

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN: HISTORY AND PURPOSE

by Dr. Annette K. Baxter

The National Council of Women has from its inception in 1888 been an organization notable for its power to unite. The occasion of its birth was the commemoration of the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention, an event forty years earlier which formally united women in behalf of their own rights for the first time in our nation's history. That commemoration, indeed the celebration, of that singular event took place at Albaugh's Opera House in Washington, D.C. There the National Council of Women, along with its larger counterpart, the International Council of Women, were conceived.

Five years after the birth of the National Council Mrs. May Wright Sewall, its second President, became the moving force and presiding genius behind the Congress of Women at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which gave vivid evidence of women's newly aroused self-consciousness. The National Council in those early years helped to persuade those women whose interest in reform stopped short of suffrage that the vote was the crucial link in the achievement of many essential feminist goals.

Thereafter the biennial conventions of the National Council provided regular occasions for the exchange of ideas on numerous issues, from dress reform to women's education. Beyond encouraging the solidarity of women on feminist matters, the Council served as a forum for the introduction of new ideas in areas such as child psychology, race relations, and peace among the nations.

Through the years the National Council's associations with the International Council of Women brought it in touch with other nations and regularly broadened its perspective. Thus it could call its members' attention to the international implications of domestic problems while cultivating the detachment that would permit organizations freedom from political bias.

Although its prime purpose has traditionally been to pool the knowledge and experience of member organizations to advance long-range human progress on a number of fronts, the Council has always been ready to take emergency action. During World War I the Council played a major role in the women's branch of the Council of National Defense. In 1933, facing the depression head on, it hosted an International Congress of Women at the Chicago World's Fair, where an impressive contingent of feminine minds grappled with the economic dilemmas of the nation and the world.

Since World War II the Council, with the co-operation of its affiliated organizations, has continued to foster a strong public conscience among its individual and organizational members. With programs, panels, committees and publications, it has probed the far-reaching implications of the new feminism. And it persists, through its International Hospitality Committee and its observers at the United Nations, in cultivating the international outlook of its founding mothers.

The women founders of the National Council were associated with 53 different organizations. Some of these groups are of course no longer in existence, there are those that still maintain their tie with the Council, and many that have joined in the past 88 years.

The original organizations were:

The women who founded the National Council came from 53 organizational groups some of which have merged or disappeared. Some continue and are still members of NCW — The original organizations are:

American Red Cross Society, *Clara Barton*
American Woman Suffrage Association, *Lucy Stone Blackwell, Rev. Antoinette Blackwell, Mary A. Livermore*
Association for the Advancement of Women, *Julia Ward Howe, Mary F. Eastman*
Christian Women's Board of Missions, *Kate B. Cordie B. Knowles*
The Grange: Fraternal Delegate: *Anna M. Worden*
Knights of Labor, *Leonora M. Barry*
Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic, *Laura McNeir*
Moral Educational Society (Boston), *Caroline M.S. Frazar*

National Temperance Hospital and Medical College Association, *Dr. Mary Weeks Burnett*

National Women Suffrage Association, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony*

National Woman's Christian Temperance Union (a current member of NCW), *Frances E. Willard, Clara Cleghorne Hoffman, Susan H. Barney*

New England Hospital for Women and Children, *Ednah D. Cheney*

New York Committee for Prevention of State Regulation of Vice, *Anna Rice Powell*

Scholl Suffrage Association (Massachusetts), *Martha A. Everett*

Sociologic Society of America, *Lita Barney Sales*

Sorosis, *M. Louise Thomas, Jennie C. Croly*

Universal Peace Union, *Rev. Amanda Deyo*

Western Association of Collegiate Alumni, *Louisa Reed Stowell*

Western Women's Unitarian Conference, *Victoria Richardson*

Woman's Centenary Association of Universalist Church, *M.M. Dean, Emily L. Sherwood*

Woman's Free Baptist Association, *Marilla M. Hills, M.M. Brewster*

Woman's National Indian Association, *Amelia S. Quinton*

Woman's National Press Association, *Aurelia Hadley Mohl*

Woman's Relief Corps, Auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic, *E. Florence Baker*

Women's Auxiliary Conference of the Unitarian Association, *Isabel C. Barrows*

Women's Educational and Industrial Union (Boston), *Abby Morton Diaz*

Women's Ministerial Conference, *Rev. Ada C. Bowles*

Women's Primary Association (Utah), *Nettie Young Snell*

Women's Relief Association (Utah) (Now called the Relief Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and a current member of NCW), *Emily Tanner Richards*

Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association (Utah) (Now called the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) and currently a member of NCW, *Luella L. Young*

The first elected NCW officers:

President
Frances E. Willard, Evanston, Illinois

Vice President-at-Large
Susan B. Anthony, Rochester, New York

Corresponding Secretary
May Wright Sewall, Indianapolis, Indiana

Recording Secretary
Mary F. Eastman, Tewksbury, Massachusetts

Treasurer
M. Louise Thomas, Fordham, New York

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE WOMEN OF THE UNITED STATES 1977

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Advertising Women of New York
 American Cancer Society, Inc.
 American Mothers Committee, Inc.
 American Woman's Association
 Church Women United
 Co-Ette Club, Inc.
 The Fashion Group, Inc.
 Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas
 Hadassah, Women's Zionist Organization of America
 Indiana State Council of Women, Inc.
 International Association of Physical Education and Sports for Girls and Women
 The Links Incorporated
 National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Inc.
 National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Inc.
 National Council of Negro Women, Inc.
 National Council of Women of Free Czechoslovakia
 National Home Fashions League
 National Woman's Party
 * National Women's Christian Temperance Union
 The Play Schools Association, Inc.
 * Relief Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
 Ukrainian National Women's League of America, Inc.
 Women In Communications, Inc. New York
 Women United for the United Nations
 Women's Medical Society of New York City
 * Young Women of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
 Zeta Phi Beta Sorority

* Current members who were also Founding Members.

