

**PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION
ON THE CELEBRATION OF WOMEN IN AMERICAN HISTORY**

September 20, 1999

The sixth meeting of the President's Commission on the Celebration of Women in American History was held at 9:00 A.M. on September 8, 1999 at the Portland Marriott Downtown in Portland, Oregon.

In accordance with Public Law 92-463 as amended, this meeting was open to the public and members of the public were present.

Note: On September 7, 1999, the Co-Chairs of the Commission addressed the General Federation of Women's Clubs annual meeting at the Portland Marriott Downtown.

Commission Members Present

Ann Lewis, Co-Chair
Beth Newburger, Co-Chair and Federal Representative
LaDonna Harris
Ellen Ochoa
Irene Wurtzel

In addition to members of the public in attendance, Martha Davis from the General Services Administration and Aprill Springfield from the White House staffed the meeting.

Call to Order

Beth Newburger, Commission Co-Chair, called the meeting to order, and called on Ann Lewis.

Opening Remarks

Ann Lewis: Before discussing the opportunities we will have to celebrate women's history in the year 2000, I want to start by talking about a very recent event.

We look for ways to take the history of American women and make it part of our everyday lives, and Ellen managed to do that in a very spectacular way. Ellen Ochoa has definitely fit in the most travel miles this summer during her flight aboard the space shuttle.

Ellen Ochoa introduced herself as an astronaut who was on the space shuttle for May and June of this year. She had an opportunity to fly a few items with her, and it was her privilege to fly a pen from the President's Commission and a certificate. Ms. Ochoa presented both of these items back to the Commission Members.

Ms. Ochoa shared a photograph taken of her and the two women astronauts aboard her mission holding an early suffrage banner from the National Women's party. Ms. Ochoa planned to return the suffrage banner to the National Women's Party at a ceremony the following week to be held at the Sewall-Belmont House in Washington, D.C. Ms. Ochoa also presented the Commission with a photo collage from the mission.

Agenda for 2000

Ann Lewis:

Last year in our report we said we thought our commission was spanning the arc of women's history, because we held our first meeting at the courthouse where Susan B. Anthony was convicted because she cast a ballot in the Presidential election of 1872, and then in Washington, DC we met at the State Department where Madeleine Albright was sworn in as Secretary of State, and thought that was truly representative of the distance we had come. But now, I think we have to go back again – you know we began in Seneca Falls and now have traveled in out of space. Our Commission is truly spanning time – we have gone from picketing the White House with that banner to having 3 women display it on a shuttle flight. I don't know which is more fun, to make history or celebrate history, but I think we are very fortunate because we can do both. So thank you, Ellen.

I want to talk about the work of the Commission in recent months. One of the recommendations in our report was to sponsor community celebrations, and journey into local communities to tell the story. One way that the Commission has been successful in doing this is through a partnership with the General Federation of Women's Clubs. The reason Beth and I came to Portland was to speak to the GFWC Board Meeting. The best way to get the story of women's history out is to go into local communities and tell the stories of their acts of heroism and leadership and achievement. Different clubs are looking at different ways they can celebrate women's history. We have already started seeing results. For example, one of the clubs located in Asheville, North Carolina recently held a ceremony placing a women's history marker celebrating the first woman elected to the state legislature in North Carolina. South Dakota women's clubs began collecting pioneer women's history, and now have collected over 6,000 stories of women pioneers. We are working with the South Dakota club to call attention to the richness of this history and to their archives of stories.

Another opportunity for us to bring women's history to our communities is by spreading the word of the Ken Burns' two-part series, *Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* that will be shown on November 7th and 8th. We should all find ways to build on this great opportunity. People are beginning to pay attention to women's history, and now we need to keep the momentum going.

There's got to be something special about Women's History Month in March 2000 – this is a once in a millennium opportunity. The Feminist Majority Foundation is planning a feminist expo for the end of March that will attract thousands of participants. They are very interested in having a segment during the expo on women's history. We will follow up with them.

In June 2000 we have another opportunity at the five-year anniversary of the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women that was held in Beijing, China. At this conference Hillary Rodham Clinton proclaimed that, "Women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights." We have heard from and talked to so many women since Beijing who have really come to understand their ability to come together and work to advance the lives of women and girls.

