

114 YEARS OLD AND STILL GOING STRONG

The Buffalo Branch of the American Association of University women is now 114 years old. The fact that an organization has endured for 114 years is remarkable. The list of accomplishments associated with the Buffalo Branch of AAUW makes this fact even more noteworthy. Nationally, the Association of Collegiate Women was founded in 1880. Ten years later the local branch was founded. A charming description of the initial meeting was written by Olga Murray Lindberg for the 85th Anniversary Celebration of the Buffalo Branch.

On a sunny October afternoon in 1890, a stylishly dressed young woman stepped from her carriage and gathering her skirts in one hand, hurried up the walk to a home on 7th street. Mrs. Lena Hill Severance was hostess, and five other college women met in her living room to form a Buffalo Chapter of the Collegiate Alumnae – the 11th Branch in the United States, later to become the American Association of University Women. Their goal was to establish a \$500 fellowship “For the purpose of enabling young women to continue their studies at European universities.” As recorded in the minutes “Women have shown that they can take a college course without injury to their health and with great benefit to their intellectual powers. It remains to be proved that a college course will produce its natural fruits in at least a handful of women who shall take a proper share in the intellectual activity of their country men.”

Those women did not need to be concerned about the contributions of the educated women in AAUW to their community.

Awarding of scholarships to women for higher education has remained a strong focus for AAUW Buffalo Branch. In 1936, Sarah Dodge Chamberlin left money from her large estate to the Buffalo Branch for non-interest bearing loans to young women to help fund their college education. Since that time, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been loaned to women. In 1999, member Velma Cobb bequeathed \$30,000 to the branch. In June of 2000, two Velma Cobb Scholarships were given to two outstanding young women from area High Schools. The awarding of these scholarships has continued. Funds for Education has been established by the branch to give grants to worthy applicants. Three separate scholarships, the Molly Fleysher Scholarship, the Ruthe Sicherman Scholarship and the Michael Weidemann Scholarship have also been established. In 2003 the Branch learned that Olga Lindberg had bequeathed almost one half a million dollars to the Buffalo Branch for Scholarships. This Olga Lindberg is the same woman who wrote the description of the initial meeting of the organization. In 2004 another endowment of \$50,000 was received from the estate of Dorothy Payne.

For 50 years, the Buffalo Branch has sponsored a Used Book Sale. The Sale has become a fixture in the community. Books are recycled and funds are raised

for the Association Educational Foundation and for local scholarships and community projects. In June of 2004, \$64,000 was raised.

Social issues have long been a focus of action for the Buffalo Branch. In 1914, members learned that Buffalo was the only large city without a Board of Education. They lobbied locally and in Albany and were instrumental in a Buffalo Schools Board of Education being formed. Low salaries for women teachers were also a concern for the branch in its early years. Branch members worked hard to campaign for fair and equal salaries for women teachers. The Buffalo Branch sold thousands of dollars worth of War Bonds during World War II and was recognized nationally for its efforts. After the war, the Branch sponsored a number of meetings and forums to help plan intelligently for the postwar education of civilians and veterans.

The National Association has gained recognition and respect for its efforts to insure equity for girls and women in education. The study, SHORT-CHANGING GIRLS, SHORT-CHANGING AMERICA, commissioned and funded by the Association was the seminal work in efforts throughout the 1990's to bring attention to the inequities for girls and women in education.

TECH SAVY: EDUCATING GIRLS IN THE NEW COMPUTER AGE has been published by the Association. Its message about girl's lack of participation in the new computer culture has already become part of the national consciousness.

Locally, two events for women have become part of the yearly program. "Sister to Sister", is a day long program to provide a forum for teenage girls to discuss issues of importance to them and "Transitions" is a program designed to encourage women to start in education or continue in education beyond high school. They are given help in overcoming obstacles to furthering their education.

The Buffalo Branch of the American Association of University Women looks upon 114 years of accomplishment. We are the largest Branch in New York State and the 6th largest in the Nation. We have made a difference in the lives of girls and women. Membership is open to all with a baccalaureate degree.

-- Judy Weidemann