, "Now is the time!"

### 1933-1943



Miss Anna Searl (Ill.)  
Miss Nellie Watts (Oh.)  
Miss Florence Carvin (Mo.)  
Miss Clara R. Brown (Ill.)

Organization took place immediately and Miss Anna Searl from Pontiac, Ill., became the first president with Mrs. Sylvia R. Shiras from Minneapolis, Minn., as vice-president and Miss Helene French, Wauwatosa, Wis., as secretary-treasurer.

Noting that all officers represented only the central states, a vice-president from each of the four regions was appointed.

Dues were set at \$1 per year per state association.

The second meeting of the Association was June 27, 1934 at Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City, N. Y., with 41 persons attending. Again 13 states were represented but not the same 13. Alabama, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Vermont had been previously, but Connecticut, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Washington were new.

The group continued to have a house party prior to the annual AHEA meeting but had changed the name to pre session convention in keeping with professional advancement. The president of the Association presided at this meeting too.

### CONSTITUTION ADOPTED

A constitution was adopted in 1934 and the name of the organization was to be "The Home Demonstration Agents' National Association." The object was to:

- provide a permanent national organization for Home Demonstration Agents of the United States of America and territories
- raise professional standards

- promote fellowship among its members
- provide a centralized means for exchanging ideas and methods
- encourage the organization of new state association of home demonstration agents.

Annual dues were to be 25 cents per person for state association and 50 cents for each agent in states not organized. Dues were to be paid at the annual meeting of the association.

Officers were to be elected for a 2-year term alternating with president, vice president, and councilors from central and southern districts to be elected in odd years and the secretary, treasurer and councilors from eastern and western regions were to be elected in even years.

Each member present at the annual meeting of the association was entitled to vote.

In the June 20, 1934 meeting, the board of directors decided to send copies of the constitution and minutes to all states. These would go to the president and secretary of each state organization and to an outstanding agent in those states not having an organization of home demonstration agents. A recommendation was made to change from a breakfast meeting to a dinner meeting to give more time for business.

The Palmer House in Chicago, Ill., was the site in 1935 and the date was June 26. At this meeting, Georgia, Iowa and Virginia reported that they had joined the Association. Virginia had been at the first meeting in 1933. Other states attending for the first time included Indiana, West Virginia, Wisconsin, South Dakota and Kentucky, making a total of 68 persons present.

Vice President Nellie Watts from Columbus, Ohio, presided at the 1936 annual meeting and was elected president to complete the unexpired term of Anna Searl who had resigned to go into the Illinois state office as assistant state leader.

The two problems of greatest concern to the home demonstration agents were: (1) managing time to have more leisure and (2) sabbatical leave. Committees were appointed to study time management and investigate the possibility of sabbatical leave.

Management of time was discussed at great length because of its value toward: (1) improving program planning, (2) making Extension work more interesting to those talented but not entering this profession because of the long hours and (3) preserving the health of the home demonstration agent.

At the pre-convention conference June 19, 1937, in Elms Hotel, Excelsior Springs, Mo., a great portion of the time was spent hearing about home demonstration work in various states.

Some special projects included: a chorus in Nebraska; furniture making in New Mexico; personal development and better English in Illinois; and club curb markets in North Carolina.

The annual meeting of the Association was at the woman's City Club in Kansas City, Mo., June 22, 1937.

Funds of 1934 which had been misplaced were found and the treasurer reported a balance on hand of \$107.53.

Second vice president was added to the list of officers this year.

Councilors reported the following paid membership:

Southern District	
South Carolina	50
North Carolina	2
Eastern District	2
Central District	152

New Mexico and Utah must have been members at this time because in the business session these states had a part.

Miss Florence Carvin, Independence, Mo., was chairman of the leisure time activity committee and gave the following report:

Number of questionnaires mailed	500
Number of states returning answers	37
Number of agents returning answers	260
Number of agents represented in this group	1095

In answers to questions related to annual leave:

16 states had 2 weeks  
10 states had 1 month

The question on "time off" during the week was answered:

115 had 1/2 day  
72 did not  
63 had 1/2 day sometime

The problem was "many were supposed to have time off, but were too rushed to manage it."

