

Presented Dec. 5, 1980 in the faculty club, SUNY to celebrate the  
90th Anniversary

REFLECTIONS: NINETY YEARS OF BUFFALO BRANCH

AAUW 1890-1980

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Based on a pageant, "From Carriage Block to Launching  
Pad" written by Olga Lindberg for the 75th anniversary  
celebration. Additional material and update by Ruthe  
Sicherman, Lucille Peterson and Carolyn Iadovito.

→ (Opening music: "Deck the Halls" or other carol to set scene.)

President Jean Lavid seated at telephone. She dials:

Jean: "Hello, is Lois Dabney there? Thank you." pause "Hi, Lois.  
We've got to get going on this 90th anniversary program. The  
8th of December is only a month away, and we must have some-  
thing to report at the next board meeting." pause  
"Fine, I'll talk to you again in a few days."

Puts down phone, leans back and sighs, closes eyes.

Narr.1 "Poor Jean! Since July she's been involved in program, the  
membership tea, carnival of classes, conference on the ageing,  
and dozens of other projects."

Narr.2 "Yes, how much more complex the president's job is today than  
it was in 1890 when Harriet Ransom Milinowski headed the  
founding group."

→ (Music: "<sup>1890</sup> ~~The Band Played On~~ <sup>"Daisy Bell"</sup> Woman in costume appears.)

Narr. 1 It was on an October afternoon in 1890 that five young women met in the home of Mrs. Lena Hill Severance to attend the first meeting of the newly-formed Western New York Branch of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae.

Narr.1 We must remember that the women of this era founded the club movement, and were the militants of their day.

Narr.2 That they were. The branch membership grew to 30 the first year, and from the beginning, its goals were to further the interests of women and help them obtain higher educations.

Narr.1 At one of the first meetings it was voted to found a fellowship of \$500, "For the purpose of enabling some young women to continue their studies at a European University." It was given to one of the members.

Narr.2 And why not? They were the only women in the city who went to college at that time.

Narr.1 So they were. The branch also assisted in the development of the University of Buffalo by raising money for the endowment fund, and by encouraging young women to attend.

*"In The Good Old Summertime"*  
 (Music: "~~Daisy, Daisy~~" <sup>1900</sup> Costumed figure appears)



Narr.2

By this time it had been proved that women could take it. In an 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."

Narr.1

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.

Narr.2

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."

Narr.1

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.

Narr.2

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.

Narr.1

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, (Music - "Shine On, <sup>Smiles</sup> Harvest Moon", Girl in costume appears.)

Narr.2

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.

Narr.1

So again the ladies swung into action. They obtained a house at 79 Goodell Street and started a place where <sup>(working)</sup> 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.

Narr.2

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".

Narr.1

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

Narr.2

Branch members were concerned about the Buffalo School System when they passed a resolution advocating a Board of Education, more high schools, and the appointment of women to the board.

Narr.1

Amazing! 80 years ago the branch felt that women should assume civic responsibilities and "make action their bag!"

Narr.2

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.

Narr.1

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

Narr.2

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

Narr.1 And that's where they experimented with recipes using substitutes like cormmeal for wheat flour.

→ (Music: "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag"  
Costumed <sup>1918</sup> figure appears)

Narr.2

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.

Narr. 1

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.

Narr. 2

Can you believe that Buffalo Branch started the ERA battle sixty years ago!

Narr. 1

Yes, I can. And members danced the Charleston as well.

→ (Music - "Five Foot Two" <sup>flapper</sup> - ~~Charleston~~ - costumed figure appears.)



Narr. 2 They had a lot of fun, but they didn't forget the AAUW goals. During this period the Study Groups were started, and today there are 22. And it was in 1921 that ACA became AAUW!

Narr.1

(General)  
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.

Narr.2

The words "Scholarship" and "Fellowship" are also themes which reoccurr constantly throughout the history of the past 90 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.

