

**THE
MISSOURI FEDERATION
OF THE BLIND**

**THE FIRST
TWENTY-FIVE YEARS**

**Written by:
Alma Murphey**

This paper is a review of the early years of the Missouri Federation of the Blind (now the Missouri Council of the Blind) and has been written upon request of the President of the Missouri Council because many newer members have expressed interest in facts surrounding the beginning of our state organization. It is gratifying to know that our younger members desire this information, and I hope the following will be helpful.

At a spring convention in 1956, the Missouri Federation of the Blind was founded. There was in existence prior to that time a loosely knit group of local clubs known as the Missouri Council of the Blind. Those organizations were The Allied Workers of the Blind, Kansas City; the Joplin Service Club, Joplin; the Springfield Service Club, Springfield; and the United Workers for the Blind, St. Louis. Those clubs, together with two recently organized groups, the Pony Express Association, St. Joseph; and Real Independence through Employment, Inc. (RITE) St. Louis, made up the Missouri Federation of the Blind. At the above-mentioned convention, the name, The Missouri Federation of the Blind (MFB) was adopted and a new Constitution was approved. The Convention was attended by Kenneth Jernigan, member of the Executive Committee of the National Federation of the Blind, and it elected Laura Welle as MFB's first president.

Much work had been done in Missouri prior to 1956, primarily by the United Workers for the Blind (UWB). We

all know about that organization's work with the Blind Pension program, but in addition to that, it was one of the seven organizations that founded the National Federation of the Blind in 1940, and served as the Missouri affiliate of the NFB until 1956. After the Missouri Federation was organized, the UWB turned over the mailing list for its well established fund raising project, known as the *White Cane Drive*, to the new state organization. The MFB also assumed responsibility for the very important legislative program which had been conducted by the UWB until this time. At the convention of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the Missouri Federation received its charter as an affiliate of that organization.

Let me explain here the arrangement for division of receipts from the fundraising projects of the state and national organizations. The above-mentioned White Cane Drive was a fund raising program that was conducted by affiliates of the National Federation throughout the country and consisted of the circulation of direct mail appeals for funds sent to a select mailing list. The proceeds of this program were divided 40 percent to the National Federation and 60 percent to the Missouri Federation. Upon becoming an affiliate of the National Federation, the Missouri Federation became a recipient of a share of the Greeting Card Program receipts, the fundraising project of the National Federation. According to this arrangement, half of the receipts were deposited in the treasury of the National Federation and

the other half was divided evenly among all the state affiliates of the NFB.

Although the affiliates of the newly formed state organization were not very adept at working together, nevertheless, when serious trouble threatened the blind people of Missouri, the MFB was equal to the task and scored a success that is serving the Aid to the Blind and Blind Pension recipients well to this day. The “trouble” was in the form of a bill introduced into the 1957 session of the State Legislature by Missouri Department of Welfare, which would, if adopted, have abolished our treasured two-part Blind Pension program and put Missouri’s aid recipients on a means test as stringent as any in the country. Our beloved friend, John Busch joined us in this battle in the legislature, and I am sure that he is one of the reasons for our success. With his help and by our efforts at being convincing at House and Senate hearings, our bombarding the legislators with letters, and our good newspaper coverage throughout the state, House Bill 62 was defeated. House Bill 62 is a number that will never be forgotten by those who were on hand at that time. Looking back, I marvel that we could have been victorious over a man as powerful in the State Legislature as was the Director of the Department of Welfare.

Unfortunately, we paid a high price for that victory, because in the fall of 1957 a million dollars was transferred out of the Blind Pension fund and given to

the Public School fund as is permitted by Article 38, Section 3 of the Missouri Constitution. Of course, we were grieved over that loss. However, the survival of our Aid to the Blind and Blind Pension programs to this date attests to the magnitude of our work in the Legislature during that 1957 session.

In 1957, it became desirable to change convention time from the spring to the fall. So in that year we held two conventions, one in the spring in Springfield, and one in the fall in St. Joseph. The main feature of the Springfield convention was a stimulating banquet address by Durward K. McDaniel, board member of the National Federation of the Blind. He discussed the advantages of establishing a statewide credit union for the blind, and less than a year later with his help and help from the Missouri Credit Union League the Missouri Federation of the Blind Credit Union was formed. It is now known as the Missouri Council of the Blind Credit Union and is still serving the blind people of Missouri as one of the Council's most valuable programs.