Now, we are preparing for the fifth year review of this conference that will be held in New York from June 5-9th, 2000. The Women 2000: Beijing Plus Five Special Session of the General Assembly will meet to discuss the advances that have been made for women and girls since Beijing.

What does this mean for us in terms of celebrating how women's lives have changed? Our hope, and I'm heading a working group in the US Government on how we should participate, is that we will produce a visionary statement that talks about the changes in the lives of women and girls in this past century. And, as a result of the changes, talks about how women now participate more fully in the lives of our families, our communities and our nations. So we will talk a little about the changes, and talk also about how we can work together at the community level. There really is a grassroots international network as women share ideas from everything from the importance of educating women, to ending violence, to electing and choosing women as leaders. Our hope is that this visionary statement will take us into the first year of the twenty-first century, and guide us on how we can keep going from there.

We should regard Women 2000 as we do a bill signing. At the White House we hold bill signings to lift and elevate initiatives that are important to our country. We get everyone to sign on psychologically as well as legally. We should regard the Women 2000 Special Session as a big international bill signing that elevates issues important to women and girls.

We are looking at ways to allow as many as possible to participate by using new technology. In five years the ability of technology to really change our lives is evident – we now have the ability for women to talk to one another on the web.

Finally, another opportunity we have to celebrate women's history will occur on August 26, 2000, the eightieth anniversary of the Women's Suffrage movement. We know that women won the vote in Oregon in 1912, and the rest of the country caught up in 1920. The West led the way. We have an opportunity to hold a significant celebration on this date.

Some of these events this year offer us a great opportunity to take the recommendations we made in our first report to the President, make them real and help them come alive. Throughout the coming year we will also be looking for more opportunities to build partnerships with local communities to help us get the stories out.

Eleanor Roosevelt Event

Beth Newburger:

Another event that the Commission has been asked to be involved with will occur in early January. On January 21-22nd, PBS is screening a new documentary on the life of Eleanor Roosevelt, and there will be some activities planned around this event. The producers are very anxious for the Commission to take an active part in the launch of this film.

I want to raise this as an issue for the Commission to discuss. If we choose to hold our next meeting in Washington, DC around the Eleanor Roosevelt event, we should come up with some dates that make sense for us. The producers will work around the commission's schedule.

Ann Lewis suggested that:

- The National Archives should be invited to play a role in this event since they are working on a project involving the Eleanor Roosevelt papers.
- Allida Black, who has authored several books on Eleanor Roosevelt, be involved with this event.

The Commission Members present agreed that the Commission should participate in the documentary release, and **Beth Newburger** agreed to go to the producers to suggest an event around the week of January 10, 2000. **Ellen Ochoa** pointed out that any day that week other than January 10th would be acceptable.

Irene Wurtzel suggested that we should design an event that includes young women. **Molly MacGregor**, President of the National Women's History Project, said that to capture the richness of who Eleanor Roosevelt was, we should discuss her friends, such as Mary McLeod Bethune. This would also be an opportunity to elevate and highlight the Eleanor Roosevelt scholarships. An **audience member** suggested that this could be an opportunity to pull on the stories of Eleanor Roosevelt in individual communities and remember her in communities across the United States. In every town across the country, there is someone who knew Eleanor Roosevelt.

Molly MacGregor commented that when she gave speeches in libraries across the country on Roosevelt, she never delivered a presentation without at least three people coming up and telling her a personal story about Mrs. Roosevelt. The stories they shared with her were so different than the stories that were told in the press. Ms. MacGregor suggested that we should recommend that the Discovery Channel link with websites and allow people to tell their stories, so it becomes more interactive.

Sally Kranz, from the General Federation of Women's Clubs, mentioned that Eleanor Roosevelt was a GFWC member.

Beth Newburger promised to have a conversation with the producers and get back to everyone with a date. The next meeting will then be held in early January in conjunction with the Eleanor Roosevelt celebration.

Continuation of the Commission

Beth Newburger:

Another item on our agenda is the continuation of the Commission. The President's Commission has been extended through December, 2000.

As a Commission our first set of priorities was to submit a report to the President on how we should celebrate women's history and continue celebrating women in our communities. We presented this report to the President on March 15, 1999.

