

The Society: Minutes of the Women's Caucus Meeting

1998 HSS Annual Meeting, Kansas City, Missouri

Karen Rader, out-going chair of the caucus, chaired the meeting. Andrea Rusnock, the other co-chair, assisted and acted as official secretary. The meeting opened with the traditional introductions of those present, and a circulation of a sign-in sheet for purposes of future contact. Approximately 35 people were in attendance.

First order of business was the announcement of women and gender sessions at the Kansas City meeting. This year, the WC sponsored one session: "Women, Gender, and Science in Early Modern Europe." In addition, there were two other sessions: "Writing the Lives of Women in Science," and "Gender in the Theory and Practice of Science." The co-chairs reminded everyone that they would continue the tradition of working to put together annual meeting sessions on topics of women, gender, and science. Caucus members were encouraged to approach co-chairs with subject and/or presenter ideas.

Amy Bix reported on the job survey carried out by Gwen Kay and herself. Bix stated that the HSS office had been very helpful and that the results were published in the October HSS Newsletter. The number of women who got jobs last year was very good. Bix indicated that the question asking for the number of people who had applied for each job had been omitted from the form and that this question would be included in next year's form. There was some discussion about whether the HSS Office should take over the survey, but there seemed to be general consensus that the WC should continue to sponsor the survey so that organizationally we could continue to exert some measure of intellectual control over its content.

Michele Aldrich was not present, so Rader gave a brief summary about the "Directory of Women in the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine." Aldrich is preparing the Directory and there is a possibility that it might be circulated in electronic format.

Rusnock announced that she would take over the long-discussed project to compile a syllabus sampler for courses on the history of women, gender, and science. She indicated that she would post an invitation in the January HSS Newsletter soliciting contributions, and she urged Caucus members to submit syllabi. It was suggested that the sampler be marketed to women scientists, some of whom teach women, gender, and science courses.

The next item on the agenda was the workshop on "Science in the 20th Century: The Difference Feminism has Made," held at Princeton University, October 2-3, 1998. Angela Creager, Elizabeth Lunbeck, and Londa Schiebinger organized this workshop which attracted over 130 participants. The workshop brought together historians of science, technology, and medicine, and provided initial discussion for a much larger conference planned for 2001 on the same topic.

General discussion then followed about the 2001 conference: Who is the audience? How can we create sessions that bring together scientists and historians? How can individuals get involved in the planning of this conference? How will information about the planning of the conference get distributed? What is the role of the WC in this regard? Rima Apple suggested that anyone interested in planning this conference meet the next morning for preliminary discussions. This was immediately accepted and many individuals indicated that they would attend.

Lynn Nyhart suggested that the WC put together a listserv, which would provide a forum for discussion of the 2001 conference and other issues concerning the WC. WITH (Women in Technological History) of SHOT already has such a listserv, and several individuals indicated that it works well. What emerged from the discussion was a consensus to establish a WC listserv. The initial list would be based on those who attended the WC meeting and the co-chairs would advertise the listserv in the HSS Newsletter and invite individuals to join. Overall, there was considerable enthusiasm for the 2001 conference and for the listserv as a way to encourage the broadest possible participation.

There were several announcements made by Caucus members. Pamela Mack announced that she has just joined an NSF review panel, and that there were no proposals on gender in the first round of applications she read. She indicated that the success rate of proposals was roughly 20%, and she encouraged more submissions, especially from graduate students.

Rima Apple announced that the 5th volume of Notable American Women, which will include women who died between 1976 and 2000, is looking for contributions, and she encouraged Caucus members to submit names of women scientists to include in this volume.

There were several job announcements: Ann Koblitz announced a job in modern European history at Arizona State and Charlotte Borst a job in modern European history at St. Louis University; both jobs would consider historians of science. Amy Bix announced the job at Iowa State for a historian of chemistry or technology.

The next item on the agenda was the election of next year's co-chair. Two women were nominated: Abha Sur and Joy Harvey. After a secret ballot, Abha Sur was elected the new co-chair for 1998-2000.

Finally, the co-chairs raised the general question of what the WC should be doing. This led to a spirited discussion and many concrete suggestions. It was agreed that the WC should keep doing the job survey (mentioned above). Some suggested that the WC play more of an advocacy role regarding the nomination of candidates for HSS council positions. (There was some concern that women were not adequately represented, especially at the executive level.) A list was circulated calling for volunteers who would be willing to run for council, and the WC co-chairs agreed to send this list to the nominating committee. Several individuals suggested that the WC submit a proposal to the HSS Special Projects Fund; one of the suggestions was to invite a prominent woman scientist to a plenary session at next year's annual meeting. We agreed that we would continue this discussion on the listserv, because the co-chairs needed more feedback THROUGHOUT the year from the membership.

The meeting closed with the co-chairs extending a formal thank-you to Constance Malpas and Keith Benson for all of their help in handling WC business through the Executive Office this year.