The St. Joseph convention took several important actions. After much heated discussion, it employed John Busch as the Federation's attorney at the enormous salary of \$500 annually. At such a salary it might be more appropriate to say that we permitted him to give us his services. It accepted an offer from RITE that RITE would match up to \$500 money from the MFB to be used for the purpose of organizing new affiliates. It

appointed RITE as the local organization to take the lead in organizing the Credit Union. In addition, it adopted two resolutions: (1) That the MFB cooperate with any agency for, or organization of, the blind when such cooperation is consistent with the ideals and principles of the Missouri Federation; and (2) that the Missouri Federation work for the protection of the right of the blind to organize and to speak for themselves through organizations of their own choice. This convention was attended by Dr. Jacobus tenBroek, President of the National Federation, and by Kenneth Jernigan. The eloquent banquet address was delivered by Dr. tenBroek.

Laura Welle resigned as MFB President at this convention, and I was elected to complete her unexpired term. It was at this time that I began to learn of the internal strife that was brewing in the National Federation, a controversy that was destined to take its toll in many ways on all who were involved during the next four to five years.

For at least the first 20 years of the MFB's existence, the organization was plagued with very low finances. We were always trying to raise money and never had enough. That had its disadvantages; however, it also produced a healthy atmosphere. People belonged to the organization not for what they could get but for what they could give. Often members were reimbursed for only partial expenses when carrying out assignments, and

state meetings were often held in homes of board members in the interest of economy.

Immediately after becoming President, I began issuing monthly news letters, which were sent to all affiliates in order to keep them informed and in touch. These newsletters were very helpful and solved the communication problem until the Missouri Chronicle began publication in February, 1960.

The Organizing Committee, chaired by Bill Jackson, began work soon after the convention, and four new affiliates were ready for admission at the 1958 convention. These were: the Ozark Association of the Blind (OAB) in St. Genevieve, the Hannibal Association of the Blind, the Bootheel Association of the Blind in Cape Girardeau, and the Tower Club in St. Louis. The Tower Club needed only minimal assistance from the State Organizing Committee. A few years after its admission, the Bootheel Association merged with the Ozark Association. The OAB and the Tower Club are very strong affiliates to this day, and the Hannibal Association was with us until recently. The Credit Union held its organizational meeting in May of 1958.

The 1958 convention, hosted by RITE, was attended by Dr. tenBroek, who delivered another splendid banquet address. This convention adopted a resolution that the MFB bid for the privilege of hosting the national convention to be held in 1961. The Ellis M. Forshee

Award was presented for the first time, and was given to Congressman Thomas Curtis, who had been extremely helpful in working for the cause of the Missouri Aid to the Blind program in Congress. Mr. Ellis M. Forshee, for whom the award is named, was one of the UWB's most outstanding workers. His work on the Blind Pension program and with the National Federation of the Blind established him as deserving of this honor. This convention elected me to a two-year term in my own right.

During my first two-year term, although always hampered by lack of funds, we made progress. At that time the Legislature held sessions every two years in the odd years. So the 1959 session marked our first contact with the legislators since our confrontation in 1957. Needless to say, our relations with the Director of the Department of Welfare and some legislators was somewhat strained. Therefore, our ambitious legislative program, approved by the 1958 convention, was not even introduced. Instead, we settled for a five dollar raise in Aid to the Blind and Blind Pension grants, bringing them up to \$65.

Two new affiliates were ready to receive charters at our 1959 convention. This was due to the expert help from NFB staff member, Paul Kirton. The Randolph County Association of the Blind in Higbee and the Guild of Fulton were the new affiliates, but a few years later, the Guild of Fulton became the Mid-Missouri Association

of the Blind, headquartered in Jefferson City. The 1959 convention was attended by Paul Kirton and John Taylor, both staff members of the National Federation. The banquet address was given by Mr. Taylor. At that time a certificate for Meritorious Service was presented to the Jenkins Music Company in recognition of its excellent record of employing the blind people. The convention also approved a proposal by the Executive Board that the MFB begin publication of a quarterly magazine, which became the Missouri Chronicle. I accepted the assignment as temporary editor.

