

85 YEARS OF AAUW – LONG BEACH

BY NORMA GRADY

What did the Branch do as a youngster in the 1920s?

It formed committees: Membership, Programs, Rooms and Arrangements, Social, Legislation, Welfare, Press, and Reception. They mostly sound familiar, don't they? [But whatever was Reception about?] In 1921 the Branch began the tradition of raising money to encourage young women to seek a college education. What began as the Bertha Brown Fisk Scholarship Loan Fund soon provided stipends, evolving into the variety of funds supporting education for women and girls in our wonder years.

In those early years three kinds of membership were available: National, Associate, and College. The first required eligibility for national membership; the second required at least a full year's academic work at a college or university on the AAUW accredited list; the third, a full year's work at a college requiring graduation from an accredited high school for entrance—but not necessarily on the AAUW list.

The Branch had fun. Their 1927 Christmas party at the California Club cost \$1.75—174 attended. That same year they held monthly Four O'Clock Book Reviews for members. During the 1922-23 year, they held a series of 28 scholarship teas besides their regular meetings, perhaps a little much, as no teas were listed the next year.

Programs varied. The Pasadena Theater Players returned several times to present drama. Music programs were varied—a concert trio, an octette, the music of Early California, Novotny on Czechoslovakia and its music, frequent vocal solos. Speakers ranged from writers such as Sherwood Anderson and Carl Sandburg to editor Max Eastman, who spoke on *The Russian Soul and the Bolsheviks*, to J. Malcolm Bird on *The Present Status of Spirit Phenomena*. One topic was *Fitting into the 1920s*. Just as do we, these women were adjusting to a rapidly changing world. Wouldn't you love to have eavesdropped on some of their discussions?

HARD TIMES AND GOOD TIMES

1930—our Branch entered its second decade with a membership of 331. New applicants required endorsements from two members. Dues were four dollars a year. A quorum required 50 members. Given the group's size, meetings were held in such places as the Ebell Clubhouse, the Villa Riviera, the Empire Room of the Hilton Hotel (today's Breakers), and the Virginia Country Club. These shifting locations became the impetus for the establishment of a building fund, later referred to as the reserve fund. Money raising began in 1933. In that year of bank closures and the Long Beach earthquake, AAUW women courageously looked ahead.

Changes took place. In 1931 the Branch's name was changed from College Women's Club to University Women's Club. What began in 1932 as the Junior Department for members fewer than ten years out of college, had, by 1935, morphed into Recent Grads—members under 30—with its own schedule of events. As an early project RG initiated a local Toy Loan program. Apparently their parties were good, too.

During the 20s the Branch had focused on raising money for local scholarships. While members continued to support local students during the 30s, they now began to raise money for the Association's Educational Fellowships as well. In 1938, President Anna Townsend was pleased to report that Long Beach had given the largest per capita contribution to Fellowships in the California State Division. Ms. Townsend went on to become California State President and later to direct the South Pacific Region of AAUW. Did you know that in 1937, besides California, Arizona, and Nevada the region also had Branches in Shanghai, Peiping, Tientsin, Tokyo, Honolulu, and Manila? It's fitting that the first fellowship established for a Long Beach member was done in Ms. Townsend's honor and that it is an international endowment.

The tenor of the 1930s was reflected in programs and activities. Topics included consumer education, economic policy, the new Palestine, and Indian independence. In 1937 H. V. Kaltenborn, well-known foreign correspondent, reported on the Spanish Civil War. International Affairs discussed neutrality. In 1930 the Social Welfare section provided shoes for children ["50 pairs needed, only 6 available at the local Welfare League"] and fruit and cigarettes for residents of two wards at the county farm. [Residents would have liked candy as well, but since many were diabetic, that was a no-no.] A 1934 program fittingly considered *Science of Earthquakes*; two years later the Branch toured the newly constructed Long Beach schools which replaced the many destroyed in the 1933 catastrophe. Unfortunately the scrapbook for the year of the earthquake is missing, so how this major community emergency directly impacted the Branch is something of a mystery.

