

October 17, 1965

AAUW 75th Anniversary
Dinner

FROM CARRIAGE BLOCK TO LAUNCHING PAD

(Pianist will be playing "After the Ball is Over")

Dr. Burrell: Let's think back to 1890.

Mrs. Campbell: On a warm October afternoon 75 years ago, a stylishly-dressed young woman stepped from her Victoria onto the granite carriage block in front of a comfortable house on 7th Street. Gathering her full skirts in one hand, she hurried up the walk to the house. The name carved on the carriage block was SEVERANCE, and this young woman was going to attend the first meeting of the newly-formed Western New York Branch of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae. Mrs. Lena Hill Severance was hostess and five college women assembled in her pleasant front parlor that afternoon to elect officers.

Dr. Burrell: These women were pioneers, pushing out into new frontiers. But Buffalo was not a frontier town and these women did not belong to the covered-wagon days.

~~(Music - "The Band Played On". Women in costume appear.)~~

Dr. Burrell: Buffalo was then a prosperous town of 250,000 population, and the social life in the city was luxurious. It was the time of elaborate balls, cotillions, and musicales..... and guests and many parties were given for charity. The hostesses/were beautifully gowned. In the daytime they wore long, full skirts, closely fitted at the waist, and blouses with full, ballooning sleeves. In the evening, their party gowns were of rich brocade, satin, or velvet trimmed with lace or fur. *and this is how*

they looked:

1. "The Band Played On"

Mrs. Campbell: Their husbands were prosperous businessmen or professional men. The status symbol of the day was the carriage drawn by a team of prancing horses.....so, of course, at each entrance there was a hitching post and granite carriage block for visitors.

Dr. Burrell: Then you might say that the gray granite carriage block, with the name Severance, was really the first stepping-stone to the success of the Buffalo Branch of the American Association of University Women. It was at this first meeting that the Branch was formed, the officers elected, and future goals discussed.

Mrs. Campbell: Although a small group, these ladies were very active. By the next year the membership had increased to thirty. From the very beginning they made plans to further the interests of women and to help other women obtain higher educations.

Dr. Burrell: Elegant though they were, these ladies were workers. At one of the first meetings it was voted to found a fellowship, "For the purpose of enabling some young women to continue their studies at a European University", and the amount of the fellowship was \$500.00.

Mrs. Campbell: Wasn't that first scholarship given to one of their own group so she might continue her studies in Europe?

Dr. Burrell: That's true....and so we see that from the very beginning the establishing of scholarships for women has been one of the principal aims of the University women.

Mrs. Campbell: By this time it had been proved that women could take it. In another early report it was stated that, "Women have now 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 countrymen."

Dr. Burrell: One of the first local projects undertaken by this small group was the establishment of home libraries for children in the poorer sections of the city. By 1893, two such libraries were in operation, and members visited them every week to read to and to play games with the children.

Mrs. Campbell: By 1894, another cause had come to their attention. The annual report says they "joined with enthusiasm in the movement to take the schools from the control of the political bosses and to better their conditions."

Dr. Burrell: They didn't believe in pussyfooting around in those days, did they? You know, they did more than talk. They actually went out and surveyed the sanitary conditions in the schoolhouses in Buffalo.

Mrs. Campbell: The turn of the century. The Pan American Exposition. Electricity from Niagara Falls was running the street-cars in Buffalo. The gaslight era had begun to fade. The 1900's had arrived.

~~(Music "Shine on, Harvest Moon". Girl in costume appears)~~

Dr. Burrell: In the early 1900's the style of women's clothes was changing, too, and the trains and bustles were giving way to a more streamlined costume. The Gibson Girl, drawn by Charles Dana Gibson, was the ideal American Woman, and her high pompadour, mutton-leg sleeves, high collars, and button shoes were accepted styles. By 1908 the popular song of the day was "Shine On, Harvest Moon" from the Follies of 1908, then playing on Broadway.

(Music - "Shine On, Harvest Moon". Girl in costume appears.)

Mrs. Campbell: Although Buffalo was a prosperous city in those days, there were the poorer sections. The Charities Society of Buffalo asked the Western New York Branch to establish a creche where working mothers might leave their children under adequate care.

