

## A Brief History

When women students arrived at Marquette on a summer day in June, 1909, they were breaking a 300 year old tradition. For that long, Jesuit colleges had taken for granted that their students would be male. Marquette blazed a trail for the education of women by becoming the first Jesuit institution of higher learning to admit female students.

Father Raphael N. Hamilton, S.J., later the first Jesuit moderator for AMUW, wrote in his *History of Marquette University* that it was a break with European tradition which encountered many obstacles. Turning opposition into advantage, those early women students became the pioneers for a new breed of American women appearing on the Milwaukee campus.

In 1910 women were admitted to the Colleges of Music and Journalism, and in 1913 a few women studied Dentistry, Liberal Arts and Medicine.

In those early years, there were no gathering places for women students, no authorized housing for those from out of town, no residence halls where women might enjoy the “dorm sessions” which are remembered long after college years are gone.

Looking back more than 60 years, the Association of Marquette University Women acknowledges the determination and dedication of a group of women led by the remarkable Mabel Mannix McElligott, Marquette’s first Dean of Women and the youngest woman in the nation to hold that position. AMUW has had such a profound effect on the lives of women students, and has made so many significant contributions to Marquette’s continued growth and success.

In 1935, Mabel McElligott recognized the need for adequate housing for women, and what such facilities could mean in terms of university growth. She prompted the organization of the Alumnae Association, and at a Sunday afternoon reception in October, 1937, the idea for AMUW was born. Her enthusiasm and her own personal popularity inspired the 500 women who appeared on February 12, 1938, for the first luncheon meeting, and continues to inspire alumnae members today.

Mary Weller, President of AMUW in 1965-66, expresses the sentiments of everyone who knew Mabel McElligott. “She was such a presence at Marquette,” Weller says. “She was a wonderful role model who truly defined the term ‘educated woman’ and who cared deeply about her students. And she was absolutely tenacious in overcoming some formidable obstacles to improve the environment for women and to achieve the goals that had been set for AMUW.”

McElligott’s impetus for forming AMUW was the lack of adequate housing for women students in the 1930s. “Existing housing for women was shockingly poor and inadequate,” she declared at the time. The 70 female students at Marquette were living in crumbling rooming houses, private homes, or with relatives and family friends.

From her office in Drexel Lodge, the gathering place for women students at that time, McElligott contacted hundreds of alumnae and explained the need to them. The response was overwhelming. On February 12, 1938, in the Venetian Room of the Astor Hotel, an organizational meeting of charter members of AMUW took place. The organization's first president was Constance Brielmaier Donovan. By 1938 the group had grown to 500 members, which included "499 women and Father Raphael C. McCarthy, Marquette president," according to McElligott.

With Father McCarthy's approval, the search for a residence hall began. The women obtained a 10-year lease on an apartment building at 12<sup>th</sup> and Kilbourn from its owner, George J. Meyer, Sr. Of the \$10,000 borrowed to finance the project, \$4,000 was paid toward one year's rent and the remaining \$6,000 was used for furnishing and renovation of what became known as Alumnae House.

To reduce costs, the women did much of the work themselves, scrubbing and waxing floors. One woman found 602 yards of monk's cloth at a sale in Chicago, which they used to make 130 pairs of drapes. They found a bargain on maple beds and dressers, but the furniture delivery men said, "At that price it doesn't get carried inside," so with the help of husbands and friends they moved the furniture into the building that became home to 85 women students (with one telephone per floor!). During the first year of Alumnae House's operation, tuition was \$125 per semester and room and board in a triple or quadruple room was \$260 a year—including breakfast and dinner.

Hundreds of women have had an impact on AMUW since it was formed in 1938. One who played a major role in the organization is Jane Schiffler Street, a 1941 Marquette graduate, who began her affiliation with AMUW in 1962 and served as executive director until 1986.

"I never thought I'd stay that long," she says, "but Mabel was truly inspiring. She was the spark that started the fire. She had a way of relating to people as though she was interested in you alone, and she was a tremendous mentor for me. I was pregnant with our youngest son, Will, in 1967 when we already had three in college. I remember saying to Mabel, 'I don't know if I can do this,' and she said, 'Jan, I had three children while I was Dean of Women. You can do it!' And I did."

Street played a major role in the growth and development of AMUW during her years as executive director. With her trademark modesty, she says, "Any success I enjoyed was because I had a lot of wonderful women working with me. AMUW serves the university in many important ways, and I am very proud of what these women have accomplished—our scholarship program, the Chair in Humanistic Studies, Capsule College, Supper for 12 Strangers, the Bielefeld and McElligott Medallion awards, and many projects AMUW has organized to raise funds for Marquette's theater program."