The National Convention in Sante Fe, New Mexico in 1959 accepted the MFB as host for the 1961 convention to be held in Kansas City, Missouri. At this convention, the Missouri delegation only halfheartedly supported the NFB administration.

During 1960, the Missouri Chronicle began publication in February, May, August, and November. In the following year, the schedule was changed to the present one. A convention committee was appointed and plans got under way in earnest for the 1961 national convention.

One of the main features of the 1960 state convention in Joplin was the adoption of a new constitution, the most significant change of which provided for a new voting system. Prior to this time the MFB had voted in the same manner as the National

Federation, one vote for each affiliate, regardless of the size of the affiliate. We were aware that this arrangement did not produce a true majority vote; so our new constitution provided that one vote be cast by each member present. That convention adopted a resolution urging the National Federation to reinstate six affiliates that had been suspended by the NFB convention in Miami. The Missouri delegation did not support the NFB administration at the Miami convention, and since MFB members were not all in agreement with the action of our delegates, much controversy developed within the Missouri Federation. The 1960 convention was attended by George Card, prominent NFB member, and by Kenneth Jernigan. There was much debate during that convention with both sides being given a full hearing. However, contrary to the wishes of the National Federation, I was re-elected to my second two-year term by a large majority vote.

The 1960 convention presented the Ellis M. Forshee Award to Congressman Frank Karsten, who had done much to promote the cause of Missouri's blind citizens in Congress.

By 1961, our relations with the Department of Welfare had improved dramatically. During that session of the Legislature, a raise in monthly grants in Aid to the Blind was amended permitting recipients to own their own homes regardless of their value and still be eligible to receive aid. Several years later this provision became

part of the Blind Pension law. Mr. Procter N. Carter was most helpful, especially with the amendment regarding ownership of the home, the so-called "Homestead Provision". This was the major consideration by the MFB when the 1961 convention presented Mr. Carter with the Ellis M. Forshee Award. It was also during this banquet program that Mr. Carter agreed to use his influence toward getting legislation passed in Congress that would enable us to continue receiving Federal matching funds without giving up our two-part blind pension program. And true to his promise, he followed through with 100 percent success.

Much time was taken in preparation for the National convention to be held in Kansas City that year. This convention was attended by 140 Missourians. As the convention proceeded it became clear that nothing could be done to restore the NFB to the democratic organization we knew it should be. Dr. tenBroek's dramatic resignation speech threw the convention into such an emotional state that members did exactly as he directed throughout the remainder of the convention. Knowing that saving the National Federation was an impossibility, a substantial number of persons began holding meetings in a different hotel preparatory to the formation of a new national organization. After the convention was over and I was free to do so, I attended the organizational meeting of the American Council of the Blind and was honored by being elected its first secretary. Forty Missouri Federationists joined the ACB

as charter members. Space does not permit more detail on this subject here. However, persons wishing to know more are referred to articles in the Missouri Chronicle written during this period, especially to an article entitled "Crisis In Missouri", September, 1961. The 1961 MFB convention, along with fourteen other states' conventions, rejected so-called "affiliate standards", which were circulated by the National Federation. Failure to adopt and live by those standards resulted in expulsion from the national Federation of the Blind. Thus ended our membership in the national organization which Missouri helped to found, and which should have remained the wonderful democratic organization it easily could have been.

Let me point out here that although many Missourians joined the American Council as charter members, and we gave help to and received help from the ACB, the Missouri Federation did not apply for affiliation until after our state convention in 1973. Emotion had been aroused to a very high pitch during this controversy, and it was deemed advisable to wait until calm had been to a great degree restored before joining the ACB.