Dr. Burrell: So again the ladies swung into action. They obtained a house at 79 Goodell Street and started a place where mothers could bring their children in the morning and call for them at night. During the day the children were cared for and two nourishing meals were served. The charge was only 10¢ a day per child! At first there were only ten children enrolled, but the Branch continued this work for seven years. During that last year there were 4,072 children registered.

Mrs. Campbell: It had cost more than a thousand dollars a year to maintain the college creche. The women raised this money in many ways.....by asking for donations.....giving teas.... balls and parties.....and, imagine this -- during the Christmas holidays, a group of women ran a lunchroom in one of

the downtown stores. They cooked and served luncheons, and a report says the venture was a success "both gastronomically and financially".

Dr. Burrell: In 1909 the City of Buffalo took over the creche project and continued it for many years.

Mrs. Campbell: They were still concerned about the Buffalo School System when they passed the following resolution: "Whereas Buffalo is the only city in the United States that does not have a Board of Education, and whereas the tardiness in the location and building of high schools and various other conditions in our local department strongly show the urgent necessity for such a body, if the Educational interests of the children of this city are to be best served, it is hereby resolved that the Association of Collegiate Alumnae are hereby in favor of a Board of Education on which shall be women appointed by the Mayor to serve for a term of from three to five years without pay and to have all the powers and duties with reference to school property and to the supervisory and teaching force that similar boards have in other cities."

Dr. Burrell: In 1913 the rumblings of war were heard in Europe, and soon America, too, was involved in the conflict. The Buffalo Branch did all it could to help in the war effort. They held War Fund Drives and sold Thrift Stamps.

Mrs. Campbell: They endowed a bed for the Red Cross Hospital and sold Liberty Bonds.

Dr. Burrell: They worked at the Thrift Kitchen, giving demonstrations on how to conserve food.

Mrs. Campbell: Oh, isn't that where they experimented with recipes using substitutes -- cornmeal instead of wheat flour, for instance.

Dr. Burrell: The songs of the day were "Keep the Home Fires Burning", "Over There", "Till We Meet Again", and "Smiles" ...and "There was a Long, Long Trail A'Winding". One was a real tear jerker which went, "O kindly tell my Daddy, That he must take care, Just a Baby's prayer at twilight, For her Daddy over there."

Mrs. Campbell: And don't forget "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag".

(Music - "Pack Up Your Troubles". Girl in costume appears.)

Dr. Burrell: But in spite of all the war activities, their principal purpose was not forgotten. The Branch still kept working for higher education for women. The year the Armistice was signed - 1918 - Mrs. Frank H. Severance, still an active member, was chairman of the Educational Legislative Committee. She worked to procure through the Legislature, higher salaries for women teachers, equal pay for equal work for men and women and equal opportunities for advancement in the schools. She also proposed a motion that married women be permitted to teach in the schools.

Mrs. Campbell: Really this theme of "higher salaries for women teachers" echoes and re-echoes down through the years. In nearly every decade, the Buffalo Branch was demanding an increase in teachers' salaries. As the economic situation of the country improved, they tried to increase teachers' salaries in proportion.....and this effort continues to the present time.

Dr. Burrell: The gloom of war was gradually dispelled by the wild gaiety of the Roaring Twenties. Again women's clothes were more comfortable and simplified. Ladies asserted their new freedom by bobbing their hair and smoking cigarettes publicly. They wore long-waisted, short-skirted dresses, with beads and fringe which swirled about them when they danced the Charleston to the newest jazz music, accompanied by the wail of the saxophone.

(Music - "Charleston". A dancer does the Charleston.)

Mrs. Campbell: It's hard to believe that AAUW members really did the Charleston.

Dr. Burrell: Well, they did. They had a lot of fun but they didn't forget the goals of AAUW. During this period the Study Groups were started.....the first one was a Child Study Group formed, no doubt, by young married women who wanted to exchange ideas about their children and study child psychology.

