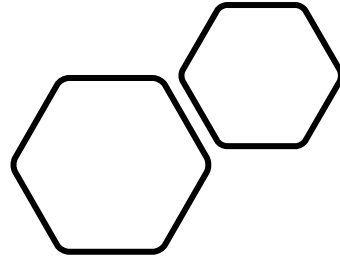


A Progress  
Delayed:  
Women and  
the AEA  
before 1970



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History of Economics Society,  
ASSA, January 2022

- Creation in 1971 of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) gave formal recognition both to the presence of women in the economics discipline and the American Economic Association and to their underrepresentation there, compared to the population at large and to the humanities and other social sciences
- Such formal organization marked start of a new era for women in the AEA – but not of the first, or even the second, era of women in the AEA

# The Early Years

- Early female participation in the AEA can be seen by turning to the *American Economic Review*, volume 1 (1911), number 1, page 1, because the journal began with “Some Unsettled Problems of Irrigation” by Katharine Coman, professor of economics and history at Wellesley College since 1883 – an article reprinted a century later in the *AER*, vol. 101 (2011), no. 1, pp. 36-48
- Coman, author of a two-volume economic history of the US West, made the still pertinent argument that the key to understanding California’s economic history was to focus on conflict over control of water rights
- She also published in the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of *AER (Papers and Proceedings)* and in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> series of *AEA Publications* in 1891 and 1903 (*AER* is the fourth series) and the only woman among the organizers of the AEA in 1885

ECONOMIC BEGINNINGS  
OF THE FAR WEST

HOW WE WON THE LAND  
BEYOND THE MISSISSIPPI

BY  
KATHARINE COMAN  
AUTHOR OF  
"THE ORIGINAL HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES"

VOLUME I  
EXPLORERS AND COLONIZERS

Illustrated

New York  
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
1907

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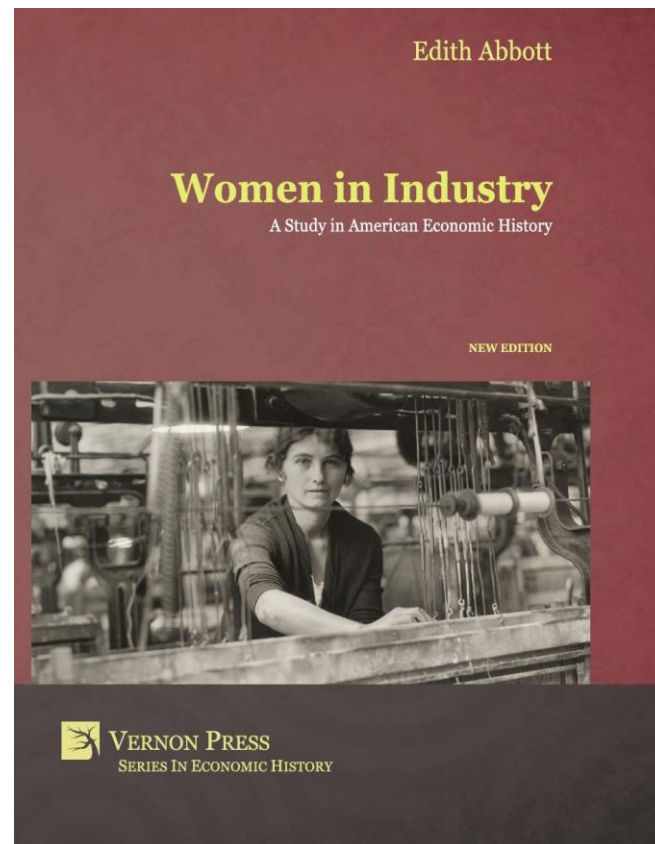
- William J. Baumol, writing in the *AER* special issue marking the AEA centenary in 1985, proudly announced his (or rather, his RA's) discovery that a very few women had published in economics journals in the 1920s or earlier – but did not notice Coman on the first page of the *AER* (or mention the three series of *AEA Publications* preceding the *AER*)

