

Today we are telling AAUW's story, so here we go.

Once upon a time on November 28, 1881, Marion Talbot and Ellen Swallow Richards gathered 15 alumnae from 8 colleges, most of them young, to talk about the difficulties women had getting into 4-year colleges and even more so into graduate school. Marion Talbot later became Dean of Women at the University of Chicago, and Ellen Swallow Richards was the first woman to receive a degree in chemistry and who is considered the founder of Home Economics as a discipline.

Three months later 50 more women joined this group and launched the American Collegiate Association, which became AAUW. Not only does AAUW have a fascinating history full of courageous and foresighted actions. It's also important to know that AAUW from the beginning was out front early and advocating for women's issues, often long before others did.

Less than four years later in 1885, AAUW published its first study. A prominent physician had published an article that higher education would affect women's health, debilitating them and preventing them later from having children. So AAUW went out and surveyed more than 200 women college graduates and then issued the study that refuted that notion.

That was followed by a long line of fact-finding studies that ranged from scientific observations on infant development in 1890 to the economic status of women in the Depression in 1936 to the taxation and financing of public education in 1955 to all the reports in the 1990's on girls shortchanged in school and college.

Back to the 1880's. Three years after proving that physician wrong about women in college, AAUW created its first fellowship for graduate work in 1888. Members donated \$1 each, and Ida Street received a \$350 fellowship for graduate work at the University of Michigan. She became a pioneer in the field of early Native American history.

One year later in 1889 the AAUW Legislative Committee was founded. By the early 1900's we were advocating for child labor laws, compulsory education, juvenile courts, and funding for public schools and libraries.

In 1913 we issued our first study on pay equity—110 years ago—and we still at work on that.

In 1917 the first International Fellowship was awarded to a Latin American to study medicine in Pennsylvania.

Now you may have noticed that during these same years, the women's right to vote campaign was well under way. AAUW was a bit late to that party. The reason was that AAUW was formed in 1881 to focus on women's higher education, and the organization was still pretty small. Until about 1913 AAUW as an organization was not participating in getting women the right to vote. However, by 1914 AAUW members began to realize that women's education rights and the right to vote were compatible, and AAUW members became more active in the fight for voting rights.

By 1917, AAUW members along with the suffragists were picketing the White House for women's right to vote. Women's civil rights became a focus for AAUW, although women's education remained the major focus.

1919: To allow Marie Curie to continue her research, AAUW members raised \$120,000 to purchase 1 gram of radium for Marie her research. Only \$100,000 was needed, so her daughter gave \$20,000 back to AAUW. That was used to create an American Fellowship endowment in science, which continues to be awarded today.

AAUW continued to lobby and advocate. Let me just give you a run-down.

1919: we advocated for equal pay for equal work in schools. We also began lobbying for the creation of a Department of Education at the cabinet level. It only took 60 more years for that to become a reality.

1921: [this one will get you!] we lobbied for independent citizenship for married women (!)

1922: advocated to allow women in the diplomatic service, and we lobbied for access to contraceptives for married women. 1922!

Beginning in the mid-1920's AAUW began publishing a whole series of study guides presenting the results of scientific studies on the various stages in child development. They were pioneering materials and led to lots of branch activity. By the 1930's branches were leading countless parent education groups, putting on exhibits of educational books and toys, and aiding and even operating kindergartens, nursery schools, children's libraries, and children's museums. There were also valiant efforts to protect school budgets from drastic cuts due to the Depression.

Also around 1931 AAUW published guides for adult education in international relations and foreign policy. Yet another area was economics, as women were being particularly impacted by the Depression. A study guide on consumer purchasing became the most popular of all the study publications, and thousands of copies were requested.

SLIDE ONE AND THEN SLIDE TWO (consumer purchasing and social development of children)

These guides were the forerunners of the adult education programs we have today in schools throughout the country.

1935: lobbied to legalize the dispensing of contraceptive information by physicians because it was illegal for physicians to even discuss methods of birth control.

Most AAUW members today don't know about this one. In the late 1930's and early 40's we organized art exhibits of contemporary artists that traveled throughout the country to towns and small cities that didn't have an art museum. It went to 145 cities and was seen by 55,000 people. This was public education of the arts long before museums did it. Again, here's an example of AAUW stepping forward before others. One piece was a charcoal drawing by Georgia O'Keeffe, which was later purchased for the AAUW office in DC. Until we moved to a different building, this was on the wall outside my office. Not everyone liked it—but I did.

