

*2010 A Centennial Year
For
The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired*

In April of 1909, Governor Franklin Fort and the New Jersey State Legislature mandated that an agency be established for the direct purpose "to provide any and all means which shall be deemed feasible for ameliorating the condition of the blind."

The formation of a single agency to administer to the needs of New Jersey's blind population was the culmination of a wave of social conscience that swept the country in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This was in no small part inspired by the advocacy of then, media figure, Helen Keller. As a result, significant strides were made toward equalizing opportunities for people who were blind.

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind was established in 1910 under the leadership of Lydia Young Hayes, a teacher of the blind who'd lost her vision due to an injury at the age of nine. The agency's first assignment was to compile a registry of the state's blind residents. By the end of the year 750 people living as far north as Bergen County and as far south as Cape May were registered by Commission staff.

Also during that first year, Miss Hayes and another teacher, Janet Paterson, established the state's first integrated classes for blind and sighted students within the Newark school system. These classes were based on a very innovative philosophy that integrated classes provided blind students with the educational tools and exposure necessary for a smooth assimilation into society.

Throughout 2010, the Commission will commemorate the centennial anniversary by sharing in a variety of events and activities presented by groups and organizations working cooperatively with the Commission to address the needs, issues and concerns of New Jersey's blind and visually impaired residents.

The Concordia School for the Blind at St. Joseph's, The Little Rock Foundation, The State Library Talking Book and Braille Center, and

the NJ Affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind are planning events that will also recognize the Commission's 100th anniversary.

An integral part of the centennial celebration will be presenting historical snapshots through the personal reminiscence of people who share a connection with the Commission, either through employment or the agency's influence on their personal life experiences. We are particularly interested in hearing from individuals who have memories from the first 50 year period, however, whether from 1929 or 2009 your contribution will still be welcomed. Photos or artifacts that might help depict your anecdote or some stage of the past 100 years would also be appreciated.

All of New Jersey has reason to be proud of The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, not only because we were one of the first states to establish an agency for people who are blind, but also because our state remains a front-runner in the field of services for persons with vision loss and in the prevention of blindness.

To join the CBVI Centennial Listserv or for further information, please e-mail: Pamela.Gaston@dhs.state.nj.us .