

A SELECTIVE HISTORY  
of THE NEW JERSEY CHAPTER  
of THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

Founding:

The earliest records of the New Jersey Chapter are found in minutes of the founding meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in June, 1930. Those records mention four New Jersey pediatricians who were invited to join as Fellows. No New Jersey pediatricians were listed as founding members. The four invited Fellows were:

Joseph Harvey Marcus, Daniel John M. Miller and Walter Blair Stewart, all of Atlantic City, and Floy McEwen of Newark.

There was in existence at the time a Pediatric Section of the Medical Society of New Jersey (MSNJ), membership and size not known.

In 1932, there were still four Fellows: Marcus and Stewart, and Frederic W. Lathrop of Plainfield and Stanley H. Nichols of Asbury Park. The latter soon became a leader, and remained so, as the first Chapter Chairperson, until 1938. A clear distinction between the Pediatric Section of MSNJ, and the New Jersey Chapter of AAP was not maintained for many years. However, as early as 1931 the interested Fellows were working with the state agencies to further child health, and to teach "preventive medicine to the practitioner."

The New Jersey Chapter of AAP was not formally organized until 1950. By-laws were created in 1952. The Chapter filed for exemption from the income tax laws in 1953, and incorporated as a not-for-profit entity in 1988.

Records are not clear on the nature of practice of its members. Some may well have been general practitioners with an interest in child work. Many, such as the distinguished poet, William Carlos Williams, spoke of themselves as pediatricians even though they included many adults in their practice. Chairperson Nichols in 1932 estimated about fifty full time pediatricians in New Jersey were members of the Pediatric Section of MSNJ; he anticipated that 25 would be members of the New Jersey Chapter. Nichols might have been a bit optimistic, but by 1935 there were 25 members.

EARLY ACTIVITIES:

Members of the New Jersey Chapter were very active in the work of the State Conference on Child Health and Protection, which grew out of the White House Conference on Children of 1930. The Journal of Pediatrics in 1932 published an extensive report from Dr. Nichols as State Chairperson, describing how the Chapter members (primarily himself) were working with a variety of public and private agencies in the areas of Public Health, Child Health, School Health, hospital outpatient and inpatient care, financial access to care, coordination and structure of all entities interested in these topics, education of parents to encourage them to seek health care (not just sickness care) for their children and finally, educational efforts to improve the quality of care of the practitioner. (Appendix)

In other words, over 65 years ago, the proto-New Jersey Chapter was at work on almost all of the principal topics which have concerned its members since.

In May of 1936, at the AAP national meeting, the work of the New Jersey Chapter was identified as exemplary. The first Chapter meeting, for which there are records, occurred June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1936 in Atlantic City. (Appendix). It was devoted to several of the topics mentioned above. In particular, a panel discussion on breastfeeding included mention of ways to encourage this. Methods to counteract the deleterious influence of hospital deliveries on the incidence of breastfeeding, compared to home deliveries, were described. The tone was extremely positive towards breastfeeding, and rates of up to 84% were described. Ten years later, this was no longer the case. At the December meeting, attention was paid not only to the "opportunities and responsibilities" of the practitioner, but also to "the 'politicalization' of medicine that we fear and that we must show the government that the profession is willing and able to care of the American people in the American way." (Appendix)

By 1938, 48 of 55 "pediatrists" in New Jersey were Chapter members. Every one of them is described as serving on at least one committee. Dr. Nichols was by now District Chairperson. The annual report of Chapter activities included mention of practice management education as well as emphasis on child health and parent education (Appendix). The following year, Dr. Nichols turned over leadership to Dr. Leroy A. Wilkes of Trenton. In turn, his successor was Dr. Harold Murray (Appendix).

Of necessity, during World War II, activities were truncated, but Fellows in New Jersey continued as best they could, under tiring and difficult conditions, to work on the projects already in motion.

#### POST WAR YEARS:

Under the leadership of Dr. Harold Murray, there was a burst of activity, with many meetings. Dinner meetings cost the enormous sum of \$2.50 per person. A broad array of medical topics were discussed. Leadership helped the practitioners maintain their knowledge abreast of new developments. For example, the surgical treatment of tetralogy of Fallot was being discussed at a meeting within a year after the first patient was operated on in Baltimore by Dr. Alfred Blalock. Comprehensive care was not neglected. For example, in 1949 at an annual meeting a panel discussion on physical disability, emphasizing cerebral palsy, highlighted the emotional aspects in a discussion by a well known child psychiatrist.

By 1956, when Walter Mitchell was Chairperson, there were 225 members, but records reveal concern, then as now, about the proportion who did not pay their dues. In the next two decades chapter membership soared, and chapter activities multiplied, but all within the framework which had been established during those lean depression years.

One development, which began in the 1970s, was the ever increasing use of professional staff. Originally, members, their families, and their private office staffs were the Chapter staff. As work load increased, this became less and less practical. In the early 1970's a secretary was hired, subsequently association firms were engaged. Currently a large proportion of the Chapter affairs are conducted by a very competent and considerate firm, thus relieving officers of a great load.

#### SUBSEQUENT ACTIVITIES:

The New Jersey Chapter has maintained a strenuous pace of activities for the health and welfare of children throughout its existence. Many members, too many to mention specifically, have made extraordinary contributions. But the thread of continuity has been unbroken as individuals and Chapter committees:

- Work with State and non-profit voluntary agencies to improve quality, coordination and outcomes of child health and welfare.

- Encourage higher standards of care in all areas of child health.

- Explore new avenues to improve health, such as the activities of 25 years ago to create intensive care units, and the continuing efforts from then until now to establish a network of poison control centers, and now pediatric emergency care units, throughout the state

- Speak up for measures to improve the lot of the child and adolescent; work with legislators and groups of all kinds to this end.

- Advocate for children and families.

- Engage in activities to enable the practitioner to work more efficiently and effectively.

- Provide for and stimulate professional education and behavior change events available for all practitioners.

THE NEW JERSEY CHAPTER, FUNCTIONING AT A PEAK OF EFFECTIVENESS, LOOKS FORWARD TO GREATER ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE YEARS TO COME

Submitted by Avrum L. Katcher, M.D. 12 June, 1998.