1962 was a comparatively peaceful year. The Credit Union prospered and the Chronicle grew. RITE hosted the first convention of the American Council of the Blind, held during July in St. Louis. The state convention, held in Springfield, was attended by Paul Kirton, board

member of the ACB, and by Durward K. McDaniel, ACB's first Vice President, who delivered the banquet address. During that banquet program, I had the privilege of presenting the United Workers for the Blind with a plaque in recognition of its 50th anniversary. This was the year when legislation was passed by Congress which brought to a successful end Missouri's struggle to keep its two-part Aid to the Blind program without losing Federal matching funds. This was a tremendous milestone in the life of the Missouri Federation, and a fitting climax to 50 years of dedicated work by the United Workers for the Blind.

That convention elected G. Arthur Stewart, President. He served until 1966. There are other informative pieces in the Chronicle written during this period. Reference is made especially to the "*Report to the Missouri Federation of the Blind*", December, 1962.

The four-year period under the leadership of Mr. Stewart was much less turbulent than our first eight years. The 1963 session of the Legislature raised Aid to the Blind and Blind Pension grants to \$75 monthly. It also amended those laws to provide that monthly grants could be reduced on a pro rata basis if money in the fund is not available to pay the prescribed amount. Of course this amendment was opposed by the MFB, but our opposition was tempered by the knowledge that the amendment would pass anyway, and we did not wish to lose another million dollars from our fund. Fortunately,

as of this date, there has been no occasion requiring use of this amendment. The 1965 Legislative session raised monthly grants to \$80. It amended the State Merit System law, which now provides blind applicants taking examinations for positions with the state with a reader and a place to take such examinations in order to assure equality of opportunity. It also forbids discrimination against the placing of blind people in positions where eyesight is not absolutely indispensable. The Legislature also amended the Aid to the Blind law to provide that a person who takes a job while receiving aid would have his first 12 months' income disregarded in making out his budget. This had an effect, of course, of encouraging individuals to achieve financial independence. Other bills were introduced but failed because of lack of time.

The first affiliate President's Luncheon was held at the 1963 convention, and the Protestant church service was held at the hotel for the first time. This convention approved a proposal that the MFB conduct an informational seminar. It adopted a resolution that the organization adopt a blind foster child through the Foster Parents' plan. George Card, board member of the American Council of the Blind was the banquet Speaker.

At the 1964 convention, hosted by RITE, the President was able to report that the informational seminar had been an outstanding success. He also reported that the foster child program was very well

under way. We were unable to adopt a blind child because they are cared for in other ways. However, we did adopt a nine-year-old Filipino boy whose father was blind. Mr. Stewart was our contact with the agency and with the child, and reported to us from time-to-time in the Missouri Chronicle. We continued this program until the child reached the age limit.

That convention was honored with two distinguished guests, both of whom spoke at the banquet: Senator Edward V. Long, U.S. Senator from Missouri, and Professor Morgan Jones, graduate of the Missouri School for the Blind, professor of linguistics at the University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico. This was the first state convention attended by our faithful friend, Bob Leighninger. He had joined the staff of the St. Louis Society for the Blind just prior to that time. This began a relationship between the St. Louis Society and the Missouri Federation, which, unfortunately it appears, has terminated with Mr. Leighninger's retirement.

The 1965 convention, held in Jefferson City, was attended by David Krause, who delivered an interesting and informative talk during the afternoon session about Civil Service employment for the blind and who also spoke at the banquet. We also had the honor of a brief address at the banquet by Governor Warren Hearnes of Missouri.

That convention authorized a second informational seminar, which was held in March 1966, and was even more successful than the first one.

During all these years, fund raising continued to be an ongoing problem. The direct mail appeals, which were sent out semiannually, were declining in receipts. Additional fund raising efforts were attempted; mailing of greeting cards, a statewide raffle, and various kinds of sales. The affiliates were even solicited, and some of them responded with contributions. This represents an interesting contrast to our present practice of making contributions to the affiliates. With our combined efforts, the work of the Federation continued and the organization thrived.

The 1966 convention, hosted by the Allied Workers of Kansas City, was attended by Durward K. McDaniel, who participated in a convention session and spoke at the meeting of the MFB Credit Union. Our distinguished guest at the banquet was Congressman, Richard Bowling, who discussed his book, "*House Out of Order.*" The Ellis M. Forshee Award was presented for the first time during this four-year period to State Representative M. E. (Charlie) Bauer for his most valuable assistance with our state legislative program.