As a result of the work we have done, there was a sense that we should extend our commission, which is very unusual for a Presidential Commission. Our Commission was extended through the year 2000 for the express purpose of continuing the recommendations and making them come alive. Continuation will give us an opportunity to make sure that we are carrying out our own promises in the report.

Through our continued participation with the General Federation of Women's Clubs regional clubs, I feel very comfortable that the Commission has started carrying out this report.

There are three major areas of concern, beginning with the traveling exhibit. We have an exhibit for this, but no funder. Our hope is that the Sara Lee Foundation will come through with the funding; but, if not, Bobbie Green of Save America's Treasures is looking into other options. Until the funding comes through, the Commission may not be able to do more in this area.

Ann Lewis commented that we should try to finish up the Commission around the 80th anniversary of suffrage, which will be on August 26, 2000 (the last Saturday of the month).

Meeting Schedule for 2000

Beth Newburger stated that the Commission will plan meeting four times in 2000:

1. On January 10th, around the Eleanor Roosevelt event.
2. In March, during Women's History Month.
3. From June 5-9th, to coincide with the Women 2000 UN Special Session of the General Assembly.
4. On August 26th, to celebrate the 80th anniversary of suffrage.

An Ongoing Record

Irene Wurtzel believes that as we wind up the Commission, there should be an ongoing record of what projects have been started and continued. The Commission should develop some way of keeping information going and staying abreast of what is happening.

Ellen Ochoa remarked that one of the Commission's recommendations of how to keep the information going is to build a website.

Beth Newburger:

Our website is lodged at the General Services Administration. I can ask them to include this website support indefinitely. In the coming weeks a registration form will be available on our website for individuals and local groups to register their women's history projects as a public record. Once they register intent and completion, as an incentive they will receive a certificate from the commission upon completion.

Ann Lewis introduced June Tremain, a Career Development Specialist at the Oregon Department of Education.

Presentation by **June Tremain:**

I hold a doctorate in education, yet the only Women's History training I received was through the National Women's History Project (NWHP). I was fortunate to attend their weeklong teacher training that forever changed my personal and professional life. Even though I had worked in educational equity for nearly twenty years, I found my knowledge of American Women's History was quite lacking. Also, I was surprised to learn that there is no shortage of women's history. It is available through books, diaries and personal letters, even though those resources are often not included in most of our educational programs.

If we don't include "Women's History," we are obviously leaving out 50% of our history. History is more than the famous national leaders, soldiers, dates and events generally taught in our history and social studies classes. In addition to asking what the famous women were doing, we need to learn what most of the "average" women were doing? What was daily life like? What were the mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of the "famous" men doing? History is multicultural. Any historical event is experienced from different cultural viewpoints. How does one group's actions affect another group? We and our children deserve to know "the whole story."

Knowing the stories of women who achieved in spite of obstacles and difficulties, helps me face days of my own life with strength and hope. I was fortunate enough to meet and hear Rosa Parks some years ago. While it is an impressive story to think that this woman just had enough one day and decided to not move from her seat, how much more powerful the true story of Rosa Parks, an experienced, informed, civil rights activist who knew exactly the impact of her actions that day. Truth is much more powerful than fiction.

As a classroom teacher newly trained by the NWHP, I went back to my school quite excited about teaching American Women's History. I taught women's history in my own classroom and volunteered to produce a school-wide Women's History Program. A co-worker, sincere but misinformed, told me, "If there had been any 'women's history' it would be in our textbooks." There was no malice in that comment, but clearly a lack of information. One of my first graders

asked if it would be OK for him to draw a picture of Amelia Earhart. Could he participate in Women's History activities?

Using materials from the NWHP, we produced a school-wide American Women's History Celebration. Women of achievement were studied in all fields, including math, science and technology. Several parents of first graders told me they were learning a lot about these famous American women from their children.

As an educator, I strive to help teachers create inclusive classrooms where every child feels included, worthwhile and able to learn and succeed. Research has shown that the students who receive the least teacher time and attention are the bright females. They are usually well behaved and we expect them to be on task. Teaching inclusive, multicultural American Women's History will empower all of our students, males and females. Learning about strong women will enable our girls to have role models and to know they can become anything they want and are capable of being.

