



American Association of University Women

Tomah WI Branch – Organized in 1972

## the **Twig** branch newsletter – March 11, 2021

### Our Next Meeting

When            Monday, Mar 22, 2021      6:30 pm – 8 pm

Where           [meet.google.com/ngd-ppny-nfu](https://meet.google.com/ngd-ppny-nfu)

Joining         [Join with Google Meet](#)  
info



### Hello AAUW of Tomah Members!

The air is so fresh and the temperatures feel like such a reprieve from February! Do you realize we have made it about one year through a Pandemic now? We should all pat ourselves on the back for making it through thus far - with some real losses of people we love perhaps the most sobering aspects of this time. Additionally, we all have a story and many unanticipated moments through this year of many losses including social gatherings, shared celebration and shared grief. Loss of business, income, employment, security and mental health experienced as well. Our work to improve equity, opportunity and educational development is more poignant than ever.

As we celebrate Women's History Month, let's not forget Women's History includes the majority of us! Our stories, lessons learned, and journeys are relevant and meaningful. Our impacts sometimes like tiny ripples in a pond that extend beyond our own time and place. Our Program Planning committee came to the conclusion that this year's Women's History Month should focus on better understanding, recognizing and honoring our individual member stories!

We will celebrate **ALL** of our members this year starting by asking each of you to contemplate putting together a short, "Reflection of My Life." Something you owe yourself at the very least.

We want to make a **Celebrating Women Project commemorative booklet**. We would eventually like to share highlights at our meetings or in the **Twig** on an ongoing basis. We hope you agree!

### To start you thinking, here are some questions:

- [Growing up what were your aspirations or most influential moments?](#)
- [How did you choose education on your journey, who or what influenced you?](#)
- [What direction did your career path take you?](#)
- [What significant personal or other challenges did you face on your journey? How did you handle it? What did you learn?](#)

- Any surprises on your journey?
- What wisdom would you share for others beginning or struggling through their journey?

Our Member Celebration kick-off will begin at our March Meeting where we will share a beautiful example of story sharing, provided by a busy UWRP Professor who took time to share her personal journey in a way that should inspire us all! We hope you can join us!

In the meantime, please look at the **April 23-24 AAUW State Convention** and register for any and all sessions you would like to join! <https://aauwstateconvention.com/aauw-web-instructions/>

## Women's History Month

— news article written by Julia Palmer

March is National Women's History Month. This year, 2021, marks the 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of this important celebration. National Women's History Month reminds the nation of the need to recognize the accomplishments and sacrifices of women. It is the story of how women built communities, inspired and nurtured dreams, and how they continue to do so. Our history is our strength. To address the absence of information about women in America, the National Women's History Project led a movement to have Congress designate a celebration to recognize women's historic achievements. The goal was to ensure that our children's education would include information about the innumerable ways women have changed America. In 1980, President Carter issued the first Presidential Proclamation calling on the American people to remember the contributions of women. In 1987, Congress and the President declared March as Women's History Month.

The theme for Women's History Month this year recognizes the tenacious women of the suffrage movement, **"Valiant Women of the Vote: Refusing to Be Silenced"**. Their determination resulted in the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to our constitution in 1920. The 19<sup>th</sup> amendment mandates "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex." Our state – Wisconsin – was the first to ratify this amendment.

The American Association of University Women (AAUW), Tomah Branch, has been proud to recognize outstanding women of our community at the Mary E. Wedin Women's History Month Celebration. Sharing the stories of women's success, talent and accomplishments expands the sense of what is possible for girls and women. Women's history becomes a story of inspiration and hope. It is a story of courage and tenacity, a story of promise, possibility and purpose.

This year we remember especially Mary E. Wedin (1926-2004). Mary was a founding member of the American Association of University Women – Tomah Branch in 1972 and was passionate in promoting Women's History Month. Mary was an educator, organizer and an exceptional leader. She lived to learn. She not only loved facts, she loved to search for the meaning behind those facts. Most of all, she lived to share and teach. Beside her membership in AAUW, she was a member of the Home Community Education Association, Homemakers clubs in Monroe County and the Methodist Church. She served on the CAP board, Monroe County Women's Advisory Group, Women's History Month Committee, the Domestic Violence Task Force, and the Monroe County Board of Supervisors. Mary became a mentor for every individual with whom she worked and every group she joined. Her expertise gave Monroe County the opportunity to become a pilot county for the State Expanded Food and Nutrition Program. As Monroe County Home Economist, she taught area women about the Wisconsin Marital Property law, feminine finances, balancing work and family, consumer protection laws, networking and women's health issues. She shared information on nutrition, edible wild plants, gardening, food preservation and safety. She encouraged personal conservation practices, recycling and leadership development. She shared all that was new and important for women, families and the

community to know. She worked with young families, seniors, 4-H members and high school students. Mary's estate funds an annual scholarship through the Methodist Church.

