

MDTSEA History Highlights

1919 - 1969

A History of the Michigan Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association

Background

Driver education is an outgrowth of a national organized safety education movement. Out of this movement a number of events occurred over several years that ultimately led to the introduction of driver education into the high school curriculum and the establishment of state driver education teacher associations.

A milestone in the development of safety education occurred in the 1919 convention of the National Education Association. The convention was addressed by Albert W. Whitney on the topic of "*Safety Education in the Public Schools.*" His address included the following statement:

"It cannot be given all of us to fight for freedom, but the fight for safety, the fight for real adventure, the fight for a life that shall be the measure of a purpose instead of the marred result of purposeless chance, is with the rights of us all--it should be within the right of every pupil in the United States."

This address had a great impact on delegates, as a number of states passed legislation requiring the teaching of safety education during the early 1920's. (Stack, Herbert J., *History of Driver Education in the United States.* Washington D.C.: National Commission on Safety Education, National Education Association, 1966.)

Another milestone occurred when the National Society for the Study of Education published its 25th Yearbook in 1926 entitled, "*The Present Status of Safety Education.*" This volume was prepared by a number of nationally recognized educators and leaders in safety education. It included subject matter in safety education, methods of administration, and types of lessons for academic and vocational high schools. One chapter entitled, "*The Fundamental Significance of Safety Education,*" written by A.B. Meredith and Albert W. Whitney, included their philosophy of safety education as follows:

"The part that safety and the other subjects of which it is a type will take in the reorganization seems fairly clear. Health, safety, thrift and conservation are all characterized by having an immediate relationship to life. They involve fundamental attitudes of mind that it is necessary for one to have if he is satisfactorily to look out for himself and take his place in society...Our schools can do nothing better nor more fundamental than to make our children honorable, truthful, brave, courteous, unselfish, self-reliant, able to recognize the finer values in life, and disposed to conserve, rather than waste, their health, their lives and the resources of nature; there are no more fundamental nor important objectives than these..."

(Stack, Herbert J., *History of Driver Education in the United States.* Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Safety Education, National Education Association, 1966.)

Early Driver Education

When instruction in traffic safety was first provided by schools, it was integrated with other subjects or taught as a classroom-only course. The first course, which included both classroom and behind-the-wheel instruction, was taught in 1933 by Amos Neyhart at the Pennsylvania State College High School. During the behind-the-wheel instruction, one student drove and three rode as observers. Mr. Neyhart reported on his program at the National Safety Council's annual conference, which led to the establishment of other courses around the country.

In 1936 a college credit course for teachers was offered at Pennsylvania State College. In addition, the American Automobile Association began teaching an intensive one-week 40-hour course for high school teachers. This was the first of many to be taught over a period of many years.

Also, during 1936, the Lane Technical High School in Chicago started its program using 30 dummy cars in the classroom to simulate driving. Adjoining the school was a small area in which several automobiles were available for practice. This program represented one of the first combinations of simulation and an off-street multiple-car range program.

During the mid and late 1930's state courses of study began to appear. By 1940, over 20 states had courses of study, and several hundred high schools had begun teaching driver education. Also, during the mid 1930's, several high school driver education textbooks were published. Included were *Man and the Motor Car* and the *Sportsmanlike Driving Series*. These textbooks were limited in scope, and the course content relied heavily on the author's experience, opinions, and "best guesses."

There were several important developments in 1937. A college professors seminar in driver education was offered at the University of Kentucky. Also, during 1937, a system-wide program in driver education was started in Cleveland Public Schools, supervised by Leslie R. Silvernale. Finally, the American Association of School Administrators initiated plans for a yearbook on *Safety Education*. (Stack, Herbert J. *History of Driver Education in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Safety Education, National Education Association, 1966.)

One of the most valuable contributions to the safety education movement came with the 1940 Yearbook, *Safety Education*, published by the American Association of School Administrators. Driver education had been making steady progress since its inception, but recognition and endorsement by school administrators was greatly needed. At the 1940 convention of the American Association of School Administrators, the Yearbook was well received and given wide distribution. This was the first time that safety education, including driver education, was recognized by the profession as an integral part of the school curriculum. Driver education was given special attention in the Yearbook, and several statements were of historical significance.