By 1938 World War II was looming, and Jewish women professors in Germany and then Austria were being forced out. One of our first letters asking AAUW to help find these women positions in America came from Albert Einstein. SLIDE THREE (Einstein letter)
In 1940 AAUW created the Refugee Aid Fund for university women refugees. Some very important women in Germany, Austria, and others were aided by this fund. We also have a thank you from Einstein for this aid. One of the original members of the Archives Task Force, Jackie Littleton, found in a box letters and reports by the AAUW staff person who handled the Refugee Aid Fund. Jackie has now written a book about that woman and the work AAUW did, and it's being published.

1945: AAUW member Chase Woodhouse, the Connecticut Representative in Congress, introduced the first proposed federal equal pay legislation: The Equal Pay Act of 1945. 78 years ago.

After WWII AAUW was an early and ardent supporter of the United Nations. AAUW member Virginia Gildersleeve was the sole female member of the group who wrote the United Nations Charter.

SLIDE 4—(Virginia Gildersleeve)

Another AAUW member was the first U.S. representative to the U.N. Council on the Status of Women. AAUW members undertook a project in 1948 to teach about the U.N. in all public schools. As a result of AAUW's support of the United Nations, we were awarded permanent U.N. observer status.

We have continued to work with the United Nations on women's issues.

SLIDE 5—[cover of program for the AAUW United Nations Seminar in NYC held annually for several years]

In 2008 AAUW received special consultative status. This allows AAUW to be a voice at the UN Commission on the Status of Women as well as other committees.

In 1949 [if time--story of how this happened; Mary Church Terrell refused membership by the Washington DC Branch; AAUW Board told

them couldn't do that; suit went to court; court ruled for DC branch because bylaws not clear]]

AAUW at its national convention amended the bylaws to clearly state that all college women graduates were eligible for membership, regardless of race or religion. 1949—16 years before the Civil Rights Act. We should be very proud of that.

In the early 50's AAUW was called The Pink Ladies by some including Senator Joseph McCarthy, who were convinced that AAUW was affiliated with Communist organizations.

In 1952 the AAUW Board of Directors issued a statement analyzing the danger of the communist threat to freedom and democracy, and the danger that individual liberties might be lost by the means adopted to defend them. AAUW received thousands of requests for that statement.

In 1943 AAUW created the AAUW Achievement Award to honor women who had made exceptional contributions to society. The first awardee was Florence Siebert, who invented the first stable tuberculosis test. In 1956 the awardee was Rachel Carson.

SLIDE 6 [Rachel Carson in the middle]

SLIDE 7 [Washington Post article]

Several years ago I was working on the AAUW archives in a box with all kinds of pages of this and that. It was a mess. Oh boy, I thought—I'll never get this organized. So I started with a bunch of pages and came across a letter. It was 4 pages long, hand written, and it was from Rachel Carson. She was thanking AAUW for the award, and she wrote that she would use the money for the research she was doing for her next book. That book was "Silent Spring." For years AAUW said we thought she used the money for that, but we had no proof. And here was the proof. [still gives me goosebumps]

SLIDE 8 AND THEN SLIDE 9 [the first and last pages of her letter]

Some of the women you would recognize who received AAUW's Achievement Award were Barbara McClintock in 1947, who was the first woman to receive a Noble Prize in science on her own--in 1983—36 years later. See what I mean about being ahead of the gang?

Some others were Margaret Mead, Commodore Grace Murray Hopper (who invented computer language COBOL), author Eudora Welty, Sandra Day O'Connor, Wilma Mankiller (first woman chief of the Cherokee nation), opera singer Marilyn Horne, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Gloria Steinem, Madeleine Albright, Mae Jemison (the first African-American woman in space), Senator Olympia Snowe, and Sonia Sotomayor.

In 1962 AAUW established the African Educators Program. For almost 20 years the program gave women educators from Africa, primarily high school teachers, professional development opportunities in the U.S. to help address the shortage of teachers in African countries. Branches throughout the U.S. hosted these women.

1968: Action for a Unified Society was formed to identify left-out groups in communities and help bring those groups into the mainstream. Branches around the country had activities promoting racial understanding and civil rights. 1968

1968 was also the year AAUW encouraged branches to study the environment in their communities with the program called "This Beleagured Earth."

In 1969 the Coretta Scott King Fund was created by member donations to support opportunities for black women to study African-American history and culture and become leaders in academia, business, the professions and public service.

SLIDE 10—[Coretta Scott King on the right with the first recipient. In the middle is AAUW president Anne Pannell, who was president of Sweet Briar College. She was the second Sweet Briar president to become AAUW president. The other was Meta Glass in the late 40's I think.]

SLIDE 11—[Coretta Scott King’s letter to AAUW thanking us for creating this program. She emphasizes the importance of helping all Americans to become aware of the rich heritage of Afro-American people. She also noted the importance of women educators with the ability to enlighten students on this.] 1969

1969 was also the year we began lobbying for a woman to be appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court (that only took 12 years to come to fruition with the appointment in 1981 of Sandra Day O’Connor).