In 1970, Street took on added responsibilities when she became the associate director of special programs for Alumni Relations in addition to her AMUW position. Among her accomplishments, she started the alumni summer college, which brought 30 to 60 alumni back to campus for a week to live in the residence halls, eat at the Union, and go to classes.

“One of the best things about working with AMUW was that we had a shared interest in the university and a desire for women’s success,” Street adds. “We often began working together as strangers, in different age groups, but invariably we melded together and became a team.”

Many alumnae remember Wenonah Eis, the first house-mother in the newly opened dormitory, and the wonderful cooks, Carrie and Alma, who were really surrogate mothers. They not only mashed potatoes by hand and maintained an immaculate kitchen, but also were always on hand with a sympathetic ear for all their girls.

The Alumnae House project was the beginning of years of AMUW fund raising through dues, donations, card parties, style shows, bazaars, auctions, lectures and art projects. With the money they raised, the women eventually financed other residences including Rigge, Nicholas and Merrity Halls and Hilltop House, along with Lisette Lodge; Lourdes, Campion, Xavier, Bonifas, Loyola and Marquette League Halls; M. Carpenter Tower; Monitor, Marian and Heraty Halls; the former LaSalle Hotel; Cobeen Hall; and Knights Tower.

But by far the largest housing project assumed by AMUW from 1938 to 1950 was the construction of O’Donnell Hall with a capacity to house 351 women students.

Sandy Zilg Pavlic, AMUW President in 1974-76, recalls the extraordinary events that led to the building of O’Donnell Hall. “AMUW had paid off Alumnae House in record time, and went on to acquire the other residences. The Association had purchased some land on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> streets with the goal of building a new dormitory instead of just remodeling old buildings. In the early ‘50s, the federal government introduced a loan program to lend institutions 90% of building costs for new housing programs if the institution came up with the other ten percent.

“Because the government would not loan the housing money to private groups,” she adds, “AMUW deeded all of their properties, which at the time were valued at \$500,000, to Marquette. This was a remarkable achievement by the AMUW and a significant contribution to the university.”

In return for the acquisition of the property, university administrators asked what they could do for AMUW. According to Jane Street, AMUW executive director from 1962 to 1986, “AMUW felt that the recognition for women at MU was slow, so they requested that a chair be established for a female professor in recognition of the accomplishments of women alumni.”

As a result, the Chair in Humanistic Studies was established in 1963, bringing distinguished women scholars to Marquette to teach, lecture, and interact with students. AMUW assumed the responsibility of raising the \$1.5 million needed to fully endow the Chair, and the goal was achieved. Two major gifts spurred the drive from the beginning: a \$500,000 challenge grant from an anonymous alumna donor, and Mary Boheim Finnigan’s gift of \$250,000 to endow the Eleanor H. Boheim Distinguished Lecture Series, the annual public lecture given by the chair holder.

AMUW has forged a long and deep involvement with Marquette's Teatro Maria, which celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1999-2000. Evan and Marian Helfaer donated \$1.6 million for the construction of the theater, and AMUW raised money to provide all the lighting, seats, curtains and furnishings as well as scholarships that continue to be awarded each year to deserving Theatre Arts majors. Among other fund raisers, AMUW members sold buttons asking people to donate to the "Naked Stage."

On November 14, 1999 the Theatre Department honored AMUW's long tradition of loyal service and support at a 1 p.m. reception prior to the 2:30 performance of *The Miracle Worker*, a drama especially selected to honor the role of women in society. Phylis Ravel, Artistic Director, emphasized that Marquette alumnae have played a strong role in the growth and success of Marquette's theatre department, and have always shown great service to the University.

In 1963, to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AMUW's founding, the organization instituted the McElligott Medallion, named in honor of Mabel Mannix McElligott. A silver medal is presented upon occasion to a non-alumna—"a woman of prominence who has emulated the ideals of our founders in advancing the educational and cultural interests of women."

Past recipients of the McElligott Medallion include actress Jane Wyatt and her mother, drama critic Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt (1963); author Taylor Caldwell (1964); engineer Lillian Moeller Gilbreth and her daughter, author Ernestine Gilbreth Carey (1966); actress Helen Hayes (1971); and musical comedy star Ann Blyth (1973).

AMUW established the Mary Neville Bielefeld Award in 1965, named after an early president of the association. The award is presented annually to an alumna who is outstanding for her loyalty to the ideals of Marquette. The first recipient was Mildred Weil, Assistant Dean of Women. A complete listing of Bielefeld Award recipients is included at the end of this publication.

The AMUW Scholarship was established in 1991 by the Board of Directors of AMUW. The intent of the scholarship is to provide \$2,000 or more in gift money to an outstanding MU woman student for her senior year at Marquette University. The scholarship is designed to help a student who has taken out a loan (or loans) in order to attend the university.