"Teaching youth to be safe and intelligent operators of motor vehicles is a responsibility of the community.

Instruction in safety is an essential part of the modern school's program of producing good citizens.

The time has come for educators to prepare themselves for leadership in safety education."

(Stack, Herbert J., *History of Driver Education in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Safety Education, National Education Association, 1966.)

Another significant event was the First National Conference on High School Driver Education. This conference was sponsored by the National Commission on Safety Education and was held in 1949 at Jackson's Mill, West Virginia. This conference came at a time when driver education sorely needed policies, standards, and objectives. Conference proceedings were published as *High-School Driver Education: Policies and Recommendations*. Recommendations covered all aspects of a driver education program. Objectives of driver education were identified as:

"Promoting the safe, efficient, and enjoyable use of equipment and environment.

Developing a strong sense of personal and social responsibility for the common welfare.

Developing pride in maintaining high standards of performance.

Promoting effective habits of cooperation in meeting and solving common problems.

Preparing people for useful vocations suited to their individual abilities."

(National Commission on Safety Education, National Education Association, *High-School Driver Education: Policies and Recommendations*. Washington, D.C.: The Commission, 1950.)

A second national conference was held at Michigan State University in 1953. This conference re-emphasized and strengthened some of the points covered by the first conference and added several others. (National Commission on Safety Education, National Education Association, *Policies and Practices for Driver Education*. Washington D.C.: The Commission, 1954.)

1955 Crisis

In the fall of 1955, it appeared that Michigan was going to set a record high in the number of traffic fatalities. The legislature had already adjourned for the year, so Governor G. Mennen Williams, concerned about this problem, called the legislature back for a short special session. This session was to deal with his 14-point traffic safety program. About half of the 14 points were ultimately adopted by the legislature. The two of most concern to driver education were the passing of the driver education law and the establishment of the Highway Traffic Safety Center at Michigan State University. Michigan was the first state to pass a driver education law and the first state to establish a Highway Traffic Safety Center.

The most salient aspects of the driver education law required that:

All school districts make a driver education course available to all eligible students, including those attending parochial or private schools and out-of-school youth.

All students wishing to be licensed before their 18th birthday must satisfactorily complete a high school driver education course.

The Michigan Department of Education would promulgate rules and regulations to carry out the act. (The Department of Education established the requirements to teach driver education as holding a teaching certificate and completion of a 2-semester hour credit course in driver education among its rules.)

Public schools be reimbursed up to \$25 for every student completing the driver education course. This was to be financed by assessing \$1 for each original and each renewal operator's license and \$.35 for each chauffeur's license.

(The Department of Public Instruction, *The Michigan Driver Education Manual*. Lansing: The Department, 1956.)

The Highway Traffic Safety Center (HTSC) was established in 1956 and was patterned after a structure recommended in the publication, *What Can Colleges Do about the Traffic Problem*. This publication was a report on a 2-year study conducted by the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities. John A. Hannah, President of Michigan State University, was also president of this association at that time. The study was conducted at Michigan State University and involved many individuals from state and national organizations, as well as faculty members from various colleges on campus. The study recommended an inter-disciplinary approach to solving the traffic problem and that the services of the center be in providing credit courses, short courses and conferences, field services, research and technical writing, and information and material service. (Michigan State College, *What Can Colleges Do about the Traffic Problem*. E. Lansing: The College, 1953.)

Twenty-eight staff members were hired from around the country to accomplish the objectives of the Center. Their backgrounds included law and enforcement, driver education, traffic administration, accident investigation, traffic engineering, and other phases of traffic activities. With the cooperation

of other departments at Michigan State University, the entire resources of the University were brought to bear upon the traffic problem in Michigan. Attached to the Center were staff from the School of Police Administration and Public Safety, General Business, Economics, Civil Engineering, Resource Development, Sociology, Agricultural Economics, Statistics, Teacher Education, Geography, Communications Research Center, and the Audio-Visual Center. Mr. Gordon Sheehe from the School of Police Administration and Public Safety was named as the Director of the Center. (Earl, Homer, *MDSEA News. Kalamazoo News: The Southwestern Michigan Driver Safety Education Association*, Vol II, No. 1, 1958.)

