

Mason's Support Public Schools

Philalethes Magazine, August 1983 Volume XXXVI Number 4 Masons Start Public School Week

Charles Albert Adams, a San Francisco attorney, was a worried man. The year was 1920 and the public schools of California and the nation were in critical condition. During the World War thousands of teachers had deserted the classrooms either to fight in the "War To End Wars" or work in the factories supplying the material to pursue the struggle. In California alone some 600 schools had been closed due to the teacher shortage (nationally, over 18,000) and many of the remaining teachers were inadequately trained. Of the approximately 600,000 teachers in the nation it has been estimated that at least half had no special training, one-third had less than four years of schooling beyond the eighth grade and one-fourth were less than 21 years of age. In view of this we can well understand Charles Albert Adams' anxiety at the plight of the schools. The public, however, was generally apathetic to the situation. Even the State of California seemed unable to cope with the problem

Charles Albert Adams thought long and carefully about a solution to the crisis facing the schools but, as one citizen alone, could not provide the answer. In the year 1920, however, there was another facet to attorney Charles Albert Adams' life. He was then Grand Master of Masons in California. Did he dare he wondered, use the power and influence of his high office in Masonry to attempt to alleviate the condition of the schools? No Grand Master could be unaware of the fact that one of the cardinal principles of Masonry is to "keep out" of politics as an organization, and any pronouncement on his part as Grand Master on behalf of public schools might be construed as getting Masons "mixed up" with state politics. Brother Adams well remembered the tragic "Morgan Incident" just 100 years previous, when the enemies of Masonry had seized the opportunity to almost destroy the Order.

Yet, Masons have always been interested in education. What other fraternal society urges its members to study grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, music, astronomy and geometry? From the very inception of the country Masons advocated and supported public schools. George Washington, in a letter to John Adams, said, "Wise and judicious modes of education, patronized and supported by communities, will draw together the sons of the rich and the poor, among whom it makes no distinction; it will cultivate the natural genius, elevate the soul, excite laudable emulation to excel in knowledge, piety, and benevolence; and finally it will reward its patrons and benefactors by shedding its benign influence on the public mind."

Grand Master De Witt Clinton, when Governor of New York, espoused the cause of public schools so fervently and successfully that he became known as the Father of Public Schools in New York. Grand Master Benjamin Franklin had vigorously urged the adoption of a public school system in Pennsylvania. And, who can estimate the time and money spent by Masons in the support of all types of institutions of learning? "No one," Brother Adams undoubtedly reflected, "can be unaware of Masonry's long-standing and sincere belief and support of public education for all children."

So, on the thirtieth day of August, 1920, the first Masonic Public Schools Week Proclamation was issued.

PROCLAMATION

Public Schools Week in the Masonic Lodges in California.

To the Masters, Wardens and Brethren of the Several Lodges in this Jurisdiction:

As Masons we unqualifiedly subscribe to the belief that an educated and enlightened citizenship is the first great care of a progressive State; and that upon our Public Schools depends the hope for the perpetuity of a free and untrammelled democracy.

The professions we make as Masons demand that as citizens of the Commonwealth we take an active and intelligent interest in all matters affecting our Public Schools.

A crisis is now confronting the Public School System in America. There is a dearth of competent teachers, schools are being closed, children, particularly in the rural communities, are being denied the education to

which they are entitled and there is apparently a deplorable apathy concerning remedial measures which have been proposed.

To focus the attention of the Craft on existing conditions, I, as Grand Master of Masons in the Jurisdiction of California, do now proclaim the week commencing Monday, September 27th, 1920, as "Public Schools Week" in the Masonic Lodges in this Jurisdiction; and I do earnestly request that during that week, in every Lodge in this Jurisdiction some phase of the questions affecting the Public Schools be brought to the attention of the members present by speakers appointed for that purpose.

What about Brother Adams' concern over the public's reception of the entry of Masons into the area of public schools? Fortunately, this proved groundless. Public spirited citizens realized the need for leadership in this field and cooperation was eagerly given by newspapers, civic groups, educators and the public. The program has expanded year after year and is now the biggest event in the public schools of many states.

From the California Freemason. Spring, 1975