When the Domestic Violence Law was passed, she not only taught women about the law but also arranged a program for county law enforcement and judges to learn the implications of the law.

Mary was a role model for what she taught. She recycled everything, drove an economical automobile, practiced conservation and preservation, participated in government and political action, thrived on life-long learning, and was always generous with encouragement, praise, and appreciation. Mary left our entire Monroe County population better because she was here. We remember Mary Wedin with love and pride.

The American Association of University Women salutes the countless women throughout our community and our country who contribute to its growth and history. We find these women in The Arts; Education, Health and Science; Business; Human Relations/Faith in action; and Communications. We applaud the women in Law and Government, Nonprofit management, and volunteerism. And, most importantly, we ask that you join with AAUW members to reflect on and appreciate the women in our daily lives who champion every aspect of life as it effects each one of us.

**Our District 4 Spring Meeting will be held on March 30 6:30 to 7:30.** All members are welcome to attend. Please consider volunteering to be part of one of the roles available. That would be District Coordinator, Nominating Committee representative / alternate, or Minutes Reader/ Alternate. Contact Deb Thiel for more details.

**AAUW District 4 Spring Meeting** (in lieu of Convention)

Tuesday, Mar 30 • 6:30 – 7:30 PM

Google Meet joining info

Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/bux-inba-pcs>

**Please take note:**

## **PROPOSED CHANGES TO AAUW NATIONAL BYLAWS**

*From Kleo Baruth Kritz, District 1 Coordinator*

Recently I attended the Midwestern Regional Zoom Meeting on January 30 that included 96 participants from 11 states. We were told by Kimberly Churches, AAUW National CEO, about the proposed National Bylaw changes to eliminate the requirement for a degree for AAUW membership. Churches explained our name is now officially the AAUW because so many changes have occurred over the years. American is misleading because we do have international members and have worked internationally for over 100 years. Women is also not correct because men were eligible to join beginning in 1987. Likewise, university is no longer true because individuals with associate degrees can be members.

This is the proposed change:

***...individual who supports the AAUW mission and pays annual AAUW dues shall be eligible to be an individual member with all rights and responsibilities of AAUW membership.***

**This is the rationale listed on the National website:**

“AAUW’s mission is to advance gender equity, yet the requirement for membership explicitly denies access to membership to those without college degrees. AAUW does not promote equity for all women and girls if the organization maintains exclusionary membership requirements. The membership requirement is not fair, is not right, and is not equity. This is simply the right thing to do.”

This is the second part of the change concerning dues because college students would now be eligible for full membership if the degree requirement is eliminated:

***Annual dues may be set at lower amounts, or may be waived entirely, for certain Individual Members based on objective criteria including but not limited to the Individual Member’s status as a student and the Individual Member’s current enrollment at an institution that is a College/University Member.***

Voting will take place from April 7-May 17 online so just tap below:

<https://www.aauw.org/resources/member/governance-tools/national-election/2021-comment-bylaws/> (This link takes you directly to the bylaws.)

“The AAUW bylaws require that the affirmative (yes) vote of two-thirds of the votes cast are required to amend the bylaws.”

## **OPEN MEMBERSHIP FAQ’S (Sampling of questions from branch members across the US)**

### **1. AAUW has been this way for a long time. Why do we need to change now?**

- AAUW has adapted itself to changing times before in order to continue to be relevant.
- Our continued relevance will be enhanced by eliminating barriers that limit who can participate in our mission of advancing equity for women and girls.
- Many corporate and foundation funders have clearly told us they aren’t willing or able based on their own criteria to fund organizations they believe have directly or indirectly discriminatory requirements or create barriers to participation in the work of the organization. Corporate and foundation funding is essential for national nonprofits these days. AAUW’s membership dues support only a small percentage of our work.
- As part of the country’s overall reckoning with systemic racism and inequality, much of which disproportionately affects women, it is time to recognize that our self-imposed barriers to participation are actually harmful, even if these barriers once may have been understood to serve as a well-intentioned incentive to specific achievement.

### **2.. Won’t dropping the degree requirement end what is unique about our organization?**

- The uniqueness of AAUW is its breadth of programming, research, policy and advocacy, fellowships & grants, and grassroots membership. Unfortunately, AAUW is also unique in its exclusionary membership requirement, which is particularly unfortunate for an organization advocating for equity
- Having a degree does not make someone “like-minded” —We are like-minded in our support for advancing equity for women and girls.
- Having a degree does not make someone a better advocate for women or a better symbol of womanpower. Think Eleanor Roosevelt, Lilly Ledbetter, Malala, Greta Thunburg.

