

The First Annual Meeting of the Iowa Health Officers and City Physicians

By: Dr. Ron Eckoff

We know the first Iowa Public Health Association was established in 1892 by local health officers and the state board of health members. It continued until 1896. We also know the current Iowa Public Health Association was established when the State Health Commissioner invited local health officers to a meeting in 1926. It was quickly determined it would be beneficial to expand it beyond health officers to include all public health workers.

Was there another group that might logically be called an Iowa Public Health Association? The July 1903 Iowa Health Bulletin reported: "Upon a call issued by a number of wide-awake 'city physicians' there was held in Des Moines, June 16 and 17, 1903, a meeting of sanitary physicians who have been chosen health officers in their respective localities. The object of the meeting was to organize an association of such officers for the purpose of discussing practical questions relating to hygiene, municipal sanitation, etc. As an indication of the work done we site the following papers that were read and discussed: 'The Status of the Health Department in Municipal Affairs,' by Dr. L.A. Thomas, Red Oak; 'Some Needed Legislation' by Dr. A.M. Linn, Des Moines, member of the State Board of Health; 'Scarlet Fever' by Dr. J.H. McGready, Independence; and 'Our Bacterial Needs' by Dr. C.T. Lesan, Mt. Ayr. The papers were listened to with interest and vigorously discussed."

In addition, J.F. Kennedy, M.D., Secretary of the State Board of Health gave a detailed report on the "Duties and Responsibilities of Local Boards of Health". Dr. Geo. P. Neal of Fort Madison presented a paper of the "Sanitation and Hygiene of Cities". He first stated that the Health Officer is the holder of the most important office in the city, town, or township. He concluded by describing what it takes to be a successful health officer. "One must of necessity be endowed with the wisdom of Solomon; the strength of Sullivan; the determination of Satan; at the same time the embodiment of the Good Samaritan". J.A. Valenta, M.D. of Iowa City presented a paper on "Some Needs of the Department of Health". He concluded with twenty specific recommendations with much focus on education of the public and physicians, better communication and coordination, better methods of garbage disposal, safe water supplies, a state sanitarium for consumptives, a more united effort to stamp out smallpox, and others.

A permanent organization was effected by adopting a constitution and by-laws, and by electing the following officers:

President – Dr. J.A. Valenta, Iowa City
 Vice-President – Dr. L.A. Thomas, Red Oak
 Secretary and Treasurer – Dr. C.T. Lesan, Mt. Ayr

The next meeting was held in Des Moines January 12th and 13th, 1904.

According to the Thirteenth Biennial Report of the State Board of Health, R.E. Conniff, M.D. of Sioux City gave a presentation to the Conference of the Iowa Health Officers Association and the State Board of Health in Waterloo on July 10, 1906. Dr. Conniff was President of the State Board of Health and the title of his paper was; "The Work of the State Board of Health". Dr. Henry Albert presented a paper on: "Disinfectants and Disinfection". The Health Officers' Association elected Dr. C.T. Lesan, of Mt. Ayr president; Dr. E.W. Doolittle, Garden Grove, vice president, and Dr. N.W. Getz, Marshalltown, secretary."

The First Annual Meeting of the Iowa Health Officers and City Physicians continued

The Fourteenth Biennial Report indicates there was a conference held under the auspices of the State Board of Health in conjunction with the Iowa Association of Health Officers Des Moines, November 12-13, 1907 with the Wellington Hotel as headquarters. The first morning was a business meeting of the Health Officers Association. The afternoon began the General Conference of Health Officers, Mayors, Township Clerks, and members of the State Board of Health. The sessions were in the Y.M.C.A. auditorium and included a welcome by an Assistant Attorney General and an address by Governor Albert B. Cummins. Then Dr. Henry Albert, Director of the State Laboratory (later Commissioner of Health) presented a paper on: "The State Bacteriological Laboratory and Its Relation to the Public Health". This was followed by a paper by Col. Charles Francis, the engineer member of the State Board of Health: "Sewerage and Sewage Disposal". On the morning of the 13th the members of the State Board of Health provided a "School of Instruction on the New Rules and Regulations". Prof. Chas. N. Kinney, Chemist of the State Board of Health presented a paper on: "Water Analysis and Purification". (Note: The State Laboratory was strictly a bacteriological laboratory at this time.) In the afternoon, Dr. L. Enos Day, Bureau of Animal Industry, Washington, D.C. presented a paper on: "Local Meat and Dairy Inspection", and the school of instruction was continued.

In January 1910 the officers were Dr. A.J. Swezey, Decorah, president; Dr. Fred Alberts, Mason City, vice president; and Dr. W.G. Carhart, Marion, secretary-treasurer.

In October 1910 the following officers were elected: Dr. Fred Alberts, Mason City, president; Dr. Samuel Bailey, Mt. Ayr, vice president; and Dr. W.G. Carhart, Marion, secretary-treasurer. In September 1912 the same officers were listed, but it was indicated that Dr. Albert was deceased. Actually he had died July 21, 1911 at age 29 or 30. Perhaps the fact that he was still listed as president 15 months later is an indication the organization had become inactive. (An interesting side note is I believe Dr. Albert was a brother of Dr. Henry Albert what was director of the State Laboratory and then the State Health Commissioner. Henry Albert died of appendicitis in 1930.)

I have not found any reference to the group after 1912.