Narr.1

It was in the '30's that Henrietta M. Langner spear-headed a guidance program for high school girls in Buffalo, Amherst, Kenmore and Orchard Park. The counselling<sup>which</sup>/her committee provided stimulated the development of guidance programs in the school system.

Narr.2

Yes, the 1930's were busy years. It was in 1930 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.

Narr. 1 And in 1938 Miss Langner became State Division President, an office to be held by Isabel Kidney from 1942 to 1944.

Narr. 2 Isabel worked to establish a New York State Teacher award which provided funds for a year of study. Later the award was named for her and given in her honor.

Narr. 1 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.

Narr. 2 At the end of the war, the United States Government presented 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.

Narr. 2 It certainly was a time for celebration.  
 (Music: "White Christmas" Costumed <sup>1940's</sup> figure.)



Narr. 2

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 prevent Communism enslavement of humanity."

Narr. 1

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."

Narr. 2

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.

Narr. 1

This was a decade of progress and change, older customs giving way to new ideas, even in money-raising. In 1955 the Used Book Sale was begun and proved to be a very effective way of raising money for the Fellowships Fund.

**Narr. 2** Dont forget the "Barmaid hearing!" At a public hearing on the proposed ordinance to prohibit employment of women bartenders in Buffalo, May Sickmon and other Branch representatives spoke out against this discrimination against women.

**Narr. 1** They also hounded the city administration to appoint women to vacancies, and even complained to the Buffalo Evening NEWS for selecting only one woman among the year's outstanding citizens.

**Narr. 2** The '50's were the time when members recognized the importance of television as an educational medium, and began the crusade to have certain TV channels allocated for educational purposes.



(Music: "Hello, Dolly" Miniskirt)

**Narr. 1** 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.

**Narr. 2** 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.



Narr. 1 Ever alert to changing times, our members foresaw the influx of mature women into the job market, and cooperated with the Buffalo YWCA in presenting a Job Opportunities Clinic.

Narr. 2 Then there were the '70's, with the Bottle Battle, which seems to be heating up again today.

Narr. 1 We sure fought for returnables, with everything from petitions and coalitions to store surveys, but to no avail. The issue comes before the State legislature again in 1981.

Narr. 2 Three booklets compiled and published by the branch during this decade provided low-income mothers with simple information about dealing with babies from birth to ~~1 1/2~~<sup>5</sup> years of age. Later ~~the~~<sup>booklets</sup> were translated into Spanish, and all were distributed free of charge at child care classes.

Narr. 2 Remember November of '75? We celebrated our 85th anniversary at the Buffalo Club, and many members refused to attend because they were required to enter through the "women's door."

Narr. 2 And our special guest, National President Marjorie Bell Chambers, chided us for not passing ERA in New York State the previous day.

Narr. 1 Right! The '70's also saw the beginning of a food coop, and participation in the Reading is Fundamental program, as well as an ERA button project, which proved to be an excellent fundraiser.



Narr. 2 This year, as we join the National Organization in celebrating 100 years, we begin the final decade toward our own centennial. We can be proud of our 90-year record.

Narr. 1 Indeed we can! Thousands of dollars raised to further the education of women throughout the world, and an on-going fight for equality for women in all areas, from physical education facilities to representation on college and university staffs.

Narr. 2 In the future, Buffalo Branch members will be faced with more complicated problems to solve, but with such a history of courage, wisdom and hard work behind them, they're sure to tackle them with equal determination and success.

 (Music: "Deck Halls" Modern woman appears)

Mod Woman: Wake up, Jean! (Shakes her) All your worries about the program are over -- and so is the pageant!

  (Music: Fanfare)

### Participants:

Sean Lavid, branch president

1890 Lucille Peterson

1900 Gertrud Burau

1910 Carolyn Iadovito

1918 Soyce Fink

1920 Carolyn Husk

1940 Janet Bishop

1960 Daphne Meyer

1980 Mary Kirkwood

Director: Ruthe Sickerman  
music Dept