But all was not serious, even during the Depression. One fundraiser was labeled *Hard Times*—with dress to match according to newspaper pictures. Interest groups were wide-ranging—outdoor sketching; conversational French; glee club; garden club; short-story writing; drama; child study; and bridge, either with instruction or without. The Branch Hi-Jenks were one of the high points of each year. Teas were held in members' homes, at local clubs, and even in the Poly High School Home Economics department.

1939—the Branch now had 492 members, and dues were still four dollars.

WAR AND PEACE

1940: While war raged in Europe and China, Long Beach Branch surveyed members' qualifications, interests, and capabilities in preparation for defense work. When the British Federation of University Women asked for temporary homes for their children during the Blitz, 15 members responded with offers.

Women had many interests—in the last year of peace the Branch learned that red is a dangerous color, especially for older women. But most program topics reflected more serious concerns: *Books Banned as Subversive*; *Recreation for Youth in Stressful Times*; *News and Views of Washington*; *Mexico—Good or Bad Neighbor*.

Then came December 7, 1941—and everything *really* changed. The Branch adjusted and combined programs as members were occupied with First Aid, Red Cross, and other demands. Recent Grads' activities were limited, for most members were now employed. Meetings were switched from evening to afternoon because of the blackout. Programs were held at locations reachable by bus.

The Social Studies Committee established a Consumer Service Center with information on rationing and price controls. They located and investigated suitable rooms for incoming defense

workers. Together with AWVS the Branch opened a cottage and garden on Atlantic as a gathering place for servicewomen. The Finance Committee invested \$1702 of the reserve fund in war bonds.

But busy as they were, members continued to focus on traditional AAUW concerns—undertaking a survey of the arts in Long Beach, protesting as discriminatory the proposed removal of the Los Angeles postmistress. Interest groups kept going—the Creative Music group undertook a seminar in composition and critical analysis—and bridge overcame all obstacles.

As least as early as 1940 the Branch was showing concern over contemptuous attitudes by Americans toward racial minorities. Through programs and projects, more than ten years before the civil rights movement emerged on the national scene, the local Branch raised awareness in this area—in 1943, for example, they worked on an analysis of racial prejudice in Long Beach.

As the war ended, programs shifted to concerns of the postwar world: the U.N., the Arab-Jewish question in Palestine, legal status of women, what's happening in Hollywood, and fashion.

On May 24, 1940, the status of the Branch had changed, as Articles of Incorporation were signed. In 1947 came the first dues increase—to \$5, and then in 1949 to \$10—postwar inflation kicking in?

Throughout the 40s, the Branch continued to raise money for EF and for local scholarships. Two special categories of members were the Recent Grads group and the Juniors. Each met twice a month, once for business, and once for bridge. Recent Grads worked on social welfare projects, while the Juniors served as a Building Fund committee. In 1949, using money raised from fashion shows, benefits, and other projects, they bought a lot to build on—Garden section to do the landscaping. With over 500 members, the Branch was looking ahead. So what next?

NOT SO LONG AGO

Do any of you remember the 50s? Familiar names begin to appear in the yearbooks, familiar topics in the programs—Korea, child molestation, Pakistan, world trade and the port of Long Beach. There were cultural events and parties. Scholarship money was raised. In 1953 the Branch began a fellowship in honor of Anna Townsend, state president from 1950 to 1952; its first recipient, a graduate student at the Women's University in Seoul, Korea.

Branch membership during the decade ranged between five and six hundred while the city and surrounding areas expanded geographically and demographically. To meet the needs of scattered members, a zone plan, based on zip codes, was devised for a time. Informal neighborhood social and discussion groups, meeting in members' homes during both daytime and evening, provided opportunities to form friendships and to better understand AAUW's program.

Numerous administrative committees (22 in 1959) kept things running smoothly. The Branch regularly met each month on a Tuesday evening for a business meeting combined with program, usually with coffee hour following, rarely with dinner preceding. Other Branch meetings were held on the occasional Saturday with lunch, while Friendship Teas were held three times a year in members' homes.

