

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

on

***THE ROLE OF WOMEN
IN THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE,
TECHNOLOGY AND MEDICINE
IN THE 19th AND 20th C.***

PROCEEDINGS

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OPENING REMARK

I am delighted to be here in Veszprém and to help welcome you all to this conference. It is a pleasure to see so many eager faces from so many countries.

It has been exciting to watch so many of the pieces of this meeting fall into place. At New York airport two days ago, I felt a thrill when the flight to "Munich, Zurich and connections to Budapest" was announced. I could hardly believe all this was finally about to happen. Because of your papers and the hard work of Eva Vamos and her colleagues, this meeting will be the high point in our commission's short life.

There is a little story as to how our commission came to be established two years ago at the XVth International Congress of the History of Science in Bucharest, Roumania. In 1978 after a previous Congress /Edinburgh, 1977/ there was a BBC-produced series on the life of Marie Curie shown on American television. This program made me wonder what had happened to all those other women of Eastern Europe, especially those who did not go off to Paris, meet Pierre, discover radioactivity or win two Nobel Prizes. What kinds of lives or careers had those more typical women scientists had? They are never mentioned, but they must have been there in the background, teaching perhaps at the local high school or women's college. It would be interesting to hear more about these women and the next international congress, to be held, I recalled, in Bucharest in 1981 might be a good place to make

a start.

So I wrote a lot of letters worldwide to people who might be interested in giving suitable papers. Eventually I got ten to agree to prepare presentations and this was enough to convince the program committee to make the subject an official symposium. In the end we had one of the largest sessions at the congress--29 papers from twelve countries.

Meanwhile as this 3-day symposium was going on upstairs at the University of Bucharest, the Americans and Hungarian delegations /to the General Assembly of the International Union that runs the congress/ introduced a joint resolution to set up a commission on the subject of the history of women in science, technology, and medicine. This had occurred to Sally Kohlstedt and me, as we read over reports submitted to the International Union from other commissions. They had been established to help foster work in new or undeveloped specialties, as history of geography or of Arabic science. Our specialty was equally in need of encouragement: wherever it was done, it was marginal, but if brought together in some way, many interesting comparisons could be made and work everywhere would be enriched.

The resolution turned out to be quite controversial with strong opposition from western Europe--England, France and West Germany especially. But it passed and we were suddenly official. Hoping that this would be the case, some of us had been publicizing a first meeting of the commission for the last day of the congress. Fifteen persons from 10 countries came and we made plans for the next four years. We decided to publicize our new commission, to put out a newsletter, to plan a bibliography and a directory and, when Eva Vamos volunteered to run a workshop here in Hungary in August 1983. All this was quite exciting and we parted rather breathless, but it was also overwhelming. I remember sitting in a hotel lobby for two hours making lists and trying to sort it all out. How does one run an international commission? How does one put out an international newsletter? How does one organize an

international bibliography? Who will come to the Hungarian meeting? How will we reach them? Who pays for it all?

Now over 100 of you have come, and we will have some very interesting days together. From the few papers I have had time to read since arriving last night I look forward to many stimulating discussions.

We have learned a lot in the two years of our Commission's existence. The International Union and its commission structure has been very useful to those of us interested in this new subspecialty. It provided initially a forum for those interested in the subject and then a structure through which we could locate still others.

As to the future our next big event will be at the XVIIIth International Congress of the History of Science, to be held in Berkeley, California, USA, in late July 1985. We will get space on the program if we suggest good topics and papers. We will have to discuss that more this week.

As for now I and our commission are delighted that you came and look forward to hearing a lot of very good papers and challenging discussions.

Thank you.