

HISTORY OF THE MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION (1987)

Prepared in 1987 by: Ken Read, Jim Lodge, Vern Sloulin, Bill Walter, Cal Campbell & Doris Morgan

ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES OF MONTANA SANITARIANS, 1951-1987

Montana sanitarians met in Bozeman on September 7, 1951, to organize into an association. Officers were elected and plans were made for an educational conference. The first of what has become an annual educational conference was held in Bozeman on November 29 and 30, 1951, with thirty-one registrants.

The adopted constitution titled the new organization the Montana Association of Sanitarians. The constitution was patterned after that of the National Association of Sanitarians, with the Montana association described as the Montana section of NAS. A charter was granted by NAS in September, 1952.

The objectives and purposes of the association, which were outlined by the constitution, largely concern professional development. Fostering and promoting high quality and performance standards were key objectives. These were to be accomplished through courses on instruction, inter-agency cooperation, standardization of code interpretation and certification of members meeting education and experience qualifications. Social intercourse among members and the furtherance of economic and social conditions of the members were also a part of the objectives and purposes.

A name change of the association was approved by the members at the October 1970 meeting. The organization then became known as the Montana Environmental Health Association. Which, of course, was a change consistent with that of the national organization, which had become known as the National Environmental Health Association.

FOUNDING MEMBERSHIP

Fifteen people became the initial paid-up members of the newly-formed association of sanitarians. These were:

Lester Groom, sanitarian from Bozeman;
Thomas McMaster, Chief of Dairy Division, Montana Dept of Agriculture;
Howard Morton, sanitarian from Hardin;
William Shea, sanitarian from Great Falls;
William Reinhart, sanitarian from Billings;
John Cunningham, sanitarian from Miles City;
Elton Andres, Director of Food and Drugs, Montana Dept of Health;
Wyman Taylor, Chief Deputy, Dairy Division;
James Lodge, sanitarian from Missoula;
Kenneth Claus, sanitarian from Glasgow;
Richard Farrand, sanitarian from Helena;
Frances MacDonald, Montana Extension Service, Bozeman;
Dr. J.D.C. Wipf, Livestock Sanitary Board, Helena;
Dr. William G. Walter, Montana State College, Bozeman;
Harry Ramsey, sanitarian from Lewistown.

Elected officers were William Shea, President; Elton Andrew, Secretary-Treasurer, and Howard Morton and Jack Cunningham, Directors.

A number of the above founding members are currently enjoying retirement. The whereabouts of some are unknown, while others are no longer living. One of the above members remains actively employed in environmental health. Jim Lodge is currently an instructor of environmental health at Montana State University. Another member, Bill Walter, has contributed much to the progress of sanitarians in Montana, and although now retired, maintains an active interest in the sanitarian profession on both the state and national levels.

EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCES

Although input into the planning and conduct of the educational conferences has been sought and obtained from the sanitarians, much of the key planning over the years was carried out by Dr. William G. (Bill) Walter and Vernon E. Sloulin. Bill, for much of his career, was professor of microbiology at Montana State University. Vern, for much of his career, was chief of the Food and Consumer Safety Bureau of the Montana Dept of Health. After Bill's and Vern's retirement, planning coordination has been the responsibility, for the most part, of Jim Peterson, Vern's replacement.

Planning for the conferences has been in accordance with the objective of providing an educational experience which fits the needs of the field sanitarian. The goal also has been to inspire the sanitarians to strive for ever-increasing knowledge of the profession and for optimum performance. The programs have always encouraged professional development. Requests for topics to be covered eventually became so numerous that it was necessary to add a spring education conference. This conference, started in 1962, has also become an annual event.

Many of the conferences have featured nationally-prominent environmentalists, including Dr. H.S. Adams, Professor of Public Health, Indiana University Medical Center; Dr. W.L. Mallman, Professor of Microbiology, Michigan State University; Professor Walter Mangold, School of Public Health, University of California; Dr. Ben Friedman, Louisiana Dept of Health; and Dr. Amil T. Chanlett, Professor of Sanitary Engineering, University of North Carolina.

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION

During the early years of the Association, a number of Montana sanitarians took advantage of the "Sanitarian Registration" program established by NAS. At the same time, some sanitarians remembered the certification objective included in the Constitution. Serious efforts toward obtaining Montana certification were initiated in 1954. The Montana Sanitarian Registration Law passed by the legislature in 1959, required registration of all practicing sanitarians by July 1960.

The law provided for administration of registration by a Sanitarian Registration Council consisting of three sanitarian members appointed by the Montana State Board of Health. Financial accounting was administered by the Department of Health. Any person who had been a sanitarian for one year in Montana was registered under the grandfather clause. Thereafter, any person entering the field was required to have a degree, including at least fifteen semester hours in basic science plus successful completion of a written exam required of the Sanitarian I classification of the Joint Merit Council.

The law was changed in 1971. The Sanitarian Registration Council became an advisory council, advisory to the board of Health, with the members appointed by the Governor. Reciprocity with states having similar qualification standards was also added.

A major reorganization of state government in 1974 resulted in a law change in which the administration of the law became the responsibility of a three-member Board of Sanitarians appointed by the Governor.

Financial accounting responsibilities were transferred to the Dept of Professional and Occupational Licensing. This latest change in law granted authority to the Board to establish by rule the minimum standards for registration in accordance with the law. The Board was also given disciplinary authority over infractions of the law or the rules.

In 1981, the Board, along with members of the Association, was successful in avoiding sunset by the Sunset Review of the Legislature. The law was also changed again. A citizen member plus two sanitarian members made up the Board of Sanitarians, also called the Sanitarian Registration Board. Academic requirements were changed to require a degree in environmental health or the equivalent, in addition to successful completion of a written exam which the Board obtains from the Professional Examination Service.

The initial number of persons registered in 1960 in Montana was twenty-nine. By 1981 the number of registrants had risen to one hundred thirty-eight. In 1986, one hundred seventy-one were registered.

AWARDS

Early in the history of the Association, members became aware of a need to recognize those sanitarians who give outstanding performances. As a result, in 1958 the first "Outstanding Sanitarian" award was given to Harry Ramsey, a longtime and respected sanitarian from Lewistown. Seeing the award as a potential annual award and a need for valid determination of potential recipients, the Association established the Awards Committee in 1960.

The Award for Distinguished Service in Environmental Health was established in 1961 and awarded to Herb Foote of Helena. Mr. Foote had a long and distinguished career in sanitary engineering and was highly regarded by the sanitarians for his counsel and support. The award was later defined by the Awards Committee specifically to be an award for distinguished service in endeavors favoring improved environmental health. It was also outlined that the award would be given to people or organizations not necessarily associated with the sanitarian profession.

PARTICIPATION OF MONTANANS IN THE NATIONAL

The Association has always made certain that Montana has been represented at each annual educational conference sponsored by NEHA. The participation in the governing process, however, has been limited.

An outstanding contribution has been that of Dr. William G. Walter. Bill moved up the ladder of the executive committee and became president of NEHA in 1962. Bill has always contributed much to NEHA. In addition to the above, he has served on committees and has been very active with the journal as editor, etc. Bill is still active even though he has been retired several years. What makes his contributions particularly notable is that he has provided them mostly during a time when he was very busy being a professor of microbiology, chairing departments at Montana State University, and serving as vice president of same.

Another person who must be recognized for his contributions to environmental health is Vern Sloulin. During his 33 years involvement in environmental health, he served on many national committees, was regional vice-president and received the prestigious Mangold Award. The MEHA Vernon E. Sloulin Rookline of the Year Award was named in his honor.