When established in 1956, the Michigan State University HTSC began teaching a number of 3-term credit hour driver education teacher preparation courses. In addition to teaching them during the regular school year, they were also taught in the summer as a 2-week concentrated course. Four courses could be taken during the summer and were taken by many teachers throughout Michigan and nationally.

Founding of MDTSEA

The Michigan Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association began when several driver education teachers met in 1953 in Southwestern Michigan to form The Southwestern Michigan Driver Education Association (SMDEA). This was the first Association of its type in Michigan. Growth of the Association was rapid so that by 1955 the group had increased to include driver education instructors from over sixty schools in the southwestern corner of the state. It was an active group of dedicated individuals interested in learning everything they could about driver education.

At SMDEA meetings the driver education instructors compared notes on each other's driver education programs. Many questions discussed then are still being considered today such as: How many students do you teach each semester? Do you use a standard shift or an automatic transmission car? How many hours of classroom work and how many hours of behind-the-wheel do you teach? Does the school use the driver education car for purposes other than driver education? What does it cost to operate your program? What's the latest information on driver education textbooks and tests? How do you grade students? How much weight is given to "attitude" and how do you grade it? How many of your students pass the state licensing examination? The two most prominent questions of the day which always resulted in a lot of discussion were: Which is the best type of automobile to start teaching with--standard shift or automatic shift, and which is the best foot to use for braking--right or left?

In 1956, the SMDEA met with other driver education instructors at St. Mary's Lake camp and formed a new association known as the Michigan Driver Safety Education Association (MDSEA). The first set of officers for 1956-1957 were: President, Lawton Smith of Portage High School; Vice President, Ed Comar of Redford High School; Secretary, Elmer Rewalt of Allegan High School; and Treasurer, Russell Kelly of Muskegon Public Schools. This is the Association which exists today as the Michigan Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (MDTSEA).

The MDSEA met twice a year on a state-wide basis. One meeting was held in the Spring and the other in the Fall. The theme of each meeting was in-service training. No one ever left a meeting without taking home a lot of good ideas to try out. They also published a newsletter beginning in 1957 titled *The MDSEA News*. Homer Earl of Kalamazoo served as the editor. (Earl, Homer; *MDSEA News. Kalamazoo: The Southwestern Michigan Driver Safety Education Association*, Vol II, No. 1, 1958.)

Lawton Smith, one of the founders of the MDSEA and its first President, was elected President-Elect of the American Driver and Safety Education Association (ADSEA) for the 1958-1959 year and served as ADTSEA's third president during 1959-1960.

1958-1960 Highlights

The Association hosted the 3rd annual conference of the American Driver and Safety Education

Association (which later became the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association) in East Lansing, Michigan.

1961 Highlights

The Executive Board held four meetings during the year. In August, the treasury had a balance of \$243.49 and by the December meeting, the balance had increased to \$382.93. The Spring meeting of the Association was held at the University of Michigan (UofM) and the Fall meeting at the G.M. Technical Center in Warren. Nearly 150 MDEA members and friends attended the meeting at the Technical Center.

The major activity of the year was a letter writing campaign to Michigan State University (MSU) President John A. Hannah, urging him to continue the courses necessary for approval to teach driver education. This was undertaken because after three years of operation, the MSU Highway Traffic Safety Center had been dissolved due to budget constraints of the State and the University. The Board also passed a resolution that the Association communicate to HTSC Director Gordon Sheehe and Assistant Director Leslie Silvernale their appreciation for all the services the HTSC had provided and their regret that the HTSC had been dissolved. A further letter was sent to the HTSC requesting that it continue serving as the Secretariat of the Association.

