

The History

Marion Talbot, daughter of the dean of the School of Medicine of Boston University, entered the University's College of Liberal Arts for the winter term of 1876-77 without obtaining the necessary studies to fulfill the entrance conditions. Ms. Talbot gradually met these demands, compensated for missing the fall term of 1876, and graduated in June 1880 with a degree of Bachelor of Arts. During 1880-81 she traveled through Eastern cities concerned about her professional fate as an educated woman. She returned to Boston University to earn a master's degree, awarded in 1882.

But during this time, Ms. Talbot felt the inequity of educational opportunity for women and saw it affect her only sibling, her younger sister Edith. The Boston Latin School, a male only bastion since 1635, was petitioned by Marion Talbot and her progressive friends to admit women so their path to college would be "made so clear and easy and unswerving" as it had proven for the young men of Boston. Her petition was denied, but the Latin School for Girls was established and Edith Talbot was a member of its first graduating class.

Marion Talbot knew too well the problems Edith would face with a university degree in the 1880s. A few women graduates would stay within the university system as teachers, but those who sought employment in other fields or those who were financially secure without professional employment found themselves isolated after graduation. Discovering other women in exactly the same dilemma, they began to fight for social reform for women. Marion Talbot and her friend Ellen H. Richards organized

their college-educated friends to meet November 28, 1881, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

These seventeen women, representing eight colleges (three each from Oberlin College, Vassar College, and University of Michigan; two each from University of Wisconsin, Boston University, and Wellesley College; and one each from Cornell University and Smith College) called a meeting for January 14, 1882, for alumnae living in the area "for the purpose of organizing an association of women college graduates with headquarters in Boston." Sixty-five attended and adopted the constitution of the first association of college and university trained women in the world—The Association of Collegiate Alumnae. Alumnae across the country were notified and quickly joined. It is interesting to note that originally membership was on an institutional, rather than personal, basis. Other institutions besides those of the original members would be recognized by board decision.

As reported by Elizabeth M. Howe in 1907 and recorded in Marion Talbot and Lois Rosenberry's *The History of the American Association of University Women 1881-1931*, "It would be difficult for a college girl of today to realize the effect which the initial invitation to join an association of college women produced. 'It came to me,' said a New Hampshire girl who had just graduated and was teaching in Omaha, 'and I joined. I felt as if I had been flung out into space, and the notices of these meetings were the only threads that connected me with the things I had known.'"¹

¹ Marion Talbot and Lois Rosenberry, *The History of the American Association of University Women 1881-1931*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1931, p. 14.

Branches Established

Expansion during those first years was phenomenal. Until 1884, meetings were held in Boston or Wellesley. Beginning in September of 1884 with a meeting in Philadelphia, one of the annual quarterly meetings was held elsewhere. In October the Board formally adopted the expansion program of branch associations. The annual sites away from Boston parallel the growth of the organization: the meetings were held in Brooklyn in 1885, at Bryn Mawr College in 1886 (when the University of California was voted an institutional member), in Ithaca in 1888, and in Buffalo in 1889. With an increase in the number of local branches and of members, the quarterly meetings were abandoned in 1889, replaced with an annual meeting of the entire association. But the locations of these annual meetings continued to reflect the expansion of the association: the annual meeting of 1890 was held in Chicago, of 1892 in Washington, of 1895 in Cleveland, of 1897 in Detroit, of 1904 in St. Louis, and of 1905 in Atlanta.

To fund this expansion the following article was adopted in 1884:

An annual assessment of one dollar shall be due from each member in January. Regular members of duly recognized branches shall be exempt from this assessment.

It was not until 1919 that the annual dues of national members was raised to two dollars, which included a subscription to the *Journal*.

An important event took place in Buffalo at the annual convention of 1889 which paved the way for further expansion under one national organization. A Chicago group in 1883 had been unwilling to join ranks with the Association of Collegiate Alumnae and organized themselves independently as the Western Association of Collegiate Alumnae. During its short life, the WACA established fellowships for women, addressed the needs for more varied employment opportunities for women, and strengthened communications among universities training women by establishing appointment bureaus. By October 1899 when the two Associations agreed to meet in Buffalo, the amended constitution was readily adopted to become one association—The Association of Collegiate Alumnae. At this same meeting a neighboring branch—The Central New York Branch with its headquarters at Syracuse—was established. And in 1890 the Western New York Branch at Buffalo was formally adopted. By 1907 thirty-five branches existed; by 1932, five hundred; and by 1990, one thousand eight hundred.