### **3. Don't we need to honor the legacy of our founding mothers by retaining the degree requirement?**

- It's been 140 years since our founding back in an era when only a very few women were able to go to college or find meaningful employment after graduation. Today, women outpace men in earning degrees at all levels. Women also make up (pre-COVID) close to ½ of the total workforce in the U.S. But economic disparities and discrimination against women persist widely, despite our levels of education and participation in the workforce.
- AAUW can and should take pride in its past and present success in helping women attain higher education. The fully endowed Fellowships and Grants Fund will allow AAUW to be a leader in this area in perpetuity. Education is important and does make a difference. But it alone doesn't guarantee equal treatment or opportunities for women, something our founders cared about deeply. The battle to be fought is not just about education, but about equal treatment.

### **4. If the degree requirement is dropped, will branch membership increase?**

- Membership levels in associations and other organizations are affected by many things. But, certainly our degree requirement is a barrier to joining for many women, and increasingly it is seen as elitist and discriminatory.
- A rush of younger members to join branches is unlikely due to the age of most of our current branch members. However, more women in older age ranges may be interested in joining once the barrier is removed. Fifty plus years ago, many women, particularly non White women, did not have access to higher education. We all undoubtedly have friends in this category--women who are "just as smart," just as interested in equality for women" not to mention "just as much fun" who can't be members because of the current degree requirement. Many of us have been embarrassed by encouraging friends to join, only to find out they aren't eligible because they don't have a degree.
- Our degree requirement has shut out women with diverse backgrounds and perspectives – who may inject new energy into the mission. Younger women, in particular, view the fact that we have a barrier to entry that disproportionately affects women of color and women of lower economic status as contrary to our mission.

### **5. Since college education is more accessible now, why do we need to worry about dropping the requirement?**

- Getting a degree was a badge of honor for many of us, building our confidence and honing our intellectual skills, and also helping to prepare us for work outside the home. For some it was also a badge of honor that meant we could join AAUW, an organization that helped keep us intellectually stimulated while we were still at home raising children. But, degrees are not the "badge of honor" they once were, and skyrocketing educational costs, childcare, elder care, transportation, working multiple jobs and language barriers are significant issues for women today that make it hard for women to get a degree. Also remember that as it stands today, many women have gotten their degree only to be burdened by two-thirds of the national college debt. Cost is a barrier many of us didn't have "back then."
- Today, there are more careers open to women- firefighters, police, pilots, entrepreneurs, artists, politicians, manufacturers, retail managers, etc. that don't require a degree. Education can come in many forms, including career technical education, on-the-job training. Women without degrees can certainly be just as passionate about advancing equity for women and girls as women with degrees.

### **6. Won't we have to change our name if we drop the degree requirement?**

- First of all, we've had a variety of names during our 180-year history.
- Today, AAUW is well-respected and high profile, particularly in its advocacy and research. We would not want to lose this position of recognition. Many other organizations use only initials and didn't formally change their names when one of the original words in the name became out of favor or inappropriate. Think NAACP or YWCA. Changing our name is not the issue to focus on. Opening our membership to a broader group that will work in support of the mission is the issue.
- Also, the full name has not been applicable for a while. "American" – we have worked internationally for over 100 years. "Association" – members dues now only comprise 15-20% of revenues. "University" – in 2005, membership was extended to people with associate degrees. "W" – in 1987, membership was open to men.

## Have a Happy St. Patrick's Day!



### American Legion Fish Fry

Rita from the American Legion reached out to Megan Divyak regarding our membership volunteering at the Legion's Fish Fry event on Friday, April 16th.

Megan did get some insight from Rita on how the first Fish Fry went last Friday (March 5) since they offered both dine-in and carryout options. It sounds like it all went very well! Rita said they had about 4 volunteers. Because inside seating was limited, they didn't need much help. But, they are planning to offer more inside seating at their next Fish Fry. She thinks if we get 5 of us to help, that should be fine. During our last AAUW meeting, there were about 4 of us that expressed interest in helping out. Megan can provide more details at our next meeting. What do you think? Can we commit to April 16<sup>th</sup>?

If you have newsletter items, please send them to Bonnie Peterson, AAUW Secretary, at [wordemp@centurylink.net](mailto:wordemp@centurylink.net) or 12808 County Hwy. PP, Tomah, WI 54660. Phone: 608-372-7501