Mrs. Campbell: Meetings were held in the Community House of the Lafayette Presbyterian Church or at Foster Hall on the University of Buffalo campus. One of the projects at that time was to furnish a lounge in Foster Hall for women students. The Branch also worked to see that a Dean of Women was appointed to the staff of the university.

Dr. Burrell: The words "Scholarship" and "Fellowship" are also themes which reoccur constantly throughout the history of the past 75 years. Large sums of money were raised for these funds, and many means for raising the money were used. In the very early days, each member contributed a dollar, but later the Branch held large costume parties, circuses, and literary teas.

The 1930's was the era of the large card parties which were attended by more than a thousand people and netted large amounts for the Scholarship Fund.

Mrs. Campbell: The members and their friends no doubt attended these affairs in dresses with very full, flared skirts and simple lines. Hemlines were down again.

(Music - "When I Grow Too Old to Dream". Girl in costume appears.)

Dr. Burrell: The ever-broadening interests of University Women are reflected in the topics which were discussed at the regular meetings. They usually had a speaker and at first their subjects had to do with local issues....schools, welfare, politics, and so forth. But after the war their interests included national and international issues such as "Disarmament" or "The Cause and Cure of War", and one very successful program was a Symposium on Peace. "Women realize more than men the entire cost of war and they must focus their attention on world peace" they were told.

Mrs. Campbell: "The Legal Status of Women" was a topic during the 1930's, and also emphasis was placed on the cultural side of life - art, literature - and for one program they enjoyed Sigmund Spaeth who spoke on "Enjoy Music".

Dr. Burrell: The interest in the Study Groups continued to grow, and more groups were formed. There was a Garden Group.

Mrs. Campbell: International Relations.

Dr. Burrell: Modern Literature groups.

Mrs. Campbell: Drama and Writing.

Dr. Burrell: Music.

Mrs. Campbell: French.

Dr. Burrell: Handcrafts.

Mrs. Campbell: Interior Decorating.

Dr. Burrell: Antiques, Bridge, and many, many more.

Mrs. Campbell: Yes, the 1930's were busy years. It was in 1938 that the first Achievement Award was given to a local woman for her work in the community. Mrs. Adelbert Moot was the recipient for her "public spirited service". This was only the beginning of a custom which has honored many Buffalo women down through the years.

Dr. Burrell: Wasn't it also in 1938 that the first Bulletin was published?

Mrs. Campbell: Yes, and there were also many projects to raise money for the Scholarship Fund. One in 1934 was extremely successful. The Branch sponsored a "Human Adventure" film which told the story of the growth of civilization from ancient times....and this netted \$1,598 for the Scholarship Fund!

Dr. Burrell: Then along came another war, and the Buffalo Branch again helped in every way possible. They served on War Relief and Defense Committees, collected books for a Victory Book Drive, held classes in nutrition. They attended First Aid Classes, sent CARE packages to University Women in Europe, and set up a model black-out room in the Historical Building. They served as hostesses at Induction Centers and contributed to the ambulance fund. One of their most successful war efforts was staffing the War Bond Booth at the Statler Hotel.

Mrs. Campbell: Probably many of us here tonight sold war bonds at that Statler booth. How many of you did? Let's see your hands.

Dr. Burrell: At the end of the war, the United States Government present the Buffalo Branch with a special citation because through its efforts more than one million dollars in bonds were sold.....\$1,090,787 to be exact.

Mrs. Campbell: During those times patriotism ran high and everyone was singing "God Bless America".

(Music - "God Bless America". Possibly person in costume will appear carrying a Red Cross bag.)

Mrs. Campbell: By this time women had really made their influence felt in many areas outside the home. Their clothes reflected their emancipation. Those were the days of the dirndl skirt....the tailored suits with big, square, padded shoulders. Hemlines were up again, this time to conserve fabric.

Dr. Burrell: But with the end of the war came Dior with his "New Look" which shook the nation because the slim, boyish figure was no longer popular. His fashions emphasized the rounded bosom, small waist, and full skirt. Pillbox hats and berets were popular, and by 1947 women were wearing slacks and mannish tailored suits.

