Waldorf Education in the US and Canada 1928-1979 (Part II)

Nana Göbel

This chapter is taken from Nana Göbel's three-volume history of Waldorf education, *Die Waldorfschule und ihre Menschen Weltweit* (The Waldorf School and its People Worldwide). It was translated into English by Jan Kees Saltet and appears here by kind permission of Ms. Göbel. Part I of the chapter appeared in Volume XXIV-1 of the *Research Bulletin*.

The Waldorf Schools Conference of North America

In view of the scarcity of teachers, and also because some recently founded schools were on shaky ground, a conference was held in June 1965. Delegates from the nine oldest schools came from far and near to attend this first general meeting which was held at the High Mowing School. From then on, yearly meetings became a regular practice.[1] The aim of these delegates meetings was to strengthen collaboration between schools and to make an attempt to assist individual schools who needed help. Henry Barnes was pivotal in these attempts to create an Association of Waldorf schools for North America and kept Ernst Weissert in the loop, as was common practice back then.[2] In 1966, the conference, which still had an informal character, was held in Garden City, and in 1967 at Kimberton Farms. From this point on, what was later called the *Waldorf Schools Conference of North America* organized support for newly founded schools as well as conferences for teachers; the conferences were hosted by a different school each year.

The first teacher conference took place at the Green Meadow School in 1968, focused on working with Rudolf Steiner's course *Balance in Teaching.* In 1969, the meeting was held in Detroit, where the 50th anniversary of Waldorf education was celebrated, with Arne Klingborg from the Anthroposophic Center in Järna, Sweden, as a special guest.

In the autumn of 1969, Henry Barnes took part in the large conference of the German school movement, also on the occasion of the 50th year anniversary. In a letter afterwards, he described what he considered the major concerns of the movement in those years: "Our chief concern was the education of the will, of the moral and religious development of young people today in the face of a threatening world situation. Such concerns directly lead over to questions of how to build unanimous resolve among colleagues in each school, going far beyond what is usually understood by that, having to do with questions of the esoteric striving of each individual."[3] One can assume that such questions were not at the forefront, but were mainly discussed "behind the scenes" of the movement in these years in the United States.

The lack of trained teachers was a challenge on both sides of the Atlantic, so it was imperative that teacher training had to be pursued actively. At that point in time, there were courses at Adelphi College in Garden City, NY, and in Sacramento, CA, but there was no opportunity for training in the middle of the country. This changed when Werner Glas (1929-1991) decided to go to Detroit. In 1967, he started a teacher training program, which initially operated within the Waldorf School. He succeeded in securing academic cooperation with Mercy College (which later merged with the University of Detroit), and became the director of the *Waldorf Teacher Training Institute of Mercy College*.

Werner Glas had a protected upbringing as the son of a well-to-do entrepreneur in Vienna. This changed from one day to the next when the National Socialists marched into Austria. At age 7, he left Vienna in one of the children's train transports organized by the Quakers, traveling together with his older brother Bruno, with the aim to get to England. There he spent two unhappy years in a boarding school with strict rules and little to eat. One Saturday, Werner walked by a theater in a small town close by and saw an announcement of a concert for violin and piano. The pianist's name was Richard Glas from Russia. Werner's mother had always told him that if he would ever see anybody bearing the surname Glas, spelled with one "S," this person would in all likelihood be a relative. And that was indeed the

1 Ekkehard Piening, *Über die Neu-Gründungen in USA*, LR 12, 1976, p. 9.

2 Henry Barnes to Ernst Weißert, 10/27/1966. Archiv BFWS.

3 Henry Barnes to Ernst Weißert, 11/9/1969. Archiv BFWS.

case. Richard Glas invited him for tea in the house of another uncle, the house of Norbert and Maria Glas. They were deeply touched by this child with his large brown eyes who was skin over bones.

Before long they took Werner into their home and soon after sent him to the Waldorf school in Wynstones, Gloucester. His parents survived the war living in Yugoslavia. He went to the *London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art* and became a Shakespearean actor. However, this wasn't fulfilling in the long run. During a conversation with his former class teacher, Margaret Bennell, the latter suggested he become a teacher, but he thought it wouldn't suit him. However, soon after this conversation, the Waldorf School in Edinburgh was in urgent need of a teacher, and Glas answered the call. His success as a teacher led to a long engagement with the Waldorf movement. Francis Edmunds asked him to help build up Waldorf education in Mexico, which he did. In 1961 Glas moved from Mexico to Los Angeles, to the Highland Hall school, and soon got involved in teacher training. During his time in Los Angeles, Werner Glas earned a PhD in order to be qualified to teach at the college level, so he was well prepared for his next step, which was to found the *Waldorf Institute*. In 1967, Glas and his family moved to Detroit to make this possible.