Our credit union reported assets in excess of \$33,000. The convention retained John Busch for another year at – can you believe it? -- \$500 per annum.

Victor C. Johnson was elected President. In fact, the convention elected an entirely new executive board. Although the people elected were capable leaders, it was found that an entirely new board did not serve well the continuity of the work of the organization. So it was not long before the constitution was amended to provide that the board be elected part one year and part the next, as is our present custom. The entire Chronicle staff was reappointed by the new board.

The term of Victor C. Johnson got off to a good start with the State Legislature approving the following: a raise in monthly grants in Aid to the Blind and the Blind Pension to \$85; the Medicaid bill providing medical services to recipients of Aid to the Blind and the Blind Pension; and a bill giving preference to blind persons in the operation of vending stands in state buildings under the existing program supervised by the Missouri Bureau for the Blind. This legislature also removed the exempt earnings clause from the Blind Pension law, a move which was opposed by the Missouri Federation.

The 1967 convention presented the Ellis M. Forshee Award posthumously to Arthur Schroer and to Viola Schroer. Arthur and Viola were charter members of the United Workers for the Blind and were among that organization's most dedicated and vigorous workers. Our distinguished guest who delivered the banquet address was Mr. Arthur G. Edgerton of Toledo, Ohio, *Handicapped American of 1967*, as named by President

Johnson's committee on Employment of the Handicapped. Our president also gave a banquet talk on economic opportunities for the blind in 1967. Attorney Busch was Master of Ceremonies.

In 1968, the editor and the associate editor of the Chronicle resigned, and these positions were assumed by Laura Welle and Assunta Lilley, respectively. During that year, Raymond Parsons passed away. He had been one of our most valuable people both in organization work and as a member of the staff of the Missouri Bureau for the Blind. Dr. Jacobus tenBroek, President and founder of the National Federation of the Blind, also died during that year.

In the hope of being able to present a united front to the Legislature, a liaison committee with the Missouri Federation of the blind and the Progressive Blind of Missouri, the NFB affiliate in Missouri, was formed. This committee, composed of members of each organization, agreed completely on the legislative program to be presented to the 1969 session of the Legislature.

The 1968 convention presented the Ellis M. Forshee Award to Miss Adeline A. Ruenzi, President and founder of the Service Club for the Blind. Present at the convention was Kenneth M. Jernigan, Executive Director of the Iowa Commission for the Blind and President of the National Federation of the Blind. He moderated the panel discussion during the afternoon session and

delivered an eloquent banquet address. The banquet program concluded with presentation of RITE's movie, *Striving for Independence*.

During 1969, in addition to carrying out his duties as President, Victor Johnson, together with his wife, Xena, represented the MFB before the Legislature. Although the liaison committee functioned according to plan, very little was accomplished during that session. The \$15 raise in monthly grants we sought was cut to \$5 and the other bills got nowhere. The Legislative Committee became the Education and Welfare Committee during this year.

The 1969 convention raised the retainer for our attorney to \$1000. It also donated \$150 to *Good Cheer Magazine*. The MFB had been contributing to *Good Cheer Magazine* since 1958. The convention adopted a revised constitution, which had been authorized by the 1968 convention. The Ellis M. Forshee Award was given to the McDonnell-Douglas Corporation in appreciation for its production of RITE's movie, *Striving for Independence*.

During 1969, a familiar thing began to happen. The MFB became concerned about money being transferred out of the blind Pension fund for the purpose of paying Medicaid expenses.

During 1970, our regular programs prospered and the MFB grew. The Credit Union, at its annual meeting, was able to boast of \$50,000 in assets. The Chronicle became a much larger magazine, including material from newspapers and other publications. However, our greeting card mailing was discontinued because it was not of sufficient worth to be of interest to the mailer. It was at about this time that the Federation received a large bequest from a friend of Arthur Stewart's, our first and only such gift.

The convention that year, hosted by the United Workers for the Blind, was the largest to date. The librarian from Wolfner Library was on the afternoon convention program, and the custom of presenting a Service Award was established. This year's award was given to the Stanley Photo Company for its excellent record of employing blind people. The banquet speaker was Floyd Qualls, Executive Director of the Oklahoma League for the Blind and board member of the American Council of the Blind. The Ellis M. Forshee Award was presented to Representative James Conway of the Missouri Legislature. That convention elected me President, and I served until 1974.