# Women and the Scholarly Journal

- Even a glance at the start of the alphabetical listing of authors in the 1886-1924 first volume of the *AEA Index of Economic Journals* reveals Edith Abbott (19 *JPE* articles, first female vice-president of AEA in 1918) and Sophonisba Breckenridge (8 *JPE* articles)... both deans of U. of Chicago Grad School of Social Service Administration
- Helen Dendy Bosanquet of Charity Organisation Society (10 *EJ* articles)
- Clara Elizabeth Collet of UK Board of Trade, published in *QJE* (Notes and Memoranda, 1891) and in the 1<sup>st</sup> volume of the *EJ* (also Notes and Memoranda, 1891) -- only person to publish in both 1<sup>st</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> volumes of *EJ* – friend of Marx family, student of Jevons, mentor of Mahalanobis, provided Keynes with reminiscences of Jevons

# Edith Abbott 1<sup>st</sup> female VP AEA

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- Can continue alphabetically to Agnes Wergeland, chair of the history department at U. of Wyoming where she also taught political economy (PhD Zurich 1890, 6 *JPE* articles 1900 to 1905 that were posthumously republished by U. of Chicago Press as 2 books in 1916) and Anna Pritchett Youngman (Chicago PhD 1908 [book 1909, reprinted 1973], 7 *JPE* articles 1907 to 1910, 3 in *QJE* 1913 to 1917, *AER* articles in 1921 and 1922)



- A total of thirty-six women published a full-length article in the *AER* in the first thirty-seven years – a relatively small proportion of the total 980 articles published
- A total of thirty-two women published a full-length article in the *QJE* from its inception in 1886 through 1948 – an even smaller proportion of the 1534 total articles published
- Their success in publishing is all the more remarkable given their lack of access to jobs in research institutions. Instead, when they were employed in academe, they were often found in women's colleges with higher teaching loads, so-called "missionary" pay, and additional monitoring responsibilities

# A Place in Progressive Reform

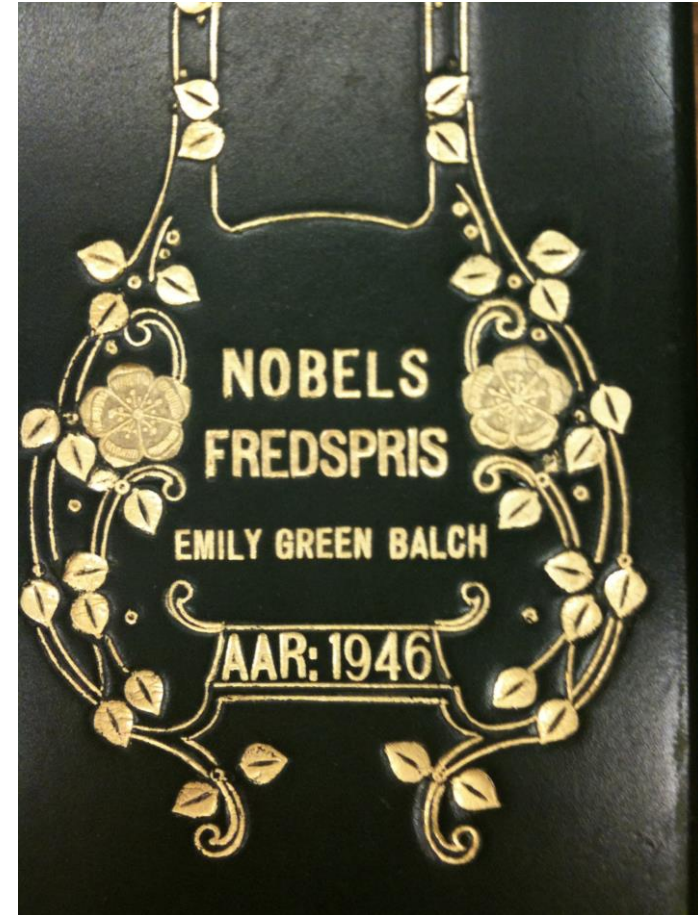
- Some moved on from economics: Katharine Bement Davis (Chicago PhD 1900 on factors affecting standard of living and wages, 4 *JPE* articles 1898 to 1900) went into administering women's correctional institutions and wrote *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-two Hundred Women* (1929, reprinted 1972)