Many students enjoyed the way Glas trained them, because he motivated them to keep on taking steps in their inner development to acquire the necessary inner mobility in soul and spirit, which the artist, in this case the educational artist, needs. Werner Glas saw the changes which were happening in early childhood early on, and he also saw that the standard ways to meet them gave no adequate answers to the new challenges facing the educator. In the middle of the 1970s, he started integrating a kindergarten training at Mercy College. Deeply convinced of the role that Waldorf pedagogy had to play, Werner Glas helped to spread it throughout the United States between 1961 and 1991, and to help in the founding of new schools as well.[4]

Post-60s Rapid Growth

At the end of the 1960s, both parents and teachers had begun experimenting with various forms of education. There were parents who wanted totally free forms of schooling, without grades or tests or a fixed curriculum. In his 1971 book, *Deschooling Society*, the radical thinker and Catholic priest, Ivan Illich (1926-2002), suggested doing away with the whole institution of schools in favor of a form of learning which would be determined by the conditions of the surrounding civilization, the relationship with nature and the environment, and, of course, humans and their activities. On the one hand, this period gave rise to a call for a radically different approach to education by disregarding societal conventions; on the other hand, there was an increase in state regimentation of school systems.

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Around the same time, the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, a radical shift was taking place. Students demanded wakeful and responsible engagement of the USA in the world instead of destruction of people and states, as witnessed in the Vietnam war. Dialogue was carried out in public. Many discussions surrounded the US involvement in Vietnam, and, in the controversies, many people became engaged and woke up.

Themes which occupied Waldorf teachers in their conferences tied in with these larger questions of the times. In 1970, at the conference in Garden City, American teachers worked on *Education as a Social Problem*. In June of 1971, the theme of the yearly teachers' conference, which took place in New York, was *The Problem of Evil*. At this conference, with 70 Waldorf teachers in attendance, Henry Barnes gave a fundamental lecture on the theme *Evil and Its Transformation through Education*. During the conference there was further talk about forming an Association of North American Waldorf schools, and Werner Glas, Head of the Waldorf seminar at Mercy College in Detroit, proposed statutes. At the same occasion, teachers appointed Henry Barnes to be the contact person for the Hague Circle, which the European Waldorf schools were forming. In 1972, at the Green Meadow School, there was a conference on the theme, *Education in the Light of the Child*, during which Ekkehard Piening (1941-1989) was confirmed as the chair of the still informal *Association of Waldorf Schools of North America* (AWSNA), with John Brousseau as treasurer. In 1973, the conference was held at Kimberton Farms with the theme *Human Values in Education*.

Up until 1970, the Waldorf movement in the United States grew very slowly. In July of that year there were

4 Jane Wulsin / Virginia Sease, Werner Glas, in Bodo von Plato (editor), *Anthroposophie im 20. Jahrhundert.* 2003, pp. 223f.

nine schools in the United States, according to the global Waldorf school list. Now, however, the pioneering phase had come to an end and the educational impulse of Waldorf had grown deeper roots. Just like in many European countries, the 1970s and 80s saw rapid growth, which resulted in existential questions about teacher training. At the end of the 1970s, there were 22 Waldorf schools in the USA, and by the end of the 1980s the number had grown to 61.

Schools which were founded during these decades were, among others, the Waldorf School of Washington, DC, where Carl Hoffmann was the most experienced teacher,[5] and the Hawthorne Valley School in Harlemville, NY,[6] where coworkers of the Camphill Village in Copake wanted a school for their children and asked Karl Ege for help.

Karl Ege and his wife Arvia McKaye-Ege, an artist who had worked on the Goetheanum when Rudolf Steiner was there, together with her sister Christy Barnes, Henry Barnes' wife, had all been colleagues for many years at the Rudolf Steiner School in New York. Both Karl Ege and Henry Barnes had houses in the country near Hawthorne Valley, and were very familiar with this peaceful, green hill-country. They shared the dream of building up a center for agriculture, art, crafts, and a school in the country. Together with Fentress Gardner, brother of John F. Gardner of Garden City, and Thorn Zay, they bought a 330-acre farm in Hawthorne Valley. Fentress Gardner, who had taken early retirement from the U.S. Army, and his wife, Hede Gardner, started farming in August 1972, but were on the lookout for someone who could take over the management of the farm. They asked the Swiss farmer Christoph Meier and his Dutch wife, Annelien Meier, who both said yes to the venture. They attracted Rudolf Copple, who had originally studied eurythmy and had been a class teacher at the Rudolf Steiner schools of Chatou-Paris and in New York City, to come work at the school.