Though agents reporting on hobbies stated they did have a hobby, a reader gained the impression of regret because agents did not time to do the things that were desired and necessary to renew the spirit. Has time changed much today?

#### PAYMENT OF EXPENSES

In 1938, the Association voted to pay the expenses of the president and secretary, not to exceed \$100 each. This was the first indication of payment of expenses of any officer.

The Association traveled to San Antonio, Tex., to the Gunther Hotel for the annual meeting in 1939.

In the pre-convention meeting that year, Miss Carvin reported the National Association of County Agricultural Agents,

NACAA, had invited representation of the National Home Agents Association on their program of work. Perhaps this was the very beginning of a closer working relationship of the two associations.

Miss Carvin appointed Miss Adelaide Barts of New York to represent the Association at the National Standards for Children's Garments Meeting in New York City.

It was suggested at this meeting that a newsletter giving information on the pre-convention meeting be sent to all states. This would be the responsibility of the national president or the secretary.

In her closing remarks, Miss Carvin told the home demonstration agents that they should plan time for leisure and guard their health. She said, "We should feel important, not feel that we are *just* a home demonstration agent. We ought to give ourselves some time to establish ourselves as an important woman."

The pre-convention conference continued to be the more popular of the two meetings. It was here that inspiring talks were heard. The annual meeting of the NHDAA seemed to be primarily a business meeting. Perhaps this is why many agents who attended the pre-convention conference went home immediately afterwards and did not stay for the annual meeting. And, the annual meeting always seemed to be at a different place from the pre-convention conference.

At the 1940 pre-convention conference, the NACAA was represented by their president, Mr. J. E. Parker of Lexington, Ky. Mr. Parker brought greetings from his Association and told something of the structure and objectives of the Association. He asked that a committee be appointed from the NHDAA to meet with a committee from the NACAA in Washington, D.C., to discuss with the directors of Agriculture Extension some problems common to both organizations.

Three home economists from the Washington office were speakers at this pre-convention conference.

The first was Miss Grace Frysinger who gave a most inspiring message on "The Future of Home Demonstration Work." She stressed the development of a fine philosophy among rural people and its importance to morale; the philosophy of fine family living responsibilities as well as privileges in the family circle.

Miss Frysinger stressed the importance of facts. She said, "There is a fifth column of ignorance and prejudice as well as politics—wholesome family life is the surest guard against fifth columns—we need *facts* about what is being said about war, as well as facts about home economics."

Some questions asked by Miss Frysinger were: "Are we

helping the \$500 a year family to see some things they can have without money—for example, kindness and courtesy? Are we helping them cooperate with the inevitable, to see beyond the clothesline to the skyline? Are we helping people to broaden their horizons? Are we teaching home economics, or, are we teaching people?"

The home demonstration agent herself was then considered by Miss Frysinger. "What are we doing for our professional selves and what are we doing for our personal selves," she asked. "Give farm women a smile and sincere friendship."

Then the home demonstration agents' association was advised to "Never use your association as a pressure group."

She closed by saying, "The American farm home is a marvelous cathedral."

Miss Mary Rokahr, home management specialist, Washington, D.C., told the group that incomes would be lower and it was the responsibility of the home agent to show farm families how to adjust their living to meet these conditions.

Miss Miriam Birdseye, extension nutritionist from the Washington office, also discussed the national situation and said, "It is time for every farm family to put its house in order." She also said that good nutrition was one of the major objectives of agricultural leaders.

In the business session of the NHDAA a committee was appointed as per Mr. Parker's request. The members of this committee were: Miss Clara Brian, president, Miss Jessie Campbell, Pontiac, Ill., and Miss Alpha Hartley, W. Va. This committee met with the representatives from the Agricultural Department and directors of Extension to talk over problems of the organizations. This was at the very beginning of the World War II struggle. Director Wilson, in his closing remarks said, "Go home, get a good rest, take a vacation if possible, and get ready to do the hardest work you have ever done."