As a career education specialist, I believe it is extremely important that our young people have role models in life, literature and history representing all kinds of people doing all kinds of work. Teaching inclusive American Women's History to all of our children would be one effective method toward achieving that educational goal.

I would like to see every new teacher trained in American Women's History. Although today's young teachers should have received more inclusive multicultural history education, I believe most still are greatly lacking in content and teaching methods. New teachers should receive NWHP training and learn how to access their materials. All new teachers should be trained to integrate women's history in their content area and for their grade level. In-services for experienced teachers will need to continue, but new teachers should be prepared to enter classrooms able to teach "American history."

Ann Lewis thanked Ms. Tremain and introduced the next speaker, Susan Butruille. Susan is an Executive Consultant, commentator, and author of the *Women's Voices* series of books.

Presentation by **Susan Butruille**:

I have worked at celebrating women's history for many years, as a writer, performer, student, teacher, organizer, and advocate. I am the author of the *Women's Voices* series of books on women in the Old West, plus numerous articles and columns on women's history.

I served as Executive Consultant and on-air commentator for the 1999 Oregon Public Broadcasting documentary "Triumph and Tragedy: Women's Voices from the Oregon Trail." I also perform a dramatic interpretation, "Marie Pantalou: The Lady Wore Pants!," based on a French-speaking character from my most recent book.

In more than twenty years of effort to make women's history visible, I often think of how our Oregon heroine Abigail Scott Duniway though it would take perhaps four years to win the vote for women in Oregon. It took forty-two years.

Much has been done to honor women's history in the United States. Witness the superb work of the National Women's History Project in dispensing information and materials for the celebration of women's history. Yet when I ask audiences how many people know of Elizabeth Cady Stanton or, in Oregon, Abigail Scott Duniway, few raise their hands.

And so, to build a national celebration for Women's History Month, the task before us is to build on what we have and what has been done, and make it visible, everywhere – in the streets and on television, radio, movies, music, newspapers, magazines, cyberspace.

I commend and thank President Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton for initiating and establishing the Commission, and members of the Commission for the work and recommendations dedicated to celebrating women in American history. One omission that I noticed was special recognition for the Women's Rights National Historical Park – a fine product of local, state, and national cooperation to preserve the birthplace of the US women's rights movement.

Many of the Commission's recommendations, I believe, are especially pertinent to celebrating Women's History Month. Portland and Oregon have accomplished many of those activities, including a women's history walk and localized exhibits, conferences, a youth poster contest, a suffrage parade, and an annual International Women's Day Celebration.

I envision simultaneous Women's History 2000 celebrations in Washington, DC and across the country, including costumed parades, exhibitions, celebrations and initiatives on women's history sites, and youth poster and essay contests. Women's History Cultural Festivals would bring together women's history performers, artists, authors, playwrights, and filmmakers. Our numbers are growing!

Additional points and activities to consider and emphasize:

- It is critical to coordinate the national celebration with community celebrations.
- Designate the National Women's History Project as the national center for women's history and Women's History Month.
- Encourage Readers Theatre. Readers Theatre is an excellent way to involve communities in exploring and performing local history.
- Facilitate distribution of community resource guides with two key parts: speakers and other resources available for Women's History Month, and a calendar of Women's History Month activities.
- Focus on women's history. If contemporary issues are discussed, historical background of those issues is essential.
- From the beginning, draw on the richness of every community's diversity.

On the national level, these items are critical:

- Funding. Few people have time to do the work and try to secure funding. Burnout is a very real problem. Consider funneling some funding through Women's Commissions.
- Promotion on a national level. Radio and television spots and coordinated media efforts would set the stage and mood for community celebrations. It is hard to get media locally if it doesn't seem to be part of a big national story.

Thank you for coming to Portland. It is an honor to be asked to participate in this initiative, for I believe that knowing and learning from women's history is the key to the peaceful and equitable future we all envision for women and children and men everywhere in the next millennium.

Ann Lewis thanked Susan Butruille for her presentation, and introduced Mary Rose.

Mary Rose

Ms. Rose shared a display with the Commission Members from an event they held in 1988 to celebrate August 26th and Susan B. Anthony's birthday. They "named buildings" after famous women.