The primary program, however, was carried on by two other kinds of committees: study groups and general sections. Study groups focused on issues: Mass Media, Status of Women, Legislation, International Relations, Education, Social Studies. Their work frequently resulted in action. A study by the Social Studies group on juvenile problems in Lakewood resulted in a

recreation program in Pan-American Park, questionnaires used in schools, and classes for parents. The Status of Women group identified a list of Long Beach women qualified for state appointments. Working with other community groups, the Education section played a major role in establishing adult education in Long Beach.

General sections included such topics as Spanish, Book Review, Travel, Gardening, Bridge & Canasta (remember that one?). The Braille section offered transcription lessons and performed a needed service. Three general sections were identified by age: Recent Grads, Juniors, and Liberal Arts.

Yearly fashion shows sparked the fund-raising for building construction. In 1951 the Branch purchased a lot at the corner of Marshall Place and Long Beach Boulevard; in 1958 they sold this lot and purchased another at Fourth and Loma.

And then came 1960, ushering in the decade that would challenge old understandings. Would the Branch change?

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

The Sixties. . . maybe you lived through them, maybe you've only read about them. But times they were a-changin'—Sputnik aftermath, the Berlin Wall, Cuban missile crisis, John Glenn's orbit, escalation in Vietnam, the Kennedy and King assassinations, civil rights, the women's movement, protests and riots, folk, rock, landing on the moon—just a few of the things that made for an unforgettable decade.

So what about the Branch in those unsettling years? Members remained committed to the roles and responsibilities that educated women should undertake in the world. Members participated in study groups, raised money for scholarships and fellowships, held teas, listened to a variety of programs, played bridge, worked in the community, and developed friendships. Membership held steady at around 450 throughout the 60s—dues were \$15.

The Branch continued its policy of joining other local groups in supporting educational and cultural programs. They helped sponsor a yearly Writers' Conference given by the Adult Division of LBCC. In 1961 the Creative Arts Committee inaugurated the docent program at the Long Beach Art Museum and continued to run it throughout the decade. For a time the Committee presented a series of monthly art appreciation lectures at the museum. Perhaps as a perk from this, an AAUW Christmas reception was held there, featuring the "silver Wassail Bowl." Also in the area of art, the Branch established an annual \$100 award to be given to the outstanding woman artist in the Annual Southern California Juried Art Exhibit. Another \$100 award went to the outstanding woman student in music at Long Beach State College.

In 1960 Elaine Babbush headed the Education Committee to study issues involved in teaching foreign language in elementary school. That group succeeded in establishing summer-school classes in Spanish. By 1962, in response to the Sputnik challenge and world events, the committee's topic for the year had become: Are our schools stimulating and challenging the mentally gifted? Are we overlooking this resource? Mass Media's interest: Identification of propaganda and interpretation of influence in the media, both here and abroad. Is it time to study it again, maybe? The Status of Women Committee looked at the comparative situations of women around the world.

All was not study. The Fellowship Committee raised sizable funds for fellowships each year through presenting a series of smashing fashion shows. A newly formed Gourmet Group went out for dinners. The Building Committee, having second thoughts about the responsibility of ownership, decided to begin enjoying the money they had raised; they rented an apartment for Branch headquarters in the International Building on Ocean Boulevard.

As members listened to panels on *Law and Order or Chaos and Anarchy* and lectures on *Hypes, Hippies, and Hypocrites*—I keep wondering what that speaker had to say—the Branch weathered the 60s with its usual élan.

Something changed, however. The yearbooks, which until the mid-sixties are full of information on various committees and programs, as well as what their editors considered significant in terms of accomplishments, become stripped down. Even the by-laws are missing. Was it economy, efficiency, or what?

REALLY CHANGING

So what else is new? The death of Betty Friedan last week has focused the attention of some of us on the major changes which have occurred for women since the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in the early 1960s. What's different? This was the situation in the 1960s—I'm now speaking personally, but I know my peers have many more examples from that time:

- My credit accounts of long standing were no longer good without the signature of my new husband.
- My income could not be counted toward qualifying for a mortgage.
- Entering a PhD program I was told that history departments in universities didn't hire women, no matter how able, and one only needed to look around to know that this was true.
- At the end of the 5th month of pregnancy, one had to go on an unpaid leave in the LBUSD or quit.
- Not only did my high-school girl students not get sports scholarships—they had few teams to play on—no money for them.
- Almost all administrative promotions in the LBUSD since WWII had been of males.