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While Henry Barnes remained in New York for the time being, Rudolf Copple became one of the founding teachers, taking the fourth grade. He later mentored all new teachers. Rudolf Copple was one of the most beloved class teachers and remained in Hawthorne Valley until his death at age 97. The second teacher to come to Hawthorne Valley was James Pewtherer, who took the first grade and carried the students through to eighth grade. Much later, he moved to Massachusetts, where he taught in the Waldorf school in Hadley. Frances Faust († 1995) took on a combined second and third grade. John Barnes, son of Henry and Christy Barnes, also came to Hawthorne Valley with his wife, Astrid Barnes-Schnell, daughter of Gerhard Schnell, who taught at the Stuttgart Waldorf school until his premature death. She pioneered the first kindergarten and was renowned for her unconventional methods.

This extensive picture of the way the Hawthorne Valley school faculty came together is justified because it was not typical of the way most new schools were founded during the 1970s. This faculty stands out because people came from many different parts of the world, were all deeply connected to the Waldorf impulse, and shared a vision of founding a special place where different professions and disciplines could work together.

Almuth Piening, another German, taught handwork and did the cooking for the *Visiting Students Program*, which hosted primarily children from the New York Rudolf Steiner School, Harry Kretz, her husband, had also been a teacher at the New York Steiner School and the two of them started the *Visiting Students Program* in Hawthorne Valley. Almuth Piening, grew up two hours north-west of Hawthorne Valley, was the sister of Ekkehard Piening, a well-known Waldorf teacher, who inspired people throughout the United States and beyond. Their father, Ludwig Piening († 1969), owned a farm in upstate New York, where he settled after emigrating from Northern Germany in 1951. Another German, Renate Field, took on the administration, and these Germans constituted something like a well-organized club, which was somewhat intimidating for others because of their high degree of efficiency. Henry Barnes himself waited until his retirement before moving to Hawthorne Valley, where he kept teaching blocks such as history in grade eight, and helped out in many other ways.

The Pine Hill Waldorf School in Wilton, NH, started up in 1972. Through a loan of a friend of the school, the founders acquired 27 acres with a 15-room house, situated very close to one of the oldest Waldorf schools in America, the High Mowing School. Since the latter was a

5 Carl Hoffmann, *Bericht von der Waldorfschule in Washington*, LR 6, 1972, p. 31.

6 Interview with Annelien and Christoph Meier, 3/11/2015, in Azua de Compostela, Dominican Republic.

high school, there was a need for an elementary school in the area which would focus on the class teacher age. These two schools wanted to work together closely right from the start. In 1973, further schools were founded in Boston and in Great Barrington, MA.

New Beginnings in a Time of Crisis

In 1974, Joan Condon, together with Diethart and Ina Jähnig, shepherded the first Waldorf school founded in the Rocky Mountains, in Denver, CO, and tried to build up a school in an area where the Divine Light Mission – a short-lived New Age religion hailing from North India – had claimed the territory with its *Unity School,* which purportedly was working with elements of Waldorf pedagogy.[7] In the 1970s, Denver attracted all manner of devotees of various occult movements, and it wasn't easy to establish work which was based in thought to the degree that anthroposophy is.

[T]he pioneering phase had come to an end and the educational impulse of Waldorf had grown deeper roots. Just like in many European countries, the 1970s and 80s saw rapid growth, which resulted in existential questions about teacher training.

Considering that in 1972 the US had a school population of 51.4 million children, ages 6-18, the 11 Waldorf schools registered in May 1973 gave only a very small percentage of the population the opportunity to attend such a school. One had to believe in the seed character of this pedagogy, or, as Werner Glas put it, develop a "homeopathic imagination,"[8] to send one's children to a Waldorf school. Americans firmly believe in individual development and education and the role these can play for cultural and economic progress, so there is a correspondingly high degree of dissatisfaction in American culture with the quality of public education. Early in the 1970s, a societal split became more and more obvious, as children of low income parents ended up in the worst schools and were housed in poorly equipped buildings. This practice was not intentional; rather it was the result of where people lived, and also worked the other way around: parents' socio-economic circumstances had a direct impact on test results in school. Furthermore, most teachers did not want to teach in inner-city schools, catering to the lowest socio-economic communities, so schools often ended up with teachers who were assigned positions there by education departments; no wonder many teachers tried to change jobs as soon as the opportunity arose. The high teacher-turnover rate did not allow for much stability in the relationship between children and teachers, with a predictable outcome. What these circumstances led to was decades later confirmed by all major educational studies. A growing number of parents were well aware of the situation. For that reason, it is not surprising that the majority of the founding parents of the Detroit Waldorf school were public school teachers.

