

Physical Education at the Grass Roots: A History of the West Virginia Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation

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The development of the West Virginia Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation paralleled many of the trends which emerged in Twentieth Century American physical education. While West Virginia could not be considered a national pace-setter, changes in physical education theory and the status of physical education and the ways in which new theories and practices in physical education ‘filter down’ and are implemented at the local level.

The WVAHPER was founded in 1921 as a sub-division or “subject-matter area” of the West Virginia Education Association. Even though papers on physical culture had been presented to the WVEA as early as 1866, it was not until the 20’s that the interest in physical education engendered by the “Golden Age of Sport” and the “New Physical Education” provided impetus for establishing a permanent organization. Surprisingly, the Depression had little negative effect on the organization, and during both the 1920’s and 1930’s annual meetings were held at which nationally prominent physical educators such as W.R. Morrison, Jesse F. Williams, James E. Rogers, Agnes Wayman, Jay B. Nash, and Clifford Brownell spoke.

Interest in military fitness dominated the WVAHPER program during the early 1940’s. However, as the war progressed, physical education and sport programs were curtailed and the dislocation of physical educators during and immediately after the war robbed the state of effective leadership. Throughout the 1950’s the association was not able to consolidate leadership or to attract many members, and in fact did not recover from W.W.II until well into the 1960’s.

The physical fitness movement of the 1960’s and a state requirement for physical education in elementary schools stimulated interest in physical education in West Virginia. The WVAHPER held its first state convention in 1967 and hosted successful Midwest District Conventions in 1969 and again in 1972. During the 1970’s, the WVAHPER was almost totally reorganized and is now on a sound basis both fiscally and organizationally with a membership exceeding four hundred.