The Executive Board approved a motion that an attempt be made to re-establish a newsletter for the Association. The Michigan Education Association (MEA) had agreed to pay up to 1/3 of the cost, not to exceed \$200.00. Ken Licht volunteered to serve as the editor.

The Executive Board also approved a motion to establish two new membership categories-- Maintaining Membership at \$25.00 and Sustaining Membership at \$50.00.

The Association was granted department status in the Michigan Education Association.

1962 Highlights

The Executive Board held four meetings during the year and conducted two state meetings. The Spring meeting was held at the Uof M in conjunction with the University's Tenth Annual Conference for Teachers of Driver Education. Over 200 teachers attended the conference. The Fall meeting was held at Michigan State University and concentrated on alcohol education.

Four issues of the *MDEA MISSIVE* were published and distributed to members.

The treasurer reported a balance of \$803.87 on hand in May.

The Executive Board passed a resolution and sent it to the Superintendent of Public Instruction that the driver education approval requirements be increased to a minor equivalency. This position was reaffirmed at the annual business meeting with the MDEA president directed to write a letter to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to this effect. The board also discussed the need for a broader base for driver education to insure that the Department of Public Instruction would be able to reimburse public schools at the \$25.00 rate.

Driver education teachers were urged to contact their legislator to voice their opposition to a bill that would allow public schools to contract with commercial schools to provide driver education for the district. Later in the year, the Attorney General issued an opinion which stated that:

"Local schools districts do not have the authority to contract with approved commercial driver education schools to provide instruction for students under 18 years of age...The attorney general ruled that the superintendent of public instruction may not distribute moneys from the driver

education and training funds to school districts for the purpose of implementing such an unauthorized contract."

Two proposed amendments to the Constitution were adopted at the Spring meeting. The first increased the membership fees from \$2.50 to \$3.00. Fifty cents of the annual dues was earmarked to defray cost of the *MDEA MISSIVE*. The other amendment changed the name of the Association from the Michigan Driver Safety Education Association to the Michigan Driver Education Association (MDEA). This change was made so that the name would conform to the national association's name of the American Driver Education Association (ADEA).

The Executive Board approved an allowance of \$50.00 per person for expenses for up to three MDEA officers or board member delegates to attend the ADEA conference.

Michigan received the nation's highest award in high school driver education. The program was recognized by the President's Committee for Traffic Safety as the annual measurement of high school driver education programs throughout the country.

1963 Highlights

The Executive Board held four meetings during the year and conducted two state meetings. The Spring meeting was held at the UofM and the Fall meeting at Ferris State College. The Spring meeting was structured around a report on the activities of the State Driver Education Policy Committee and a survey conducted by Dr. Donald Huelke and Dr. Paul Gikas on the involvement of teenagers in highway accidents. The Fall meeting centered around automobile mechanics from the standpoint of preventive maintenance.

Three issues of the *MDEA MISSIVE* were published. With the departure of *MDEA MISSIVE* editor Ken Licht to the National Safety Council (NSC), Les Silvernale took over as editor.

The Association reaffirmed its stand on increasing driver education teacher preparation requirements and urged the ADEA to seek raising the requirements throughout the North Central Region.

The Executive Board gave consideration to the MDEA tying in more closely with the MEA's regional meetings. In the Fall, the MDEA did participate in ten regional meetings covering fifteen of the eighteen MEA regions. The board also voted to continue the practice of paying up to \$50.00 expense money for each of the four MDEA officers to attend the ADEA conference.

1964 Highlights

The Association held its Spring meeting at the UofM in conjunction with the Twelfth Annual Conference of Teachers of Driver Education. The morning session focused on automotive safety research at the G.M. proving grounds. The afternoon session was held at the proving grounds with a tour of the grounds and some of the research being conducted. Registration was limited to 225 attendees, and the fee for the meeting was \$1.00. The Executive Board voted to discontinue the Fall meeting and instead to hold a meeting in conjunction with each of the Fall MEA regional meetings.

Four issues of the *MDEA MISSIVE* were published and sent to Association members.