But finally change arrived. The ferment kicked off by Friedan's book and the subsequent consciousness-raising came to fruition in the 1970s. Title IX became law in 1972. The Equal Rights Amendment easily passed Congress and was sent to the states, seemingly headed for ratification. The *Roe v Wade* decision was handed down.

So what does this have to do with the Long Beach Branch in the 1970s? The Branch presented a panel on changes that the ERA would require. They formed a committee on the Status of Women which eventually evolved into our Public Policy Committee. Many more women were working—thus networking became a major concern, particularly of younger members of the Branch, and became one of the most popular interest groups. But even backed by new laws and with all their enthusiasm and abilities our members confronted barriers that weren't easily overcome.

In 1976 the Branch recommended Borgny Baird, a lawyer and former president of AAUW who held numerous positions in the community, for a position on the Long Beach Harbor Commission. The attitude of Llewellyn Bixby, one of the members: "A female commissioner

would be at a disadvantage on a trade mission, which would be physically and mentally exhausting.” [Borgny was a champion skier.] Wilson, another member: "Sex biases in other countries would prevent her from discharging her duties. She might be a great hostess, but not able to do business." [He later admitted he was not sure of this.] Whatever, Borgny was not nominated as the first woman to sit on that commission. It was not politically possible for the City Manager.

The 1970s AAUW Branch was led through these challenging times by members such as Barbara Gleason, Anne Graves, Jean Aldrich, Fay Denny, and Elsa-Karen Braden. Among the accomplishments of the Branch under their leadership: a study of nuclear energy which was widely distributed and a study of the California inheritance tax, which helped lead to a change in the state law. So let's give credit to the Branch for its leadership.

In a recent column, Susan Jacoby has written that this entire history is in urgent need of retelling today, at a time when legacies of the movement are under assault—just think Title IX. Historical amnesia, not fundamentalism, is the true villain. Millions of young women can't imagine what it was like to be told “No Women Need Apply.” So tell your sisters about it, your daughters, and your granddaughters. You don't want them to have to do it all over again.

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Long Beach Branch became a senior citizen in years during the 1980s but did not slow down. Just as recent retirees put new effort into community work, so did our members. In 1981 we published *Choosing Childcare—A Directory of Child Facilities in Long Beach*. This was a real service to Long Beach women and children, as by that year increasing numbers of young mothers were at work, some by choice, others of necessity, and good child care was a major concern. Five years later in 1986 a committee revised the book and published a new edition.

The year after the first appearance of the childcare handbook more assistance to the working woman was provided by the Branch as it cooperated with LBUSD in providing community job fairs for re-entry women. Carl Perkins funding helped out with that project. In 1983-84 another cooperative effort with the school district resulted in a remarkably successful Math and Science Conference for Girls, foreshadowing our recent conferences.

Furthering that approach to girls, in 1986 Branch President Connie Inskip was instrumental in bringing about a *Women in Technology Conference* at CSULB. Girls from the five Long Beach high schools of the time visited technology labs, talked to professors, and became aware of possibilities for further studies and careers.

AAUW women in general love the written word, and they are intrigued by the writers who create them. Book groups which feature lively discussions have been part of the Long Beach Branch since its beginning. In 1982-83, in cooperation with other organizations, our Branch was instrumental in the development and presentation of the First Literary Women's Conference. That conference, too, has a birthday—next January it will be 25.

So in the 80s what did our members do besides work for the community and read? Among other things, we supported community playhouse, we played golf, we wrote, we took pictures, we ate, with both afternoon and evening gourmet, and then we lost weight, or tried to. We discussed foreign affairs, played bridge, and did needlepoint. There were interest groups for young moms,

for bird watchers, and for conversation. I'm especially intrigued by the last. Branch members felt free to admit that we just wanted to get together and talk.

The conversation group was short-lived, however, and I'm guessing that this might have been because *all* of our groups talk. One of the wonderful things about our Branch is the variety of women who not only do things, but also talk. Just think—here in Long Beach we've had eighty-five years of intelligent, curious, diverse, and concerned women conversing—and laughing—about matters ranging from getting through the day to making a better world!