From its inception, the Waldorf school of Detroit wanted to be integrated in the city and do something about its problems. In contrast to many East Coast schools, a third of the students in Detroit were Afro-American. The school cultivated close collaboration with the *Waldorf Institute of Mercy College*.

In 1976, Clopper Almon, professor of economics at the University of Maryland, and John Huber, a banker and former student of the Basel Rudolf Steiner School, took on the chairmanship of the board of the Washington Waldorf School, founded in 1969. Carl Hoffmann, a founding teacher in Washington, reported on the serious study of anthroposophical basic books which was a strong focus of the faculty and commented:

> There are only very few people left here who still indulge a feeling some anthroposophists have of wanting to accommodate all manner of occult forms of striving, in an effort to avoid the "arrogance" of anthroposophists who think they have the answer to everything. This is a false form of tolerance. True modesty and a deep feeling of responsibility towards Rudolf Steiner's work can never lead to arrogance. What we need to develop more is delicate tact and true insight – challenges of which there may be a higher degree of awareness among anthroposophists in central Europe than in English-speaking countries. This is the reason why work with spiritual science is pursued so seriously at our school.[9]

The Waldorf movement continued to grow. New schools sprouted in Colorado, in Greeley and in

7 Stefan Leber, Bericht über die Sitzung des Haager Kreises 30.5. – 1.6.1977 in Stuttgart. LR 15, 1977, p. 33.

8 Werner Glas, *Der Bildungsimpuls Rudolf Steiners im Amerika von 1973*, LR 7, 1973, p. 7.

9 Carl Hoffmann, *Bericht von der Washington Waldorfschool*, LR 15, 1977, p. 38.

Colorado Springs. California saw a remarkable number of new foundings: in Potter Valley, San Rafael, Santa Cruz, and Sebastopol. A special school was founded in Chicago in 1972 by the physician Traute Lafrenz-Page, the Esperanza School, which served English and Spanish-speaking children in need of special care.

Traute Page had been a friend of Hans and Sophie Scholl during World War II. She had survived imprisonment by the Gestapo and moved to the US in 1947. With incredible dedication, and demonstrating an extraordinary combination of practicality and devotion, she took care of these special needs children, many of whom were suffering from extreme neglect. Traute Page's approach was characterized by recognizing other people's needs without any sentimentality and applying herself to work with complete dedication. The first thing she did in the mornings was make breakfast for the children, since in the 1970s, many households didn't have enough to eat. Before school began, the children were bathed and massaged, a ritual they eagerly looked forward to. The whole room would fill with the scent of the massage oil and the children felt thoroughly refreshed and seen. Their clothes were washed in another room, and with fresh strength and clean clothes, they were ready for their lessons. No questions were asked about their backgrounds, and most of them came from deprived households in the ghettos of Chicago.

By 1976, the number of schools had grown to 18, seven of which had been founded between 1971 and 1976. In addition, there were 11 kindergartens, 10 of which were founded between 1973 and 1976. Schools like the Esperanza School were not included in this count. At the same time, the lack of trained teachers increased with the founding of every new school, and teachers who had completed one of the three trainings (in Garden City, Los Angeles, or Detroit) were insufficient in number to meet the need. In the culture at large, few people took notice and the Waldorf movement found little recognition.

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The Birth of AWSNA

The teachers of the experienced schools work together in the *Waldorf Conference of North America,* inviting colleagues from the new schools to work with them as guests in the internal teacher conferences and at the delegate meetings. This *Waldorf Conference* took the place of the delegates meetings which had been held regularly since 1965, a change which was initiated by Ekkehard Piening, who had taken over as chairman of the Conference in October 1972. In June 1976, a conference was held at the Highland Hall School in Los Angeles, with 115 participants from 14 schools and the three teacher training centers, the largest number so far. After years of discussion, the *Waldorf Conference of North America* became the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA), with Harry Blanchard as the new chairman. From that point onwards, AWSNA meetings were held regularly in January and in June of each year. In addition, there was an internal teachers conference. It was held in Los Angeles in July 1976, on the theme of religion in the schools. Helmut von Kügelgen gave an introduction to the free Christian religion lessons and talked about the children's services connected with them, as well as the teacher meditations.