1972: AAUW was instrumental in the passage of Title IX. Patsy Mink from Hawaii, an AAUW member, co-authored the bill. And this is a good time to point out that AAUW doesn’t just lobby, we actually get involved in creating the legislation as we did with Title IX and the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act.

In 1975 the Capitol Hill Lobby Corps was formed, and Virginia provides the bulk of the members. Hundreds, may thousands, of visits have been made by the Lobby Corps to the offices of Senators and Representatives.

1978: Members in the march in DC to support the passage of the ERA .

SLIDE 12 [ERA March]

If you look closely, you will see one of our own, Nancy Joyner, in the front on the left, next to the AAUW President at the time. Nancy was the vice president on the AAUW Board of Directors.

1981: the Legal Advocacy Fund was formed to fight sex discrimination in higher education and the workforce. It supports women’s law suits. Its first victory was in 1987 when a group of women won their suit against a college in New York state regarding tenure and pay.

1983: AAUW and 39 other organizations formed the national Women’s Vote Project and registered 1.5 million women in one year.

1983: After 7 years of lobbying and support, the Family & Medical Leave Act passes. As I mentioned before, AAUW didn’t just talk but

we also took action. And one of our major actions for years has been lobbying Congress on bills we want to see passed—and sometimes on ones we don't want to see passed. Information sheets are composed for our Lobby Corps members to use plus the Fact Sheets and Position Papers to leave in Congressional offices.

SLIDE 13 [a statement in 1976 to the House Judiciary Committee on our opposition to attempts to restrict the freedom of choice.]

SLIDE 14 (a Fact Sheet for the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1989)

SLIDE 15 [Position Paper on Family Leave and how it should cover both fathers and mothers. Probably 1987)

1987: members raised more than \$235,000 to establish the Judith Resnik American Fellowship in honor of that AAUW member who was killed in the Challenger explosion. She also had been an American Fellowship recipient.

1989: now some gender equity—we admitted men with a vote at the national convention in Houston. Those voting “no” usually gave as their reason that if we admitted men, they would take over our branches. [I'm still looking for all those men....]

1989: The AAUW Board adopted the AAUW Diversity Statement, which appears on every AAUW publication, including our branch and state websites and newsletters. So for 34 years AAUW has had a Diversity Statement of equity and inclusion. [show front page of Vision, the state newsletter]

1991: The 90's were a great decade for AAUW. We started the AAUW Initiative for Educational Equity with report after report on girls in school and then women in education. The first report was Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America, which received enormous publicity.

It was followed by How Schools Shortchange Girls,

SLIDE 16 [cover of report]

**Then Hostile Hallways,
SLIDE 17 [cover of report]**

Next came Sister-to-Sister Summits, Tech Check for Schools, Signposts: A Guide to Creating Gender Fair Schools, Under the Microscope: Gender Equity Science Projects, Tech Savvy. All those focused on kindergarten to 12th grade.

SLIDE 18 [cover of Tenure Denied]

“Tenure Denied” moved from schools to sex discrimination in academia,

SLIDE 19 [cover of Behind the Pay Gap]

then onto Behind the Pay Gap. All these reports were based on research funded by our contributions.

One of the later research studies was “Why So Few: Women in STEM.” That again generated incredible publicity, even beyond the U.S.

AAUW was invited to present it to a U.N. Status of Women meeting in Geneva, and we were also invited to a big U.N. conference that constantly referred to “Why So Few.”

Next was “Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment in Schools”. Next came “Women in Community Colleges: Access to Success”, and then “Solving the Equation (which dealt with Women’s Success in Engineering and Computing)”. Then “Bias and Barriers: Women and Leadership in 2015”. AAUW has become well known for these fact-based research studies.

The more recent years have seen continuous work on equal pay and benefits for all women, eliminating discrimination in higher education and the workplace, and women’s success in the STEM fields. We have Start Smart for women entering the workforce, which is now in more than 145 colleges, including more than 30 historic black colleges. A grant from Coca Cola has funded Work Smart for women already in the work force. These two salary and benefit negotiation programs

have trained over 190,000 women. And we also have STEMed for girls, a summer program for girls of diversity.

We continue to lobby Congress for the passage of legislation on reproductive rights and equal pay. The Paycheck Fairness Act sits waiting for Senate approval.

AAUW fellowships and grants totaled a record \$6 million this year.

The National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (otherwise known as NCCWSL), which started in 2002, is back in person, so we continue to provide this conference for college women.

I hope I have convinced you that AAUW has an outstanding and awesome history of being in the forefront. We should be very proud, but we also need to remember: WITHOUT ACTION, NOTHING CHANGES. It's because AAUW lobbied and persisted that we have all this in our past to be proud of.

**Caroline Pickens
2023**