The period of October 1970 to October 1974 was a very active one. During this time, the State Legislature began holding annual sessions, with the even year sessions ending on April 30, while the odd year sessions continued through June 15. This meant that the MFB

must have a Legislative program ready every year, as is now the case. During this period, monthly grants in both programs were raised to \$100. The Blind Pension law was amended to provide that recipients could own their homes as in the Aid to the Blind law. The visual acuity provision in the Blind Pension law was amended to conform to that in the Aid to the Blind program. These provisions had been sought before, but it was imperative that they be adopted at this time so that recipients could be transferred from one program to another as we knew would be necessary when the Federal Supplemental Security Income program (SSI) came into existence. This program became operational on January 1, 1974, and our Blind Assistance program has been much more complicated since that date. A good thing happened during this time. Proctor N. Carter transferred Medicaid expenses from the Blind Pension Fund to General Revenue.

During 1971 and 1972, Missouri's blind people received desperately needed assistance from the American Council of the Blind in the person of Durward K. McDaniel. Congress was considering a welfare reform bill which, if adopted in its original form, would have mutilated Missouri's envied two-part pension program, and many recipients would have been removed from the rolls. Mr. McDaniel worked with Missouri's Senator, Thomas Eagleton, and his staff so that the appropriate amendment was added as part of the Welfare Reform bill. As a result of this legislation,

when SSI came into existence, Missouri was able to keep its flat grant program intact and no one was removed from the rolls. This was a very exciting time in the life of the Missouri Federation.

The 1971 convention, held in Cape Girardeau and ably hosted by the Ozark Association of the blind, was the first convention to be held in a motel. It was also the first time a Catholic mass was celebrated at the convention site. Durward McDaniel came to this convention to bring us up-to-date on the work being done in Congress, but he could not remain for the entire convention. A notable action of this convention was the vote to sign the contract that marked the beginning of our thrift store fund raising program. Due to problems with the National Federation, we amended our constitution to provide that persons could not belong to the Missouri Federation and the National Federation simultaneously. We accepted a proposal by our Executive Board that we begin laying plans for our summer camp program. The Federationist of the Year Award was established, and two MFB members were recipients: Majella Rigdon and Eleanor Shain. Proctor Carter was our banquet speaker, and in addition to giving an informative address, he named two Federationists to serve on the newly established Advisory Committee to the Bureau for the Blind. The MFB had been working for some time for the development of such a committee. The appointees were Arthur Stewart and Aubrey Welle.

The Ellis M. Forshee Award was presented to Victor and Xena Johnson.

Our honored guest and banquet speaker at the 1972 convention was U.S. Senator Thomas Eagleton. This was the second time the MFB had the good fortune of having as its banquet speaker a United States senator.

The first Summer Camp week was held in July 1973 and its growing popularity speaks eloquently for its success. The 1973 convention adopted a resolution that the MFB apply for affiliation with the American Council of the Blind. Despite all the expert assistance we had received from the ACB, we permitted twelve years to elapse before taking this step.

Our credit union reported assets in excess of \$75,000 and it was privileged to have as its speaker at its annual meeting, Durward K. McDaniel.

The banquet speaker was Senator William Cason, Missouri Senator, with whom we had had disagreements in the past but who had become a staunch friend. The Federationist of the Year Award was presented to Laura Welle, and the Ellis M. Forshee Award to the Gerber Wrought Iron Company for its excellent policy of hiring blind employees.

We prepared no legislative program for 1974 because we knew the new Federal SSI program would present us

many problems to be solved. This expectation was more than fulfilled.

In August of 1974, the MFB experienced real tragedy. Our beloved friend, John Busch, suffered a totally debilitating stroke. He passed away in March of the following year, but he was lost to us in 1974. Shortly thereafter, his partner, Jack McEnery, became the Federation's attorney, a position he filled admirably until 1979.

The second Summer Camp week was held that year; the Credit Union prospered, and the Chronicle continued its good work. The young people who had recently joined the MFB were doing a commendable job, especially in the area of public relations.