WOMEN OF CONSCIENCE AWARD

The National Council of the U.S. and the International Council celebrated their joint 75th Anniversary in Washington, D.C. On June 19, 1963, at the opening dinner at the Statler Hilton Hotel, Dr. Janet Travell, personal physician to President Kennedy, presented on behalf of the Council, its first "Woman of Conscience" Citation to Rachel Carson.

Each year following Rachel Carson, the Council selected a different woman to receive a citation of conscience. In 1964, it was Hazel Brannon Smith, courageous Mississippi editor whose advocacy of Negro Voting Rights cost her the destruction of her office and printing plant. In 1965, the citation went to Virginia Senders, author of the Minnesota Plan, an original program for retraining and educating adult women. Judge Florence M. Kelley, Administrative Judge of the Family Court in New York City, was recognized for her humane treatment of those young people who came before her. Ellen Jackson of Roxbury, Mass. was the first Black woman to be cited for her creative community action programs in 1967.

Because the 80th Anniversary of the National Council of Women and International Human Rights Year coincided in 1968, the Executive Committee decided it was fitting to broaden the "Woman of Conscience" program. Each National Council of Women member organization was asked to submit a nominee from its constituency who had made a significant contribution to human rights. The following women received citations: Dr. Dorothy Ainsworth, International Ass'n of Physical Education and Sports for Girls and Women; Mrs. Andrew Brown, Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation; Dr. Mary S. Calderone, Women's Medical Ass'n. of N.Y.C.; Mrs. Edward Carter, Play Schools Ass'n.; Mme Marcel De Gallaix, Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas; Mrs. D. Joe Hendrickson, Women's Christian Temperance Union; Mrs. Florence Smith Jacobsen, Young Women's Mutual Improvement Ass'n.; Dr. May Hall James, Canadian-American Women's Ass'n.; Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr., National Council of Negro Women; Mrs. Dorothy M. Lewis, Women United for the United Nations; Mrs. Margaret Moore, The American Mothers Committee; Mrs. Jan Papanek, National Council of Women of Free Czechoslovakia; Mrs. Mamie B. Reese, National Ass'n. of Colored Women's Clubs; Mrs. Harold E. Rodden, Indiana State Council of Women; Mrs. Dean Rusk, Ass'n. of American Foreign Service Women; Mrs. Dorothea W. Sitley, Philadelphia Federation of Women's Clubs and Allied Organizations; Miss Hilda Torrop, National Ass'n for Practical Nurse Education and Service; Mrs. Raphael Tuorover, Hadassah; Mrs. William Volker, Ukrainian National Women's League of North America; Miss Helen F. Winfield, American Women's Ass'n; Lt. Violet Hill Whyte, National Ass'n of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs.

The following year, its seventh, the Council's "Woman of Conscience" Citation had matured into a full blown annual award. Nominating forms were distributed well in advance, and a group of distinguished women was selected to judge the candidates. Perhaps most important, however, the Clairol Corporation agreed to support the program, making possible adequate staff preparation and a cash award for each recipient.

The first of these awards was made to Annie May Bankhead, a Black leader who, by personal example and influence, had measurably raised the quality of life in her community in College Station, Arkansas.

In 1970, Ellen Sulzberger Straus received the award for creating the program "Call for Action" on Radio Station WMCA in New York City. Originally offered to slum dwellers and others who felt powerless to get basic city services due them, the program soon set up an office manned by volunteers in cooperation with the station. In addition to providing concrete help to thousands of citizens, the case records provided material for many crusading editorials broadcast over the station.

By 1971, the Woman of Conscience Award had become so important: that it was separated from the Council's Annual Fall business meetings and made a special event each spring. This entailed skipping one event in October and it was not until April 1972 that the next award was made. Sister Ruth Dowd won it for her achievements as an educator with teenagers in Harlem. The citation described in part "her passionate belief in the power of education to open doors and open lives, and the hard pragmatic competence to translate that belief into a working reality."

In 1973 at NCW's 85th anniversary party in Washington, D.C., Patricia Smith, M.D. accepted the Woman of Conscience Award for her heroic hospital and medical work among the Montagnards in Kontum, Vietnam. Mrs. Frances F. Pauley of Atlanta, Georgia, received the 1974 award in recognition of her dedicated work in the civil rights struggle. International Women's Year, made appropriate the selection of Margaret Mead, internationally renowned ethnologist and anthropologist, as the 1975 award winner.

Equally logical was the choice of a highly acclaimed government leader as the 1976 Bicentennial Woman of Conscience — Congresswoman Barbara Jordan of Texas.

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN

The International Council of Women founded concurrently with The National Council of Women of the U.S. in 1888, is today made up of affiliated national councils from the following countries:

Argentina	Kenya
Australia	Korea
Austria	Lebanon
Bahamas	Liberia
Barbados	Luxembourg
Belgium	Madagascar
Boliva	Malaysia
Botswana	Malta
Brazil	Mexico
Cameroon	Morrocco
Canada	Nepal
Chile	Netherlands
Columbia	New Zealand
Congo (Brazzaville)	Niger
Denmark	Nigeria
Dominican Republic	Norway
Ecuador	Pakistan
Finland	Peru
France	Philippines
Gambia	Rhodesia
Germany	Saudi Arabia
Ghana	Sierre Leone
Great Britain	Singapore
Greece	South Africa
Guatemala	Surinam
Haiti	Sweden
Hong Kong	Switzerland
India	Thailand
Indonesia	Trinidad & Tobago
Iran	Tunisia
Israel	Turkey
Italy	Uganda
Ivory Coast	United States

