



A Notable Woman – Helen Parkhurst

Helen Parkhurst, who was once placed on a list as being “one of the 100 great educators for all time,” served at UWSP from 1912 to 1915.

Her claim to fame was as the founder of the Dalton Schools and Dalton Plan of Education. They stressed that children learn more effectively in an environment which permits freedom of choice and allows youngsters to progress at their own pace.

Some observers contended that her philosophy was based deeply in one-room rural schools of the kind she attended and where she had her start as teacher. A native of Durand, Parkhurst began her career in her hometown in 1904 after attending River Falls State Normal School.

While serving as primary teacher-training supervisor and later as director of the primary department at Stevens Point State Normal School, she attended sessions in Italy led by Dr. Maria Montessori and made arrangements for the noted educator to teach here for a summer session. However, the plans did not materialize, but Parkhurst joined Montessori as a teaching assistant in New York. For a time, Parkhurst served as director of all Montessori schools in the United States.

After Parkhurst began her own schools, she advanced her philosophy of education in many articles and several books. Her Education on the Dalton Plan was published in 58 languages. She appeared often on network radio and on programs in the early days of television.

Many of the Dalton Schools were in New York City and other major eastern cities. Some were developed in foreign countries. Consequently, Parkhurst was honored for her work by many governments. The first president of the Chinese Republic decorated her in 1925, as did the Emperor of Japan in 1937. Queen Juliana of the Netherlands gave her the Order of Orange Nassau and dedicated a school in Rotterdam in her name. She received numerous other citations from abroad, all of which were donated to the archives of UWSP at the time of her death in 1973 at 86.