

In 1873, he showed up at Little Rock's Grand Opera House, where the State Teachers' Association (now AEA) was inadvertently staging what was undoubtedly its most dramatic pageant. "Col. O. C. Gray, W. C. Parham and myself were the only Southerners there," he wrote later. But there were a few other dedicated school men present. He enrolled as a member, and a year later, when the Brooks-Baxter War restored home rule to the state, he became an Association officer. Aided by two other officers who put the cause of education above party politics, in his office at St. John's College, he actually wrote the new school law to supersede the one in force during reconstruction days. Then he met personally with the legislative educational committee, day after day (at its request) and explained each phase of the law, showing its suitability to the needs and abilities of the people at that time. This law was passed, in 1875, and, with amendments, remained the one governing the state's school system for nearly half a century.

The Association collapsed with the collapse of the reconstruction regime. But the Major and a few others revived it so promptly that not a single annual meeting was missed. He kept the organization alive and functioning almost single-handedly, until new and more statesmanlike leadership appeared in the 1880's. He talked to Little Rock people personally, he wrote pieces for the paper, he invited distinguished speakers for the meetings in Little Rock, and once he introduced the then innovation of serving refreshments after the program -- "A fest of reason and a flow of lemonade." When the annual meeting was scheduled to meet during a post-Christmas holiday, at Helena instead of Little Rock, and that meeting, too was a discouraging one, he furnished the paper with a spirited account of his trip to the meeting, accompanied from Little Rock by two University professors; part of the way by rail, part by boat, then by rail again, to Memphis; a stop-over at a Memphis hotel, where the waiter addressed the "professors" only in French; an unexpected "ill wind" which brought the Mississippi River boat, "Katy Hooper," in on Sunday (instead of Saturday) and enabled their party to arrive in Helena on time for an early Monday meeting. His is the only known case in which delegates to the AEA arrived by river boat, and the story, as he related it, made attendance at the convention seem a happy adventure.

When some over-zealous denominational educators published articles denouncing public school education, he answered them in Little Rock newspapers, citing the superior worth of good public schools. After new leadership came, and the Association traveled to Mount Petit Jean and Mount Nebo for the purpose of selecting a site for a state normal school, Major Parham of Little Rock, then fifty-odd years old, went along, and, on Petit Jean, led the descent down the side of the gorge to Cedar Falls (quoting classical poetry for the occasion as he went), to get water to drink with the lunch furnished by a hospitable Morrilton.

When a Reading Circle was formed in the Association, Major Parham of Little Rock soon became its leader, and he continued as such until this early circle was disbanded, several years later. When the Association carried its convention to Fayetteville in the 1890's, he reported the event to the press, characteristically mentioning the unprecedented "complimentary banquet," which he described as "full of enjoyment," adding, "The speeches were somewhat tedious at times, but the company--the social side