The banquet speaker for the 1974 convention was State Senator Manfred, who had been and continues to be extremely helpful. I had the honor of presenting the Federationist of the Year Award to Robert Leighninger and, much to our complete amazement, Jack and I received the Ellis M. Forshee Award. That convention elected Fred Lilley President, and he served until 1978.

During the period from October 1974 to October 1978, the Federation's work continued in the same manner as in preceding years. Monthly assistance grants in both programs were increased from \$100 to \$160. A most wonderful thing happened in 1978. The

Education and Welfare Committee was able to persuade the chairman of both the House and the Senate Appropriations Committees to discontinue taking money from the Blind Pension fund for the Missouri Bureau for the Blind. Thus, from 1978 to 1982 or 1983, the Blind Pension fund was used only for paying monthly grants to Blind Pension and Aid to the Blind recipients. That explains our ability to get such substantial increases during those years.

The 1975 convention in St. Joseph chartered two new affiliates: The Blind of Central Missouri, Sedalia and the St. Charles Federation of the Blind, now the St. Charles Council of the Blind in St. Charles. In that year, Mrs. Bertie Lee became the Editor of the Missouri Chronicle. The convention adopted a budget of \$26,500 and the Credit Union was to report assets of over \$100,000. The Ellis M. Forshee Award was given to Mr. Joseph Stokes, a great helper and friend in the Division of Family Services.

The 1976 convention was the first to use our voting machine, the Vote Getter. It chartered one new affiliate, the Capital Area Association of the Blind in Jefferson City. It adopted a strong resolution regarding the use of or the neglect of Braille at the Missouri School for the Blind, and a resolution establishing a committee to investigate the feasibility of inaugurating a housing program for the blind. The following year, the convention adopted a motion authorizing that \$50,000

be set aside as the beginning of a fund for such a program. A Distinguished Service Award was presented at the 1976 convention to Al Sontag, Chairman of the Governor's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. He had done much for disabled persons, including the blind. That convention was held in St. Louis, hosted by the Missouri Federation since no affiliate had bid for the privilege at the 1975 convention.

In 1977 another new affiliate, the Southeast Missouri United Blind Club (SEMO) in Poplar Bluff, was organized and chartered at the convention. The Capital Area Association of the Blind began having difficulty and needed assistance from the membership chairman, Teresa Lauer. The convention was held in Cape Girardeau and hosted by the OAB. It adopted the following resolution: (1) to update the MFB state charter; (2) that the MFB affiliate with the American Association of Citizens with Disabilities; and (3) that the MFB affiliate with the American Leadership Leagues (ALL) a group including representatives of organizations of the blind and agencies for the blind. Donald and Betty Clarkson were selected for the Federationist of the Year Award, and the Ellis M. Forshee Award was presented to Robert Leighninger.

The 1978 session of the Legislature was a short but very busy one. The raise in monthly grants was one of our major considerations. Our attempt to have the lien law repealed and the matter of some tax monies not

going into the Blind Pension fund where it rightfully belonged were two more vital questions. The tax problem was solved to our satisfaction. However, we failed with regard to the lien law.

The 1978 convention, hosted by the Tower Club in St. Louis, adopted the following resolution: (1) that MFB bid for the privilege of hosting an ACB convention; (2) that MFB pay for one quarterly issue of *Good Cheer Magazine*; (3) that MFB strongly urge that one qualification for rehabilitation instructor be that he/she should be legally blind; and (4) that a Medic-Alert program be established. The convention presented Wenona Sucher with the Federationist of the Year Award, and the Ellis M. Forshee Award to Assunta and Fred Lilley. Darrell Lauer was elected President and served until 1982.

The MFB had not planned a legislative program of its own for 1979, but rather it planned to support legislation that was to be introduced by other groups. However, early in January, we learned that a bill had been introduced into the state legislature by a blind state senator that would reduce the tax that makes up the blind pension fund from three cents on \$100 valuation of real estate to one-half cent on \$100.00 valuation of real estate. Needless to say, this was cause for great concern and blind people of Missouri rallied in their usual manner. Again, we were victorious in defeating an

objectionable bill; in fact it did not even come out of committee.