# Emily Greene Balch

- Coman's Wellesley colleague Emily Greene Balch published a 177-page monograph ("Public Assistance of the Poor in France") in the first series of *AEA Publications* in 1893 and is noteworthy as the first female economist to win a Nobel Prize



- Balch shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 for the same antiwar activism for which she lost her professorship in econ and sociology at Wellesley in 1918, after 18 years as a full professor (a Quaker, she was a leader with Jane Addams of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) – Wellesley later made amends, which Balch accepted – but she bequeathed her papers to Swarthmore
- The Emily Greene Balch papers located at Swarthmore College contains the lovely cover containing her prize but misspelling her name



# The (Book) Trade in Words

- All the female economists mentioned on last few slides published books as well as journal articles
- When we examine the prevalence of coauthorship in the book trade in economics from 1911-1948 we see that the majority of authors, both male and female, did not coauthor their books. However, coauthoring increased over time
- About 59 percent of coauthored books written by women were coauthored with men and only 41 percent were coauthored with other women
- This contrasts sharply with patterns for men. Of books written by men, 91 percent of the time they coauthored with other men

# Marriage and Coauthorship

- There are several known examples of married couples coauthoring together such as Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Mary and Charles Beard, Gladys and Roy Blakey, Ursula and John Hicks, and Carolyn Ware and Gardiner Means
- Specifically, about 25 percent of books written by women with a male coauthor were coauthored with a close relative – typically a husband

# Stepping into the Discipline

- Between 1914 and 1937 the proportion of women among new economics PhDs in the United States ranged from a low of 9.15% in 1936 (the only year below 10%) to a high of 19.29% in 1920
- But the only year before World War II when women were at least 10% of the AEA membership was in 1888, when there were 46 women among 430 individual members (there were also 25 institutional memberships)
- 7 women among 182 AEA members in 1886 (first membership list)
- Proportion of women among AEA members fell to 2.4% in 1903 (21 out of 868), recovered to 3.4% in 1909 and 3.6% in 1914, dropped to 2.9% in 1919, reached 4.2% in 1924 and 5.5% in 1928

# The Annual Conference

- Fewer women among AEA members than among new economics PhDs – and fewer women on program at AEA meetings than among AEA members
- Before World War II, the two high points of share of women among participants in AEA annual conferences were 1890, with 2 women out of 24, and 1922, with 3 women among 37 presenters and discussants – a proportion exceeded, until 1970, only in 1930 (4 women, all discussants, out of 58 presenters and discussants), in 1955 (6 women out of 67) and in 1957 (4 women out of 49)



- At the largest AEA annual meeting before 1970, that of 1941, there was one woman among 109 presenters and discussants
- Which was one more woman than on the program of the 1940 AEA annual meeting

# Women and the AEA in Perspective

- Edith Abbott, cofounder with Sophonisba Breckenridge of the Chicago School of Civics was one of five vice-presidents of the AEA in 1918
- Economic historian Susan Myra Kingsbury (best known for her four volumes on the records of the Virginia Company of London) was one of five AEA vice-presidents in 1919
- But in 1920 the number of vice-presidents was reduced to two – the next two female VPs of AEA for Jessica Peixotto of UC Berkeley in 1928 and Vassar public finance specialist Mabel Newcomer in 1947

