Celebrating 125 years

SSTUWA
State School Teachers' Union of WA



First Teachers Conference, April 1899.

The beginnings of the union

By A.E. Williams

The story of the State School Teachers' Union from its inception is a story well worth the telling.

It's a story of many trials and vicissitudes. It's a story of incredible achievement in the face of much official and teacher apathy.

It's an occasional story of organised opposition in high places. It's a tale of success in the very best traditions of industrial organisations.

And it's also a tale of contribution to educational advancement in an area about half the size of Europe.

It's important to realise at the beginning that the birth of a teacher organisation in Western Australia was no accident.

Rather, it was a predictable response to a felt educational and State need.

In retrospect, we can see that there was a proper time and place for this particular birth, conceived by changing historical, geographical and economic forces.

This period, when the state achieved responsible government, was a time when the whole population was geared to advance, educational advance amongst others.

Confidence in the community was unbounded. The famous gold discoveries of Coolgardie (The Old Camp) and Kalgoorlie had brought new prosperity to thousands.

Amongst the many migrants were men of discernment and learning; some imbued with new industrial thinking. From some of these in future months came the original impulse which led on to the establishment of our union. Others followed.

The development of a teacher organisation in this state was a development which was overlong in coming. There are critics who complain today about the pace of educational advancement. There always will be such critics.

But what these critics often overlook is the tremendous difficulty in establishing our educational foundations in the first place - foundations which we now take for granted.

When in difficulties, our teachers always find our union an unfailing source of strength and endeavour. But it had to be begun; it had to win its spurs as a respectable establishment; it had to be proved and tried and its undoubted powers forged in the fires of argument and faction before it became that honoured instrument which we admire today.

To anyone who queries the value of our union there is a simple answer: Can you imagine the educational set-up of Western Australia today without it?

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Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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