AMUW believes that it is important to foster and promote future women leaders. For that reason, the Association established the Ignatian leadership Award, which includes a \$1,000 stipend, to recognize a graduating Marquette University senior woman who has demonstrated leadership skills and volunteered her services to the Marquette and Milwaukee (or her home town) communities. The Award was instituted in 1991 by AMUW to honor St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus.

AMUW established an annual \$500 Endowed Theatre Arts Scholarship in 1970. This scholarship is available to outstanding students interested in technical theatre as well as the performing arts. It is an annual scholarship of \$500, renewable for four years, totaling \$2,000 for each student. Currently, the Theatre Arts Scholarship fund totals more than \$43,000.

Many of AMUW's events reflect the long tradition of the organization in providing continuity for Marquette alumnae. The annual meeting, for example, continues the tradition of featuring a top guest speaker.

The popular Weekend Capsule College, held on Saturdays for alumnae, was staffed by Marquette faculty members who shared their knowledge in a wide array of fields.

“Supper for Twelve Strangers,” an AMUW program begun in 1973, has become an immensely popular annual event for hosts and “strangers” alike. Named to reflect Jesus’ last supper with his twelve apostles, the supper is meant to be a social welcoming event for current students. Alumnae open their homes to students for friendship and support as well as a home-cooked meal. “Supper” brings together students, alumni, Jesuits, parents, faculty, administrators, staff and Marquette friends to Milwaukee-area homes for dinner and conversation. In 1996, nearly 250 students were invited to the homes of more than 35 host families.

Almost every member of AMUW has pleasant memories of one or several “Suppers.” Ann Hart Dodds, AMUW president in 1985-87, recalls the enjoyable time she and her family had when they hosted the event. “One year my husband and son were at a Packer game, so I not only cooked the meal but also picked up the guests. We had seven or eight people in the car at one time. It was just wonderful fun for all of us.”

Through the years, the Annual Benefit Luncheon and Style Show has been a major fundraiser for scholarships for women. In the last several years the Luncheon, which usually draws a crowd of 300-400 women, has raised \$10,000 annually for AMUW's scholarship fund. The AMUW Board works for an entire year to prepare the auction and entertainment or fashion show to insure a pleasant afternoon for everyone who attends. Currently, the proceeds allow AMUW to offer two partial scholarships for deserving women.

Perhaps the most valuable insights into the work of AMUW, and the lasting friendships that have been forged through the years, come from some of the organization's past presidents. We would like to share their comments. The years of their term of office follow their names.

**Ruth Ann Carbone Carver (1987-88).** During my years of involvement, the University allowed us to tap into previously “untouchable” resources to seed contributions to our fund drive. The \$1.5 million Fund Drive allowed us to permanently establish the Chair of Humanistic Studies as a full time position.

AMUW brought me much closer to my alma mater; it made me more aware of its position in our city and state and in my own life; it made me see what an incredible contribution AMUW has made to the role of women at Marquette. I made friends with wonderful individuals and had the opportunity to serve as AMUW representative in the Marquette University Alumni Association—a great experience!

**Mildred Cable Fraser (Weir) (1951-52)** I first met the Board members of AMUW as a student in residence at Alumnae House from 1944 to 1946. I was president in 1951 when O'Donnell

Hall was built, which was a major success. I remember signing contracts and checks as president, even though my husband worried about us being liable for them!

In my era, the need for decent housing was a major concern because women were just making inroads at Marquette. Through AMUW I met a wonderful group of dedicated women. Mabel McElligott comes to mind as a role model for me. The night I was elected president, I got home very late and said to my sleepy husband, “Guess what happened to me tonight?” His response was, “What did you do to the car?” So spending a year with my year-old baby on one hip and my ear to the telephone didn’t seem to bother him. I loved every minute. Now these many years later, it still pleases me!

**Lillian Vedder Klotz (1992-1993 and recipient of the 1977-98 Bielefeld Award).** AMUW gave me a great opportunity to work with a diverse group of women with the same goal—to benefit Marquette University. I have many fond memories of many special friends working together for a common goal. I am proud of the AMUW scholarships to help women attend Marquette, and of the Ignatian Leadership Award.

**Mary Alice Dedinsky (1990-91).** The major focus of AMUW during my years of involvement were the Community Service Award and Ignatian Leadership Award. Dr. Glenda Riley was the recipient of the Chair in Humanistic Studies, and Dr. Margaret Schlinetz received the Mary Neville Bielefeld Award.

AMUW provides opportunities for women of all ages, from all departments of the university, to work together, pray together and celebrate life together. We are dedicated to all types of service to the community and to Marquette University. Through the generosity of Marquette women, and Sandy Pavlic and Donna Heon as co-chairs of the fund drive, the Women’s Chair in Humanistic Studies was completed. My special memory will always be the date, April 24, 1999, when I received the Bielefeld Award. It was an honor I shall cherish forever. Thank you, women of AMUW.

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