NEW ROADS FOR THE BRANCH

The 90s were innovative, productive, and prosperous. In 1994 the Long Beach Branch/Connie Wright Inskeep Research and Projects Endowment was established and completed in one year.

In the area of innovations, Deloris Mayuga and Connie Inskeep inaugurated the sharing of elective positions by serving as co-presidents in 1995-96. In an era in which women are undertaking ever more commitments and responsibilities, this practice is allowing us to tap more women for leadership roles.

In 1996-97 the Branch received a bequest of \$25,000 from Ethel P. Black, a 49-year member; the money became the Ethel P. Black Fund to be used for projects which support the AAUW Mission Statement. That same year the Connie Inskeep AAUW Leadership Award was established to reward members for outstanding service.

Influenced by the early 90s Association study done by Wellesley College, documenting the under-achievement of middle-school girls, the Branch began its mentoring program at Stanford Middle School in 1997. Thoughtful planning by leaders such as Linda Silver and Deloris Mayuga contributed to a program which has had a positive impact on both girls and the Branch. For the girls it has meant support and awareness of opportunities. For us, it's been our most effective recruiting tool among women who want to make a positive contribution to the community. Even in that first year we sent one of the mentees to the first Tech Trek Science Camp at Stanford University, while the program won an Association EF Grant of \$4800 to encourage further development of the project.

By the end of the decade the Branch was collecting awards for all their hard work. We were frequently given 5-Star status by the Association. Then came a special commendation for putting together a Voter Education Guide to report candidate response to AAUW positions on public policy. Soroptomist International honored us both as an organization which advanced the status of women as well as an award for *Women Who Made a Difference*—this latter for the mentoring program—while TALB recognized us for outstanding contributions to the community.

With Janet Kruger developing our website, we made our mark in cyberspace in 1999.

It was indeed a decade of accomplishment.

ON TO 100!

As the third millennium dawned, the Branch faced new challenges. A precipitous drop in interest rates, affecting the building fund and the Black-Holmes fund, was coupled with a slow decline in

membership numbers. At the same time we were expanding programs which reached out into the community. So, how to do more with less?

Under the leadership of Ellen Mathis and Joan Gustafson we downsized, moving our headquarters to St. Luke's Church. Deloris Mayuga and Linda Silver wrote successful grants for the Mentor program. Daphne Ching-Jackson and Frances Rozner have run our Math-Science Conferences for Middle-School Girls on a shoe-string.

And our members, as usual, came through in their support for education for women and girls. The Ethel Black Research and Projects Endowment was completed, and a new endowment begun. Our LAF contributions have been among the State's highest. Increasing numbers of girls have been supported for a week at Tech Trek. Branch contributions help sustain the Women's Shelter and Mary Bethune School needs. Helen Sebring has initiated a yearly International Dinner—always a sellout—to raise money for women abroad.

Each year at the State Convention Branch anniversaries are celebrated. Members attending the 2005 meeting were thrilled to hear that Long Beach was 85. So why not celebrate those 85 years? Remember that beautiful cake at the Membership Tea? Digging for information in old Presidents' books one day, we were shocked to find a photograph of Branch members cutting another 85th anniversary cake—in 1996. But of course—the Branch, as a part of AAUW, was 85. The organization of Long Beach college women supporting education for women and girls began in 1911, thus this is also our 95th anniversary. In another five years we can celebrate our first Centennial!

2005-2006

Acknowledgements

This sketch of Branch history rather just happened. Last fall we thought it would be fun to look for highlights of our 85 years, so we delved into the mysterious boxes at headquarters. We were stunned at the amount of material, particularly from the Branch's early days. It was just too good not to do something with. Given time constraints, statements have not been double-checked for accuracy. It's all based on the archives with additional comments that arise from our not-always-accurate memories.

If you find this interesting, thank the mostly long-gone Branch historians who put together the scrapbooks and saved the yearbooks that provided the material. By the way, while there are almost complete sets of yearbooks from early years, too many are missing from recent years. Does anyone keep their old yearbooks? They would make a great donation.

Betty Thompson
Norma Grady