This meeting helped bring the two associations into a closer relationship and also gave each person an insight into the tremendous job they would be called on to do.

In the 1941 meeting, the program of work was rewritten with Helen Winslow of Indiana serving as chairman. Committees were appointed during the early years at the pre-convention conference and were ready to report at the breakfast meeting following the AHEA meeting.

The second committee appointed was a constitution committee. The Constitution as it read at that time stated that the president and first vice president were to be elected in the same year. The thinking was that both top officers would not go

out of office the same year. Revision was needed to correct this. Then the president and second vice-president would be elected in even years and the first vice-president and the secretary-treasurer in odd years.

Pearl Harbor had become most meaningful since the last NHDAA meeting. Because of the war, it seemed advisable not to have the customary social and recreational period at the 1942 pre-convention conference. Instead the entire meeting was devoted to business.

The constitution committee gave the revisions which were adopted. After the actual voting it was found that the order of election stating the president and second vice-president be elected in *odd* number of years would mean that Clara Brian was to remain in office another year!

The meeting in 1942 was in Boston. A baked bean breakfast was served and a sugaring-off party had been shipped from the mountains of New Hampshire to a cold storage plant in Boston. Large pans of snow were brought to the table and hot maple syrup was drizzled over the snow and when cold, was eaten. When the party was over and the guests returned to the lobby, they were surprised to find out the first practice "black-out" in Boston had taken place.

Continued studies were done in 1942 to find out what states were doing to further the work of their state association and what Extension departments were offering in advanced training for Extension workers. A salary scale was compiled from the states as to average, high and low. Many states had expense accounts at this time and this too was recorded.

The lowest on the "Low" scale was \$1200 in Georgia and Iowa. The highest in the "Low" scale was \$2800 in Alaska. In the "High" salary \$1800 was the lowest with Nebraska and Puerto Rico having this amount. For the high in this division, \$3590 was the amount that Alabama paid. The lowest of \$1498 in the "Average" scale paid by Puerto Rico; California paid \$2984.38, which was highest in the average scale. California also had the highest paid expenses, \$1462.50 and six states—Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee and West Virginia—did not pay expenses.

The pre-convention for the NHDAA was called off for 1943 due to war conditions, limited transportation, and the fact that the AHEA meeting had been called off. However, it was necessary to elect officers. Since the president had the right to call a meeting it was held in Chicago to transact necessary and vital business of the organization. Officers were notified and the meeting was held at Hotel Sherman in Chicago June 11-12, 1943.

This was strictly a work conference and much was accom-

plished in planning, appointing committees and outlining work to be done.

The slate of officers made for the coming year was sent to all state leaders who got it to the members. Of the 875 ballots mailed, 457 were returned. This was the first time officers had been elected by a mail ballot.

The states had been asked to submit suggestions for study and for a program of work. From the problems listed by the states, the following objectives were listed:

1. Salary scaled to term of work and professional improvement.
2. Closer association with County Agents' Association.
3. Help with agents personal and professional problems.
4. Informed membership.
5. Recognition of outstanding home demonstration agents.
6. Encouragement of visits between states to broaden vision, strengthen organizations, promote fellowship and exchange of ideas.
7. Annual meetings of state associations at some time other than at the annual conference of Extension Service.

In recognition of outstanding home demonstration agents, the following recommendations were made and consideration should be given to:

1. Term of service
2. Opinion of farm people in the county where the agent works
3. Professional attitude
4. Well planned program and results accomplished
5. Professional improvement.

The recognition should include:

1. Presentation of pin to honoree.
2. Publicity at national, state and county levels.

Recognition was to be made annually and announced at the annual meeting.

Here was the very beginning of the Distinguished Service Recognition as it is known today.

## **EHE REPORTER**

In 1943 the first historian was appointed. Clara M. Brian also started a mimeographed "News From National" which was a very chit-chatty form of information.

It was also decided that a business meeting should be held at least annually until after the war was over and the pre-convention conference resumed.