The first branches reflect the nature of ACA. The Washington Branch in 1884 was the first recognized and immediately established three study groups (i.e., to study political science, especially socialism; to read Latin; to study living English authors). The New York Branch at New York City founded in 1886 closely watched over educational policies in the city as well as the state. That same year the San Francisco Bay Branch, the Philadelphia Branch, and the Boston Branch were established. In

these formative years the outstanding achievement of the California branch was its philanthropic work; of the Philadelphia Branch its establishment of a free library; and of the Boston Branch, finally formally established as a separate branch at the initial site of the ACA founding, its scientific investigations into domestic service (affecting the pure food movement) and into the conditions at public laundries.

In 1889 the Central New York Branch in Syracuse was adopted. Working through three major committees—municipal, educational, and philanthropic—the group addressed the needs of children in education (i.e., improved school locations and facilities) as well as in the workplace (i.e., child labor laws). The Minnesota Branch comprised of Minneapolis and St. Paul and The Chicago Branch were also established in 1889. The Minnesota Branch instigated the pioneer program whereby the Branch starts projects, proves their merits, and then relinquishes them to other organizations better adapted to continue their progress. The Chicago Branch, having existed as the Western Association of Collegiate Alumnae for five years, had fully established its commitment to funding fellowships and to social work. They were instrumental in the founding of the Illinois Consumers' League in 1897.

Buffalo Branch

Four branches were adopted in 1890—The Detroit Branch, The Western New York Branch, The Indiana Branch, and the Eastern New York Branch. The Detroit Branch, originally comprised of Ann Arbor and Detroit until its division in 1902, always maintained a close affiliation with the University of Michigan and its endow-

ments and scholarships. The Indiana Branch (now the Indianapolis Branch) was closely associated like The Chicago Branch with the Western Association of Collegiate Alumnae and worked to establish university extension courses and to raise the standards in high schools which provided the foundation for Indiana's universities. Albany established its branch, The Eastern New York Branch, before the end of 1890.

But it is the tenth branch, The Western New York Branch, at Buffalo which was formed from the joint meeting of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae and the Western Association of Collegiate Alumnae in October 1889. This joint meeting which resulted in the unification of the two groups was under the local direction of Mrs. George Townsend, president of the Buffalo Women's Educational and Industrial Union. Only eight women in the city of Buffalo qualified to become members in the ACA, and only three of the eight had gone to college from the city of Buffalo. The five who attended the first meeting of what is now the Buffalo Branch were

Harriet Ransom Milinowski

Lena Hill Severance

Mary M. Wardwell

Maude Austin

Ella C. Lapham

In October, 1890, these five with eight other members became the charter members of the Buffalo Branch. Harriet Milinowski served as the first president; Mary Wardwell served as the first secretary.

In the 1931 publication of AAUWs fifty year history, the history of the Buffalo Branch states:

The first undertaking of the newly formed branch was to assist in every way the development of the University of Buffalo. Beginning with assistance to the endowment fund, its service has continued throughout the years, not only in the material way of furnishing rest and recreation rooms, but through scholarships and an annual meeting with the branch and the women students together. In 1893 and 1894, 'the work of establishing home libraries in the poorer portions of the city of Buffalo has been continued with encouraging results. Two libraries are now in operation.' Members of the branch visited regularly once a week, spending an hour or two with the children over the books, and playing games. The Buffalo Branch considers as its outstanding achievement a work begun in 1902 in establishing a college crèche. Early in that year an urgent appeal was made to the branch by the Charities Society of the city to establish a crèche in a thickly settled part of Buffalo in order that working women might leave their children under adequate care while they were at work during the day. After con-

siderable deliberation, the branch decided to undertake this work, 'feeling that we could perhaps in no way render a greater service to the city than by giving to some of its needy children an opportunity to develop into healthy useful citizens.' In about three months from the time the crèche was established, eleven hundred dollars had been secured as a result of appeals to the public. A desirable house had been rented and the work had begun with more than a score of children under the care of the crèche. In 1904, the branch reported that sixteen hundred dollars had been raised in the previous year. The branch continued to carry its support until, the need having been adequately demonstrated, the City of Buffalo took over the project and continued its support.