- Notice that Susan Myra Kingsbury of Bryn Mawr became an AEA VP the year after her January and February 1918 letters protesting that the *AER*'s list of recent US economics doctoral dissertations omitted Bryn Mawr's Department of Social Economy (see May and Dimand, *HOPE* 2019)
- That correspondence with *AER* editor Davis Rich Dewey (MIT) was followed by May 1918 letter from Dewey to AEA secretary Allyn Young suggesting four Bryn Mawr faculty members be invited to join AEA (had not been included in recent membership drive) – included Anne Bezanson, later first female president of Economic History Association and first female economist tenured at U. Penn (in Wharton School – Claudia Goldin, 2<sup>nd</sup> female president of EHA, was first woman tenured in Penn's econ dept, half century later)

- Abbott, Kingsbury and Peixotto were only women to serve on the AEA executive committee before Mabel Newcomer in 1939-40 and Eveline M. Burns of Columbia in 1945-47
- After Burns, the next woman on the AEA executive committee was Mabel Timlin of the University of Saskatchewan in 1958-60 (during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of which she was also President of the Canadian Political Science Association, which then included economics) – Canadian but US-born – author of *Keynesian Economics* (1942) – had risen from department secretary to full prof at Saskatchewan

- After Peixotto in 1928 and Newcomer in 1947, the next women to serve as vice-presidents of the AEA were Barbara Bergmann (U. of Maryland) in 1976 and Anne Krueger (Stanford) in 1977
- In first 56 years after number of AEA vice-presidents was reduced from 5 to 2, Peixotto and Newcomer were the only women chosen as VP

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- Mabel Newcomer, AEA executive committee member 1939-40 and VP 1947 – member of US delegation at Bretton Woods
  - According to Vassar College website, “a plan to make her president [of the AEA] ended when she went on a mission to Germany” – in 1950 Newcomer served on a Technical Assistance Mission on German Refugees



- Charles Kindleberger recalled “when I served one year on the nominations committee of the American Economic Association (AEA), the chairman of the Committee mentioned in opening the meeting that the Association had never elected as president a woman, a Southerner or a Canadian”
- And so, Harold Innis of the University of Toronto became AEA president-elect in AEA in 1952 (although he died before taking office as president)

# CSWEP Comparisons

- CSWEP's first survey of the "Chairman's Group" – the 43 schools that produced over 2/3 of economics PhDs in the United States, found that women were only 6% of the 1,194 faculty in those economics departments
- Women were only 12% of the economics graduate students in those programs (CSWEP 1974)
- 2020 CSWEP Report found that women were 25% of faculty in US economics departments with doctoral programs and 34.7% of the graduate students – still considerably lower than in the humanities or in other social sciences



# The Gender Problem in Economics

- Several factors depressed the participation of women scholars in the early years
- Factors included the lack of access to graduate programs in elite universities and lack of access to faculty positions in state universities
- Many universities instituted “marriage bars” preventing married women from being hired or if already employed, called for their firing once their marriage was discovered.
- Women such as Carolyn Ware (who did not change her name upon marrying Gardner Means) was not allowed to fulfill her summer teaching contract at the University of Wyoming when it was discovered that she was married. When national attention was brought to the incident, the university reported that the rule was instituted in order to “spread employment.” Ware, not surprisingly, pointed out that the university was an educational institution and “not a work-relief organization.”

# Anti-nepotism Policies

- In post-World War II US academia, when "marriage bars" went out of style, anti-nepotism policies stepped in limiting access for women whose husbands were also academics
- Nepotism laws passed by states, nepotism rules instituted by universities, acted against academic employment of women – specially during job scarcity of Great Depression, men viewed as breadwinners – consider careers of such distinguished scholars as Nancy Dorfman or Nancy Ruggles
- GI Bill of Rights supported training and employment of veterans, who were mostly male

# Today

- Also, differential burden of childcare: COVID pandemic reduced share of economics working papers by women in high-ranked working paper series from 20% to 12%, according to *The Economist* (already considerably lower than humanities or other social sciences)
- But despite these obstacles, women active in economics in US in pre-CSWEP eras – productive scholars, measured by books, articles, PhDs
- But pre-1970 always larger share of women in economics than in AEA membership, larger share in AEA membership than in AEA conferences, larger share in AEA conferences than in AEA governance