Because of developments surrounding the legislative program, the United Workers for the Blind withdrew from the Missouri Federation early in 1979. It was wonderful to welcome this venerable organization back into the Missouri Council at the 1986 convention.

In 1979, the recently elected president, Darrell Lauer, appointed three new committees: a Thrift Store Committee, a Library Service Committee, and an Affirmative Action Committee. During that year, the camp site was changed from Cobblestone Lodge to Eaglehurst Ranch. The ACB convention in July accepted Missouri's bid to host its 1981 convention. Thus, a tremendous job lay ahead for MFB.

The 1979 convention in Hannibal chartered two new affiliates: The River City Association of the Blind, and the West Central Missouri Association of the Blind. It adopted a resolution which marked the beginning of our Health Benefits program, and began the practice of giving money to the affiliates to help send members to ACB conventions. The Ellis M. Forshee award was presented to George Lance, well-known benefactor for many years of our Missouri School for the Blind. Ed and Louise Reiman were recipients of the Federationist of the Year award. Credit Union assets in 1979 were \$162,000.

Shortly after the 1979 convention, we were saddened to learn of the death of our Chronicle Editor, Mrs. Bertie Lee, who had been ill for some time. Louise Reiman, who had been assisting Bertie, was appointed by the President to serve as Chronicle Editor.

The 1980 convention held in Kansas City was attended and addressed by our ACB friend, Durward K. McDaniel. Because of the change in the fiscal year of the Credit Union, there was no annual Credit Union membership meeting at this convention. Beginning in March 1981, annual Credit Union meetings have been held in St. Louis.

Plans had been in progress all year for the acquisition of an office for the Federation. So at this convention, the President was able to announce that the move to a new office would take place in December, to what is our present location. Prior to this time, in fact, since 1962, headquarters of the MFB had been at the home of the Murphey family. The phone had been answered there on a 24-hour basis, and many of the records of the organization were kept at that location. This was a big step forward for the MFB and it was made possible because of the greatly increased income provided by the Thrift Store program. Fred C. Lilley was appointed by the President as the first Executive Director of the Missouri Federation of the Blind. That convention gave the Ellis M. Forshee Award to R.D. (Pete) Rogers, a most helpful lobbyist in Jefferson City, and a service

award was presented to Jack Raithel who had recently retired from his position as Director of Employment Specialists with the Missouri Bureau for the Blind.

The big story in 1981, of course, was the convention of the American Council of the Blind. It was deemed quite successful, and it provided an experience to those MFB members on the convention committee that will never be forgotten. The highlight of the convention was the banquet program which honored Durward K. McDaniel, who had just retired from his position as National Representative of the American Council. All of us who know Durward knew quite correctly that retirement would not mean that he would stop working for the organized blind. The 1981 state convention was attended by Durward's replacement in the ACB, Oral Miller.

An extremely important development occurred at the 1981 ACB convention. The Braille Revival League, a special interest group of the ACB, was founded. As its name implies, the purpose of this organization is to restore Braille to its proper place as the primary medium of literacy to blind people. This had special significance for blind Missourians for two reasons: (1) We, as members of the Alumna Association of the Missouri School for the Blind, then as members of the Missouri Federation, had been trying since 1956 to restore Braille to its place of importance in the lives of blind people. The goal of the Braille Revival League exactly paralleled

our concerns, and it was gratifying that people throughout the country were joining us. (2) Since the Missouri School for the Blind in 1851 was the first school in the United States to begin using Braille, it seemed particularly appropriate that 130 years later, the organization to restore Braille should have its beginning in St. Louis. Missouri now has a thriving state chapter of the Braille Revival League, The Braille Revival League of Missouri. It has become the first special interest group of the Missouri Council.

This concludes my review of the first 25 years of the Missouri Federation of the Blind, now the Missouri Council of the Blind. Its continuing history is well known to us all. There is still much to be done by consumer organizations on all three levels of Government, local, State, and Federal, and the MCB has a significant role to play. By continuing to adhere to the time tested practices of dedication, generosity, mutual respect, and hard work, there is no limit to the accomplishments that can be achieved by the Missouri Council of the Blind.