The Buffalo Branch has always given assistance to educational movements and needs, not only in the City of Buffalo, but in the State of New York, and in cooperation with the national organization. The branch assisted in adjusting a scale of salaries in state normal schools, and in 1931 is working for adequate compensation for the teachers in the city schools.²

² *IBID.*, pp. 111-12.

The activities mentioned in this 1931 description of the branch are also recorded in the local papers. On May 19, 1908, the Buffalo *Express* reported the success of the day nursery for working mothers. Located on Goodell Street in shared quarters with the Neighborhood House, the College Crèche had already registered 4,072 children, an average of thirteen each day, for the year 1908. These children represented fifteen families. The total cost for the year was about \$1,300, a cost of about \$.32 per child. The *Express* on February 11, 1909, records that the Collegiate Alumnae group was continuing to hear detailed reports about the progress of the nursery.

Miss Grace Bissell, president of the College Crèche board, gave an interesting account of that institution's work for the year and said that an average of from fifteen to 25 children has been kept at the crèche, at a cost of seventeen cents per week for each child.

On April 11, 1926, a Buffalo *Express* article shows the close connection between the founding in Boston and Buffalo women. Mrs. Lucien Howe, president of the branch from 1907-10 as well as a national president from the Buffalo Branch, had been a resident of Boston on January 14, 1882, when 66 women met in Boston and formed the ACA. This article reports "Its purpose was to further the cause of education for women, to encourage struggling girls, and to enjoy the higher branches of cul-

ture in the companionship of women of like training." This article also reports that Ellen Lapham (referred to in branch records as Ella Lapham), one of the original five who attended the first meeting of what is now the Buffalo Branch, was responsible for drafting and sending the letter to the college women of Buffalo requesting assistance in "entertaining the delegates" at the 1889 convention which merged the ACA and the WACA. Buffalo is reported as the birthplace of this new national organization for college women with the merger of the ACA and WACA at that convention. The Buffalo Branch archives has numerous newspaper articles dating from around 1902 that are quite detailed in their account of the branch's early activities.

The Movement

This microcosm of activity by women in western New York was part of a macrocosm of significant change in the history of women. Originally part of women's suffrage activities, this *movement* is described by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in the *History of Woman Suffrage*. The first three volumes of this six volume history were published and distributed by Anthony herself in Rochester between 1881 and 1886. She defines the *movement* as an "accelerating transformation of consciousness among a group of oppressed people and a growing sense of collective power. The overwhelming majority of challenges to established power are stillborn, but a few generate movements."³

³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Mathilda Joselyn Gage, et al., eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, p. 114.

By 1890 significant changes had occurred. Two states had introduced equality in municipal elections, 15 states had granted women the right to vote in school elections, and Wyoming had entered the Union as the first state with full suffrage for women. In 1890 the National Suffrage Association, headed by Stanton and Anthony, and the American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Henry Ward Beecher and Lucy Stone, merged into the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Buffalo played a significant part in these activities and eventually hosted NAWSA's annual convention in Buffalo in 1908. But the growth of women suffrage resulted from the growth of women's clubs, the spread of female college education, and the increasing number of women factory workers.⁴

Depicting the "helpless and hopeless" struggle these women felt in addressing the problems particular to their sex, Stanton defined the goals of the movement in very broad terms. As early as 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention—the first episode of a women's rights movement, no woman was willing to chair the meeting. One of the organizers, Mrs. Lucretia Mott, asked her husband to chair it. From the very beginning this convention illuminated "the first and greatest task was acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to lead."⁵

Between Seneca Falls in 1848 and the founding of the Buffalo Branch in 1890, New York led the way for the emergence of women. By 1860, fourteen states had

⁴ Walter S. Dunn, Jr., *History of Erie County: 1870-1970*. Buffalo: Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, 1972, pp. 180-81.

⁵ Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America 1848-1869*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 23.

passed some form of women's property rights legislation. That year New York enacted the most comprehensive piece of women's rights legislation in the United States. The Married Women's Property Act secured economic rights for women.⁶ In January 1866, Anthony and Lucy Stone suggested merging the American Anti-Slavery Society with the suffrage movement. The American Equal Rights Association was founded in New York City in May of 1866. Within one month the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution embracing citizenship rights passed in Congress. Forever diligent even with this level of success, outraged women filed the lone opposition in the New York legislature at the reference to males three times in the Amendment.⁷ By April 1867, Anthony concluded her crusade with a rally in Buffalo to remove the word *male* from the New York State Constitution. Twenty-eight thousand signatures filled the petition.