The Executive Board voted to contribute to the expenses of only two of the officers instead of four to attend the ADEA conference. The amount of the contribution was increased to \$100.00 per person. The board also voted to increase the number of issues of the *MDEA MISSIVE* from four to five per year with one issue being published in the summer. The summer issue was to be sent to all driver education teachers in the state.

The Association approved three amendments to the Constitution. One changed the address of the Association from the HTSC to the MEA. The second changed the time of the election of officers from the Fall meeting to the Spring meeting with newly elected officers taking office immediately. The third change was that officers would serve two-year terms instead of one-year terms.

The Association approved a resolution that the Association was opposed to the use of speed in automotive advertisements and that the President communicate this resolution to each of the automobile manufacturers.

At the urging of Governor George Romney, the MSU Board of Trustees voted to re-establish the HTSC, effective July 1, 1964.

1965 Highlights

The Spring meeting of the Association was held as part of the 13th Annual Conference for Teachers of Driver Education at the UofM. The program was varied dealing with signs, signals, and roadway markings; safe driving; psychology and driver behavior; and law enforcement practices. Fall meetings were also held at the MEA regional meetings.

Five issues of the *MDEA MISSIVE* were published with the summer issue being sent to all driver education teachers in the state.

The Association held two extra meetings, one in the Upper Peninsula and one in the Lower Peninsula, to give careful consideration to the recommendations made by Governor George Romney's Special Commission on Traffic Safety (SCOTS). The Association voted overwhelmingly to support the recommendations. Among the recommendations were increasing the licensing age to 17, increasing the age to be eligible to take driver education from 15 to 16, requiring 90 days of driving with a parent or guardian following driver education, and increasing the reimbursement for driver education up to \$40.00 per student, but not to exceed the cost of the program. The Association President was directed to send a letter to the Governor, Secretary of State, and the SCOTS Chairman to inform them of the Association's position.

A driver education study conducted by the HTSC was also released which included many recommendations for the improvement of driver education. Among the recommendations was increasing the licensing age to 17 years of age. This change was recommended by the majority of the school officials, law enforcement personnel, judges, and parents interviewed as part of the study. Association members Bob Gustafson and Bob Nolan of the HTSC staff were co-investigators.

Several Association members joined national leaders in writing the publication *Policies and Guidelines--Teacher Preparation and Certification in Driver and Traffic Safety Education*. The booklet was the product of the National Education Association's National Commission on Safety Education

The State Board of Education raised the requirements to teach driver education from two semester hours to four semester hours beginning July 1, 1967 and to six semester hours beginning July 1, 1968.

1966 Highlights

The Association held its annual Spring meeting in conjunction with the 14th Annual Conference of Teachers of Driver Education at the UofM. The program included presentations on the University's Highway Safety Research Institute, facts about tires, the Michigan Accident Claims Fund, the status of Michigan driver education, and automobile insurance. The Honorable William G. Milliken, Lieutenant Governor, addressed the luncheon meeting. At the meeting, 69 members received Certificates of Merit for having achieved a minor or its equivalency in driver education.

At the Spring meeting, the Executive Board voted to take an active part in the series of eight regional meetings being held by the Michigan Department of Education for driver education teachers. Following the meeting, the Association President appointed a committee to develop plans for the public information program.

The Association published and distributed to Association members three issues of the *MDEA MISSIVE*.

Approximately 190 teachers attended four regional meetings the Association conducted to discuss traffic safety legislation. Those in attendance voted in favor of all the recommendations in the SCOTS report.

The legislature enacted a bill which raised the reimbursement for driver education to \$30.00 per person but not to exceed the cost of the program. To cover the increased reimbursement, the licensing fees going into the Driver Education Fund were increased to \$3.00 for an original operator's license, \$2.50 for an operator's renewal, and \$1.35 for a chauffeur's license.

The Association held its Fall meeting as part of the MEA's regional meetings. Eight meetings were held which covered 13 of the MEA's 18 regions.