Mrs. Campbell: And although the war was over, there was still work to be done. The Buffalo Branch made plans to help families of Veterans obtain higher educations. They held vocational guidance clinics, and the speakers they had chose topics such as "Progress of a New World Order" and "Bullies in the Balkans". One far-sighted speaker told them, "Communists are a threat to world freedom, and only America can present Communism enslavement of humanity."

Dr. Burrell: Another speaker looked toward the future -- his topic "Atom Power and Tomorrow's World". He said, "The soldier of the future will be a scientist....In the war of the future men and women will push buttons and send rockets where they should go."

Mrs. Campbell: How right he was!

Dr. Burrell: But still the women of AAUW never forgot their principal goal -- furthering educational opportunities for women. They supported the Federal Aid to Education Bill, and in 1947 were again recommending an increase in teachers' pay and also a minimum salary for women teachers.

Mrs. Campbell: At the group meetings the speakers discussed Japan, India, South America, "Awakening Africa", "Translating Ideas Into Action", and "Europe in Crisis", and "Women in the Changing Order", so you can see how their interests were again broadening.

Dr. Burrell: By the Fabulous Fifties women were wearing slacks as accepted street attire and skirts ascended ^{to the} ~~once more~~ knee.)

(We are not sure about costumes and music for the 40's and 50's. If we have them, they will appear here.)

Music - Enjoy Yourself, it's later than you think

Dr. Burrell: This was a decade of progress and change, older customs giving way to new ideas, even in money-raising. In 1954 the Used Book Sale was begun and proved to be a very effective way of raising money for the Fellowships Fund.

Mrs. Campbell: At the general meetings members were being told "The nation needs the help of trained women"..... and there was also an increasing interest in art, politics, conservation, and other peace-time projects.

Dr. Burrell: The theme for the year 1958 was "Our Responsibilities...." and the monthly talks were on - "Our Responsibilities in the World -- in Education -- in the Arts -- as a Consumer", and then at the end of the year, the subject was "Translating Ideals Into Action".

Mrs. Campbell: This brings us to the 1960's.

(Music: "Hello, Dolly".)

Mrs. Campbell: The jet set, the affluent society, the twist and the watusi were in.

Dr. Burrell: On the other hand, world problems multiplied and increasing urbanization brought new problems to the community.

Mrs. Campbell: During 1962-63 the topic was "Megalopolis -- Niagara Frontier Version". By presenting programs related to this subject, as well as programs on world problems, the Branch was trying to awaken its members to the role they should play in local and world affairs.....to encourage them to take an active part.....to assume responsibility, and to help advance education for women wherever possible.

Dr. Burrell: A group was formed to do volunteer work at the Erie County Home and Infirmary at Wende. It is interesting to note that this service has brought us full circle, back to volunteer service to the needy on a person-to-person basis as was done in the 1890's. Here was an area where help was needed among our aging citizens, and the Branch took action.

Mrs. Campbell: But throughout the 75 year history of the Buffalo Branch, one of its principal concerns has always been to provide scholarships and fellowships for women. The Branch has been instrumental in collecting and providing many thousands of dollars to further the education of women throughout the world.

Dr. Burrell: Yes, we have come far from the early days when a \$500 scholarship was established, but the dreams of that small group of women who met that sunny October day in 1890 in the Severance front parlor have really become a reality.

Mrs. Campbell: You might say that from the time the young lady took the first step onto the carriage block to attend the first meeting -- through periods of depression, prosperity, and recession -- through two world wars -- the University Women have tackled, with courage and wisdom, the problems as they arose.

Dr. Burrell: We have continued to take steps toward the original goal -- higher education for women. But now, with the Atomic Age and the increasing interest in Outer Space -- women will be faced with further challenges. There will be more complicated problems to solve. But -- with such a history of courage, wisdom, and hard work behind them, the women of the Buffalo Branch are sure to tackle the ever-expanding problems of the future with equal determination and success.

Mrs. Campbell: On to the launching pad!

(With suitable music, a woman wearing a space suit appears.)

(Written by Mrs. Edward Lindberg, Historian, Buffalo Branch, American Association of University Women, for the 75th Anniversary program, October 19, 1965.)