Many sites in Portland have been renamed for eminent women. Ms. Rose said that the women have really done so much, that it overwhelms her to think of the amount of work women have done and have not been given credit for. On the one hand it is so exhilarating to be involved in women's history, and on the other hand to realize that there is so much that isn't talked about.

Ms. Rose's performed an original song.

Ann Lewis thanked Mary Rose for one of the most creative presentations, and introduced Molly Murphy MacGregor, Executive Director of the National Women's History Project.

Following is a transcript of the remarks by **Molly Murphy MacGregor**:

In April, the National Women's History Project launched the *Remembering Project*, a campaign asking people to send stories about women in the Twentieth Century who impacted them. Ultimately, we hope to compile a massive archives of women in the Twentieth Century that honors real women and makes history come alive.

Recommendation to the President's Commission on Celebrating American Women's History in March, 2000

In celebrating March 2000, I am recommending a **Salute to Women of the 20th Century**. This event would be held in early March at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC as a nationally televised broadcast. To ensure broad based public appeal, it should be hosted by celebrities like Rosie O'Donnell and Oprah Winfrey.

Modeled on the program that the Kennedy Center presents every December to honor achievements in the Arts, this program would honor the scope of achievement and progress in 20th Century women's lives. The program focus would be the extraordinary range of women's accomplishments throughout the century. Individuals and organizations who created and pioneered these changes would also be part of the program.

A Salute to Women of the 21st Century

Retrospective media presentations would be used to give context and background to each category of achievement. Musical and dance segments would celebrate the achievement. These segments would include an array of music and dance forms that illustrate the expression of art from the perspective of several different generations.

Rather than singling out specific women, the salute should be to the achievements of women's progress through the Century. Select five or six categories to best represent this progress which might include Politics, Business, Sports, Media, Medicine, Art and Literature, etc. For example: *Women in Sports* – clips from Olympic, World Cup, WNBA as well as classic footage and images from the beginning and throughout the Century. Many women from the world of Sports could be on stage or in the audience to show the extraordinary variety and excellence of this achievement. This same format could be replicated for all the categories.

Another component of the program would be Remembering Women of the 20th Century with a special focus on the "common" woman. Celebrities like Dan Rather, Cokie Roberts, Cynthia Cooper who have written about the so-called "common" women might talk about the women they have remembered. Connected to this element of the program needs to be an interactive online component. The National Women's History Project will make their *Remembering Project* website available for all who want to participate and begin writing the stories of 20th Century women to be remembered.

The National Women's History Project's staff is available to assist the Commission in helping to make this event happen.

Molly MacGregor added that the NWHP plans to hold an all-day seminar in Washington, DC on March 8, 2000, followed by an evening gala. March 10th would be the ideal day for holding *A Salute to Women of the 21st Century*.

Ms. MacGregor distributed NWHP pens displaying the poster design for 2000.

Beth Newburger told the Commission that Molly MacGregor's huge vision 21 years ago was largely responsible for Women's History Month.

Ann Lewis asked Ms. MacGregor if she would comment on the one-day seminar NWHP is planning for March 8th, and to discuss whether there is an opportunity for the Commission to be involved.

Molly MacGregor responded that the March 8th seminar is still in the planning stages, but that she envisions an event combining historians with hands-on activities.

Beth Newburger asked if the Commission helped to pull off the gala, would NWHP link their celebration to it?

Molly MacGregor assured the Commission that the NWHP would absolutely link their celebration to the gala, and would be available to assist in making this event a reality.

An **audience member** suggested holding an event on the West Coast, since festivities are already planned for Washington, DC and New York.

Ann Lewis pointed out that telecasting the event would be very important, as it would allow a wide audience to share in the experience.

Ann Lewis reconvened the meeting after a short break, and began with one more goal the Commission agreed to move forward on. The Commission agreed this past March after the Millennium Evening to encourage further discussion about women's history through state humanities councils.

Beth Newburger reported that she recently met with the National Endowment of Humanities and their leadership. The Commission would like for them to have an official celebration through the state humanities councils that follows the same format as the Washington discussion. NEH has agreed to work with the Commission to set up the celebrations in areas where they have councils that are active. Ms. Newburger is going to suggest that they do this on the web. Suggested topic include growth of citizenship, changes to women's lives during this century and changes to women's lives internationally. The Commission should send NEH suggestions or recommendations around any of these three areas.