In 1978, the Association consisted of 14 member schools and three teacher training centers. There were six so-called *sponsored schools,* each guided by a member school, and five so-called *advised schools*, counseled in the initial phase by individual mentors. Nine other schools were not members. Almost all schools, especially those in the cities, faced the problems of a lack of teachers and of high school teaching, which needed to improve in quality. In order to cultivate mutual contact, especially with regards to international representation of Waldorf schools in the Hague Circle, Wim Kuiper, recently retired from the Vrije School in The Hague, traveled the US in the autumn of 1977, visiting schools. At that time, contact between Europe and America had to be actively cultivated for it not to fall by the wayside.

The *Waldorf Institute of Mercy College of Detroit*, built up by Werner Glas, was officially recognized in 1977 by Mercy College for its basic anthroposophical studies year. From this point onwards, students could earn a Bachelor of Arts degree by completing Anthroposophical Studies.[10] Starting in the academic year 1978/79 the Waldorf Institute was located on the Southfield Campus of the University in order for it to comfortably accommodate all required activities. The Institute's reputation spread, and for the year 1979/80 students from abroad, as well as Americans, enrolled. People came from Holland,

10 Hans Gebert and others, *Waldorf Institute of Mercy College of Detroit*, LR 16, 1977, p. 19.

Ghana, Brazil, Venezuela, New Zealand, Switzerland, and Canada, and the Institute enjoyed a cosmopolitan flair. The teachers at the Institute were facing considerable challenges because of the large demand for Waldorf teachers. An additional challenge was the increasing behavioristic worldview prevalent among students. The Waldorf Institute ended up moving to Spring Valley, NY, where, after an interim phase, it continued as Sunbridge College.

In Fair Oaks, near Sacramento, CA, René Querido (1926-2004) built up Rudolf Steiner College, starting in 1976. This training institute was in easy walking distance of the Waldorf School of Sacramento, located outside of the city, on the American River. The site occupies an important place in the history of California, as a place attracting adventurous pioneers during the 1850s Gold Rush. Now a new pioneer spirit of quite a different sort was to reign here. René Querido and Franklin G. Kane took on the responsibility of directing the college. Next to René, Merlyn Querido, Ruth Buch, Jay Sydeman, and a few others took on teaching assignments. With this establishment of the Rudolf Steiner College, students had the opportunity to choose either New York on the East Coast, Detroit in the center, or Sacramento in the West to study Waldorf education.

In addition to internal commemorations of the 50th year anniversary of the Rudolf Steiner School in New York, celebrated at Michaelmas of 1978, the school organized a symposium at Columbia University in May 1979, with contributions from Henry Barnes, John Gardner, and John Davy of Emerson College. A central reason for holding the event at Columbia was that avowed opponents of Waldorf education were teaching at this university. In addition to the symposium, teachers from the Rudolf Steiner School of New York put together a large traveling exhibit, designed primarily by Thorn Zay. It was called *Awakening Intelligence* and was first shown at the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* in New York, after which it traveled to the *Museum of Science* in Boston and the *Department of Health, Education, and Welfare* in Washington. The exhibition featured examples from the fields of history, biology, mathematics, and physics, demonstrating how children open up to different subjects as they grow up.[11] It was the largest public outreach effort the Waldorf school movement had staged up to then, showcasing Rudolf Steiner education and how it reflects the developmental stages of childhood).[12]

Early in 1979, the *Waldorf Institute for Liberal Education* at Adelphi College closed its doors. Around the same time, a number of founding teachers of the American Waldorf movement died, among them Bertha Sharp (Highland Hall), Eva Leicht (Green Meadow), Eric Wakefield (Honolulu), Helen Howentstein (Highland Hall), Beulah Emmet (High Mowing) and William Harrer (New York City). It was clear that it was time for a change of guard.

Nana Göbel *is co-founder and executive leader of the Friends of Waldorf Education, in which capacity she has supported hundreds of Waldorf initiatives throughout the world. A Waldorf school graduate, Ms. Göbel also trained and worked as a banker, co-founded the European Forum for Freedom in Education, as well as an organization that provided humanitarian support to children in need in Eastern Europe following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. She has been serving as the general secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in Germany from 2003 to 2008. Since 2008 till today she is a member of the International Forum of Steiner / Waldorf Education (formerly Hague Circle). Her history of Waldorf education,* Die Waldorfschule und ihre Menschen Weltweit *(The Waldorf School and Its People Worldwide), from which this chapter is taken, has recently been published in Germany and is currently being translated by Jan Kees Saltet.*

Nana Göbel's The Waldorf School and Its People Worldwide

11 Ekkehard Piening, *Zur 50-Jahrfeier der New Yorker Schule*, LR 19, 1979, p. 42.

12 Ekkehard Piening, *Zur 50-Jahrfeier der New Yorker Schule*, LR 19, 1979, p. 42f.