

AAUW Asheville History

A group of 17 young women college graduates met in Boston in the fall of 1881 to discuss the restrictions against the education, growth, and development of women. They formed a national alumnae association. The women represented Boston University, Cornell University, Oberlin, Smith, Vassar and Wellesley colleges and the University of Michigan and Wisconsin. The Southern Association of College Women had organized in 1903 in Knoxville, Tennessee. These two organizations merged at a meeting held in Washington, DC in April 191 to become the American Association of University Women.

The Asheville Branch of AAUW can trace its history from March 27, 1915 when 16 female college graduation in the community met and organized the "Western Carolina Branch of the Southern Association of College Women." During the first year another 12 women joined the new association for a total of 28 members. In 1939 the name was changed to the Asheville Branch of the American Association of University Women.

From the beginning, the Branch tackled community projects. In 1919 when businessmen were trying to make Asheville a convention city, the AAUW members contributed \$5 each and worked successfully to bring the national convention of The Federation of Women's Clubs to Asheville. Community work centered on helping the Salvation Army, support for Travelers Aid, and visiting patients in the local sanitariums.

Other projects included working to improve standards in colleges for women, to establish night schools, to help set up a juvenile court system and to improve the probation system.

During these early years the Branch met in homes, Women's Club building at Charlotte and Sunset streets, the YWCA on Grove Street and at the George Vanderbilt Hotel. They hit the ground running with their new organization!

In the early years of the new branch, members worked to improve standards in colleges for women, establishing night schools. The branch helped in setting up a juvenile court system and an improved probation system. They helped establish the Detention Home for delinquent children. Another project to benefit children was the School Art Exhibit, which annually displayed several thousand items of arts and crafts by elementary school students. The summer preschool kindergartens were first sponsored by our branch. In 1926, the branch had 70 active members and worked to support higher education. In 1928, the branch established a revolving loan scholarship fund to aid high school graduates in continuing their education. Years later the fund was phased out and replaced by the granting of \$200 per year, for four years, to both UNC Asheville and Warren Wilson College.

Education and literacy of adults and children in the community have always been a branch priority. In the 1930's branch members helped men and women in learning to read and write. During this time 40 members completed special training in working on literacy in the community.

Another outstanding program that the branch started was the Refugee Shop, organized on August 1, 1940 to aid the refugees of WWII beginning to send relief to British women in need. Tune in for more information on how our branch helped with worthy causes in Europe after WWII.

In 1939 our branch marked the beginning of a long association with Pack Library. The library was in the process of providing a "library on wheels" bookmobile to serve outlying communities. The Branch voted to support this project by collecting books. This led to the organization in 1941 of "The Friends of the Library" in an effort to improve the quality of public libraries that serve the city. During the first year, 400 people became "Friends."

Asheville-Buncombe College (predecessor to UNC Asheville) had Branch support from its beginning. In 1945-46 more than 4000 reference books were purchased and donated by the Branch to help the college meet accreditation standards. The Branch also helped the Botanical Garden with plans for expansion and donated twenty magnolia trees native to North Carolina.

In the 1950's a number of projects occupied the Branch. Our branch helped establish a receiving home in Asheville for children whose family ties were disrupted for one reason or another. Members worked to provide preschool kindergartens in the summer for a number of schools. Tuition was \$20 with our branch paying the teachers and purchasing the materials.

In 1954, the Branch Special Studies group included representatives of the Family Life Council, Mental Hygiene Society, Receiving Home, Salvation Army and the YWCA. One of the branch programs dealt with juvenile delinquency and this program resulted in a community project, an Institute on Juvenile Delinquency held with over 200 participants.

The Branch celebrated its 50th anniversary in March 1965 at Trinity Episcopal Church. The program featured a huge cake and candles and

special recognition of the pioneer members of the Branch. Mrs. Curtis Bynum (first president of the Branch) was the special guest.

In 1985, with 215 members, the Asheville Branch held the distinction of being the largest branch in North Carolina. The AAUW Study Groups continued with great success. In addition to four literature groups, there was an art group, financial group and world affairs group as well as the Friday Study Group. Emily Quinn conducted the "Get Acquainted with Asheville" groups for months beginning in 1985. Emily is still an active member, serving most recently as membership co-vice-president.

The Branch helped the American Red Cross in Asheville with their Life Line Project, which enabled the Red Cross to receive a special award in April, 1986.

In the middle 1990's the Branch initiated a program to interest 7th and 8th grade girls in non-traditional careers and to encourage girls to continue to take science and math courses in high school. The girls were selected by their science teachers and came from Asheville Middle School. The Branch conducted this program at UNCA and involved a number of women who talked to the girls about their careers-all using math and science.