Although Queen Victoria still insisted on wearing a lace bonnet rather than a crown to emphasize her womanly position, society began to reflect the dichotomy of woman's role in the family and society. Women had begun to expand their visions. As early as 1876 with the patent rights secured for *Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound*, she became the queen of patent medicines. (Few realized that she really only trademarked the name and of lesser importance were the ingredients.) Even domestic life was changing. Fannie Merritt Farmer in 1896 invented the recipe as we know it today. The "pinch" and the "handful" gave way to specific measurements with the

⁶ Stanton *et al.*, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp.686-87.

⁷ DuBois, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

printing of *Boston Cooking School Cook Book*. By 1900 another woman changed store windows forever; Madame Paquin invented the first store mannequin which she displayed in Paris. *Emancipated Woman* (1887) was a popular novel which exploited a "young woman's mistaken desire for medical education and her true vocation as wife and mother."⁸ While some kept vicariously abreast of the dilemma, other women seemed to have solved the dichotomy with the help of Stanton and Anthony, who fought to open the doors for every woman.

Buffalo Around 1890

Buffalo was bustling. The city was officially fifty-eight years old. Eleven railroad trunk lines terminated in the city. The lumber trade, handling millions of board feet annually, was second only to Chicago. The port was handling approximately 150 million bushels of grain annually. The Buffalo Forge Company, established in 1878, dominated the nation's iron industry and distributed to every state in the Union. Worthington Compressor Operation, Dresser Industries, Inc. started its business as The Snow Steam Pump Works in a building at Clinton and Roberts Avenue in 1889 manufacturing compressors for hundreds of different industries. Banking had stabilized in Buffalo during the 1850s and banks such as Marine, Manufacturers & Traders, Buffalo Savings Bank (later known as Goldome), and Erie County Savings Bank (later known as Empire of America) were flourishing in downtown Buffalo. Dr. Roswell Park, founder in 1898 of Roswell Park Memorial Institute, had arrived from

⁸ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, Vol. II. New York: Harper & Row, 1988, p. 154.

Chicago to be chair of surgery at University of Buffalo's School of Medicine in 1883. Construction of The Birge Mansion on Symphony Circle was begun in 1890 by George Birge, president of Birge Wallpaper Co. and co-founder of the former Pierce Arrow Motor Car Co. Upstate's first indoor shopping mall, Market Arcade, was built in 1892. Stanford White, the reknowned architect, built in 1890 the mansion on Delaware which, now renovated, houses the Snyder Corp. In 1890 Grover Cleveland, who had been Buffalo's mayor in 1881, was between his two terms as President of the United States. By 1896 energy from Niagara Falls was being harnessed and transmitted to Buffalo. This twenty mile distance was the first long distance transmission of electric power. Buffalo Street Railway Company was the first recipient. Adam, Meldrum, and Anderson was the first commercial establishment in the U.S. to use the new power. And Buffalo became the first U.S. city with electric street lights.

Buffalo Women Around 1890

Sentiment about proper activities for women was changing. Buffalo's city government is evidence of these changes; in 1887, Buffalo Police finally accepted a police matron after three years of agitation. Miss Mary L. Rice, active with Buffalo's Union, published in 1891 an abstract of New York State laws affecting the rights of women and property. It was widely read and distributed. The growing number of working women in the city is verified with membership in a women's teachers association in Buffalo; by 1889 over 500 women were members.⁹ The

⁹ Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 177-78.

equality of women was becoming increasingly clear to Buffalo and the world. Victor Hugo (1802-1885), witnessing these revolutionary changes for women, may have succinctly forecasted their outcome.

There is only one thing that is stronger than armies and that is an idea whose time has come.

1913

- February 11: Five members of the Western New York Branch of ACA are appointed to study the possibility of a college club.
- April 11: The committee reports two possible locations for the club—The Studio Club at 508 Franklin or the Guild of Allied Arts at 623 Delaware.
- May 6: Pledges of \$175 received. A “large and energetic” committee is appointed to secure members.
- The College Club of Buffalo, Inc. thrives at 264 Summer.