Molly MacGregor suggested that the National Women's History project has an extensive list of bibliographic resources now available on the web.

A member of the audience commented that there should be a discussion about backlash. Every time women begin to make a difference they are pushed back. Another member of the audience stressed that it was important to include women as citizens, and the immigrant experience.

Ann Lewis said that when talking about citizenship, the immigrant and non-citizen experience can be included. There could also be a discussion about what it means to deny citizenship.

Ms. Lewis opened the floor to other ideas for March.

Ellen Ochoa:

Any event we do should be an ongoing effort of our recommendations, and we should use the media to highlight our recommendations.

LaDonna Harris:

The Commission needs a place to house our history from this Commission. I have been on Presidential Commissions where the work of the Commission is lost in boxes somewhere, and not incorporated. This is important history, and you are not able to find it anywhere else.

Beth Newburger:

Martha Davis has kept a log of the material that has arrived.

Martha Davis:

The law stipulates that I have to return the material to the White House when the Commission is completed.

Ann Lewis:

There is an archiving process. Legally the material produced by the White House goes to the archives. Aprill will follow-up on where the archived material will go. A copy of everything will be available through the Presidential Library. We will find out legally if we can make a copy of what has been done so the information can also go to another source. The commission should work with someone who can make the material technologically available.

LaDonna Harris:

The Commission needs to find some way of documenting the people who have participated in these presentations.

Irene Wurtzel:

The Commission's report to the President needs to be made available on our website.

Ann Lewis:

We will definitely make sure that the report is available on the website.

Beth Newburger:

The How to Guide will be added to the website as well.

Irene Wurtzel:

The Commission shouldn't finish our work quietly. We need to firmly implant this work in our history.

Beth Newburger:

For the August 26th celebration, there needs to be a focus on community activities.

Irene Wurtzel:

The Commission needs to think about visuals – we need to have a lot of photographs and pictures of what is happening in communities. The Commission also needs to document the music that has been presented to us. We should have a record of such powerful reminders.

Molly MacGregor:

We are not good at documenting our own history. It is difficult to locate images of girls and women. We have moved away from documenting the moment, and need to take the time to set up good photo-ops. We had the most difficult time finding images of women during the period of 1955-1977. We must do better at documenting our own history.

As part of the Remembering Project, the NWHP is asking people to send photos. The NWHP definitely plans to scan in pictures. The Remembering Project website is not yet available – it's being done on paper now. Everyone will be receiving a poster and catalogue in the mail about this project.

Ann Lewis:

Ms. Lewis asked Ms. Newburger to comment on her conversations with NEH about the *My Stories* project.

Beth Newburger:

The *My Stories* project is a project that NEH decided they would like to do to collect the oral histories of people across the country. However, the current chairman of the NEH is not as committed to doing this project. While he says it is important, he says there are a lot of other places where this is being done.

Molly MacGregor:

The General Federation of Women's Clubs has one of the best websites available, and their archives is indexed.

Ann Lewis:

When making recommendations about the website, we need to be aware that there is so much information available on the web already that we do not want to replicate. The Internet is an entrypoint to connect women with everything available out there. Technology has changed so

quickly that we do not need to start over from scratch. We know we have great historical information, and we need to make it as accessible as possible and be connected to everybody. We need to go back to AOL with a more specific proposal.

Ellen Ochoa:

NASA just completed a new web exhibit with a more detailed history and timeline of the history of women who have played roles in aviation and aerospace.

The National Advisory Panel for Women's Institutes is hosting a series of meetings around the country in September, October and November to advertise their new museum. The Women's Museum and Institute for the Future will send information on what cities the meetings will be held in and when the meetings will occur. They are starting to build a list of supporters. They have already broken ground on the building.

Beth Newburger displayed the new *How to Guide* to the audience. When planning the guide the space inside the back cover was purposely left blank. The Commission Members need to decide what should fill this space. Suggestions include a year 2000 calendar, or a description of an upcoming celebration.

Ann Lewis thanked the audience and participants, and adjourned the meeting.