Phil O'Leary joined the staff of the State Department of Education as a consultant in driver education. Phil became a very important member of the Executive Board from that position.

Walter Eaton, an important member of the Executive Board and a prime mover in the creation of the MDEA in 1955, left Michigan to accept a position at the University of Georgia.

1967 Highlights

The State Department of Education conducted a series of eight Spring regional meetings for driver education teachers. The Association had voted previously to take an active part in these meetings. The theme of the meetings was *Improvement of Driver Education in Michigan*. At the meetings there were presentations on methods driver education teachers can use to acquaint people with a good driver education program, how the driver education teacher can cover the alcohol problem in the classroom, and the improvement of driver performance. The meetings were a great success as far as the program and attendance were concerned. Unfortunately, on five of the eight meeting days, there were heavy snow storms and icy roads.

Two Association members, Al Peterson, MDEA President, and Les Silvernale, represented the HTSC at a meeting called by the National Commission on Safety Education to react to tentative driver education standards developed by the National Highway Safety Bureau. This and the development of other highway traffic safety program standards were required by the Highway Safety Act of 1966.

The Association held its annual Spring meeting at the UofM as part of the 15th Annual Meeting for Teachers of Driver Education. The program consisted of a discussion on the status of Michigan traffic legislation, and presentations on recent developments in automotive safety entitled, *Do We Care Enough*, and *ASchool Administrator's View*. The registration fee was \$2.00, and the cost of the luncheon \$2.60.

At the annual meeting, Les Silvernale was presented a life membership in the Association and a beautiful bronze plaque. He was also presented the beautiful American Steering Wheel Award by the Automobile Club of Michigan. In accepting the awards Les said:

"I shall always consider my experience as executive secretary of MDEA as one of the highlights of my career. I have seen the steady progress which the Association has made over the years and am confident that it will continue in a leadership role in the effort to improve Michigan's driver education program."

With the retirement of Les, Bob Nolan of the HTSC took over as the Association Secretariat and as editor of the *MDEA MISSIVE*.

Once again the Association presented certificates to members who had completed a minor equivalency in driver education. Twenty-two new certificates were issued compared to sixty-nine last year.

The Association held its Fall meeting in conjunction with the MDEA regional meetings. The programs varied at the different regional meetings.

At the December Executive Board meeting, the board discussed plans for the 1969 American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (ADTSEA) national conference to be held on the Eastern Michigan University campus.

The Association published and distributed to members four issues of the *MDEA MISSIVE*.

Membership in the Association increased substantially in the past year with approximately 500 MDEA members and 100 teacher professionals associated with ADTSEA.

1968 Highlights

The MDEA participated in a series of twelve regional meetings conducted by the Michigan Department of Education. Also cooperating in this series of meeting was the Automobile Club of Michigan and the HTSC. Drs. Pelz and Schuman gave the research results of a study of 452 young drivers in Washtenaw County; and showed two-minute trigger films designed by the researchers and used expressly to study reactions by young drivers used in their study.

The Association held its annual Spring meeting at the UofM as part of the 16th Annual Meeting for Driver Education Teachers. The program contained a discussion of the status of Michigan traffic safety legislation, a panel presentation on Michigan's Implied Consent Law, and the Breathalyzer Program, and two presentations titled *What Will the Emperor Wear Next Year* and *Spot Lane Checks*.

The Executive Board voted to support the 1968 Voluntary Vehicle Safety Check program in Michigan sponsored by the Auto Industries' Highway Safety Committee. The board also discussed ways and means of raising more money for the treasury. A committee was appointed to investigate the possibility of including commercial advertising in the *MDEA MISSIVE*.

The MDEA needed a new home for its Spring meeting. With the death of A. A. Vezzani the Annual Meeting for Driver Education Teachers was discontinued at the UofM. Tentative plans were made with the Boyne Mountain Lodge.

The Association published three issues of the *MDEA MISSIVE* during the year.

1969 Highlights

The Association hosted the ADTSEA conference in Ypsilanti, however, no records were found on MDEA preparations for this conference or on any other Association activities during the year.