



BARBARA STUHLER – PAVED THE WAY FOR WOMEN TO JOIN THE CFR

Historian Barbara Stuhler made sure those who came after her would know more about the St. Paul-Minneapolis Committee on Foreign Relations. She preserved what is almost certainly the largest surviving stash of the Committee's membership records: a dozen rosters, including the organization's original list of members, stretching across three decades. According to her voluminous archives at the Minnesota Historical Society, she was one of the first two women to join the Committee, in mid-1972.

Stuhler was a faculty and staff member at the University of Minnesota for 40 years, retiring in 1990. She played many roles there and with the Minnesota Chapter of the League of Women Voters. In the process, Stuhler accumulated and passed on to many audiences beyond the Committee a broad and deep knowledge of Minnesota's ties to the world. Her wisdom flowered in her 1973 book, *Ten Men of Minnesota and American Foreign Policy, 1898-1968*, and in her work for the University's World Affairs Center.

She was born in Iowa, raised in Evanston, Ill., and got her undergraduate degree from MacMurray College in downstate Illinois. She joked that the purpose of MacMurray, founded in 1848 as the Illinois Female Seminary and still a women's college when she attended, "was to make good wives for Methodist ministers." Soon after arriving at MacMurray, she began to shape her world views. "The only newspaper I'd ever seen was the Chicago Tribune and suddenly, I was introduced to the St. Louis Post Dispatch," she later recalled. One of her best teachers, her freshman zoology professor, would open her class not with a discussion of zoology but rather with what was happening in the world. As Stuhler put it: "She would say indignantly to us, 'This is a tremendously important period in world history, and you're living in it, and you have to know what's going on. There are papers in each of the dormitories and I want you to read those newspapers. I want you to turn on the radio. Inform yourselves because your lives are going to be affected by the events that are happening today.'" It was the fall of 1941.

Engaging With the World

Stuhler came to the Twin Cities to do graduate work in 1945, when the University of Minnesota's School of Public Administration offered her a generous research assistantship. Then she landed a high-profile internship at the National Institute for Public Affairs in Washington, and later moved to the University of Virginia in Charlottesville as a research assistant. In 1948, she returned to Minnesota to work for the League, traveling widely throughout the state as the organization's secretary. Meanwhile, Bill Rogers, a colleague in Charlottesville, had moved to Minneapolis to head the World Affairs Center. He recruited her in 1950 to be his assistant, a position that quickly established her as a player in the state's foreign affairs firmament. Backers of the United Nations and of the Foreign Policy Associations of Minneapolis and St. Paul had championed the idea of the Center which was formed shortly after the war ended to help prevent Minnesotans from returning to the isolationist outlook that prevailed prior to World War II. The Center acted as a clearing house for foreign policy information, and offered lectures, conferences, seminars and publications.



Stuhler gave frequent talks on foreign affairs. In 1967, she toured the Soviet Union for three weeks with a League of Women Voters delegation, then spoke at a CFR dinner on "Russia in its 50th Anniversary Year." She served under Rogers as associate director at the Center until 1975, when she was promoted to associate dean at the University's Continuing Education and Extension center. (In 1984, the World Affairs Center, hit by budget cuts, was merged into the Minnesota International Center). Her career also included a 15-year run as a weekly commentator on everything international -- from arms control, economics and trade to foreign aid and the UN -- on the U's radio station, KUOM.

Her book profiling Minnesota's most important politicians in foreign affairs stands as testimony to how much those years sparked her lifelong interest in the state's place in the world. "I became terribly interested in the influence of Minnesotans on American foreign policy," she said. Most of the 10 men she profiled significantly influenced foreign policy in the years leading up to, during and immediately after World War II. Among them: Charles A. Lindbergh Sr., congressman from Minnesota's Sixth District and the father of aviator and leading isolationist Charles Lindbergh Jr.; Harold Knutson, who stuck with his isolationist perspective throughout his 1916-46 tenure representing the state's Sixth Congressional District; Henrik Shipstead, U.S. Senator from 1923 to 1947 and also an isolationist; Dr. Walter Judd, an internationalist who represented Minneapolis in Congress from 1942 until 1962; former newspaperman Joseph Ball, Minnesota's other U.S. senator during World War II; and Harold Stassen, who at age 31 in 1938 became the youngest governor any state had ever elected. In a time when isolationism still prevailed in the state's congressional delegation, Stassen appointed Ball to the Senate in 1940, in part because Ball was an internationalist.

Championing Diversity

In 1974, soon after Stuhler pioneered inclusion of women in the CFR, she became part of an effort to further broaden its membership rolls. She joined Bob White, then the Committee's secretary, and three other members -- George Thiss, executive director of the Upper Midwest Council; Jonathan Morgan, solicitor general for the State of Minnesota; and Emily M. Staples, a mid-life career counselor for the University's Women's Center -- to form a membership committee. At the time, four of every five members of the organization's 1973-74 roster were business executives, lawyers, bankers, newspapermen or from the University of Minnesota. The panel's mission: bring more diversity to the roster by adding members from nine categories: women, clergy, labor, higher education other than the University, secondary education, minorities, government, younger members and leaders from St. Paul.

We know that this effort succeeded, thanks to the membership rosters Stuhler saved. The number of women members jumped to ten in 1974-75 from just four a year earlier. John Littleford, headmaster at the Breck School, joined and the Committee gradually brought in more new members from its targeted fields. But the process was also highly selective, mindful of how a top college fraternity or sorority maintains its exclusivity by considering many prospects and then inviting only a few top achievers to join. That's what the membership committee did, after sifting through and rejecting scores of others.

Thus as one of its first women members, Stuhler reflected well the desire for a more diverse membership. At the same time, she also had a hand in helping the Committee maintain the elite status of its membership.

Stuhler, who was a CFR member for 16 years, died in 2007. "She is remembered as a strong champion of civic involvement and women's rights in Minnesota and the nation," the League of Women Voters said in a memorial to her life.

