

150 Years of Women at Berkeley



The Prytanean Society: More than a Century of Remarkable Women

By Maria Protti '79

Past President Prytanean Alumnae, Inc. (2019 – 2021)

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The Prytanean Society at UC Berkeley honors women leaders who have given service to the University. The Society began on the Berkeley campus in the academic year 1909 – 1910 with the encouragement of University President Benjamin Ide Wheeler who saw the need for a group of women student leaders to meet and work together on projects toward the betterment of the University of California.

Today the Society is the oldest women's student honor society in the United States. Prytanean members and alumnae have met continuously throughout the years and have undertaken a myriad of projects such as the establishment of the University Hospital, the creation of a cooperative student residence, the instigation of the *Center for Continuing Education for Women*, and the funding of student loans, scholarships and faculty enrichment awards.

Initiates into the Society are mostly upper division students who are recognized for their leadership to the University of California. Over the years Prytaneans have gone on to make remarkable achievements in all sorts of fields and ways.

The following profiles highlight twenty-six of the thousands of past Prytanean members who have accomplished much in their era. Most of the women profiled here are lesser-known women of achievement. Many of them were non-academics who made their mark in disciplines and positions untethered to the University that nurtured them. They all

merit recognition in the celebration of the 150th anniversary of women's admittance into the University of California.

A collection of profiles of "Remarkable Prytaneans" showcases additional past Prytanean members. Part of a larger, ongoing project that documents the accomplishments of Prytanean women, the continually expanded collection can be found at <prytanean.org>.

Women Enter UC Berkeley: 1870 – 1910

Agnes Louise Frisius (1874 – 1955)

Student Leader. In 1901, as the President of the Associated Women of the Students of the University of California, she amalgamated women's sports into one organization—The Sports and Pastimes Association. That was the first time that women's athletics were combined into one organization at the University of California. She co-founded the Prytanean Women's Honor Society.

Women Organize: 1911 – 1925

Grace Van Dyke Bird (1892 – 1986)

College Administrator. In 1921, she became the first woman to head a community college in California. She pushed for the usage of the phrase "community college" instead of "junior college." As President of the California Junior College Federation (now the California Association of Community Colleges) she built ties with high schools, colleges and universities. With the responsibility of fostering community engagement, she served as Associate Director for the University of California Office of Relations with Schools. Grace Bird was named as a Berkeley Fellow of the University of California for lifetime service. The library at Bakersfield College is named after her.

Ruth Salinger de Young Elkus (1884 – 1972)

Legal Reform Advocate and Art Collector. She was a leader in the Native American Reform Movement of the 1920's. The Movement resulted in the Federal administration of the "Indian New Deal" of the 1930's and reversed the U.S. policy that mandated cultural assimilation. Ruth Elkus and her husband, Charles de Young Elkus, directed attention to the political, health, and social struggles of the Pueblo Indians in the Southwest. The attention culminated in the removal of squatters who thwarted the Pueblo Indian's rights to land and water. Urging reform of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, they used public outrage, the law, and personal relationships. With authentic admiration of Native American arts and crafts, they collected almost 1700 pieces of contemporary art between 1922 and 1965. The collection includes jewelry, katsinas, paintings, pottery, and textiles made by over 200 artists mostly from U.S. Southwest tribes. The San Francisco Academy of Sciences holds the Elkus' papers and art collection. Included therein are the diaries of Ruth Elkus that record culture clashes in the 1930's through the 1950's. As a Cal student, Ruth Elkus was President of the Prytanean Honor Society.

Katherine Jewell Everts (1873 - 1950)

Voice Trainer, Writer, Elocutionist, Dramatist. In 1913, she toured stages in the eastern and southern states, and gave dramatic readings and lectures on the pedagogical method she created to develop the voice. Teachers all over the United States adopted her method. She equated the voice with an emotional instrument. She used spoken interpretation of literature to “tune the instrument.” By this, Katherine Everts meant that the proper control of the body and voice expresses an author’s thoughts and emotions. Her audiences were inspired by her message that the spoken word can be beautiful and effective speech. She wrote The Speaking Voice (1908) and Vocal Expression: A Class-book of Voice Training and Interpretation (1911). Both books contain directions and exercises and remain popular today. The Speaking Voice contains advice on vocal production and techniques, and is downloaded frequently on the internet. Katherine Everts coined the word “tone-color” that is defined by dictionaries as timbre.

Leigh Stafford Foulds (1885 – 1956)

Student Leader. While a senior in the UC Berkeley Class of 1911, she chaired a group of women classmates who petitioned the University to build a Hall to provide a gathering place for senior class women for business and social meetings. In their petition, the students noted that men regularly met at their own campus “Senior Hall” but did not allow women to use that Hall. The Petition asked for the building designer to be Miss Julia Morgan. In response, the *UC Regents on Grounds and Buildings* voted and approved “permission to the women students to build Senior Women’s Hall on the knoll south of the Greek Theater and a few hundred feet east from the College Avenue entrance.” Construction of the Senior Women’s Hall, with plans sketched by Prytanean Cal graduate and architect Lillian Rice as modified by architect Julia Morgan, began that summer. In later life, Leigh Foulds continued to reside in Berkeley as a “clubswoman” and was active in the College Women’s Club and as President of the local Parent Teacher Association.

Katherine Carlton Gilkey (1892 – 1979)

Statistician. One of the first to work in the Statistical Division of the U.S. Food Administration. In 1917 after the declaration of War, she oversaw the maintenance of statistics on food pricing and compiled reports for the head of the Administration – the future U.S. President Hoover. The Food Administration set “just and reasonable” food prices to encourage production and discourage purchases thereby freeing up food for the hungry in Europe. It tracked local “fair prices” announced by over one thousand “Price Interpreting Boards” across the country. In 1919 in the aftermath of WWI, she worked for the American Relief Administration in Paris and London. She again reported to Mr. Hoover who led the Administration with the aim of providing food to starving Central and Eastern Europeans. In 1920 she returned to Washington, DC to prepare and research for Hoover’s report on the Administration’s food security work and his writings on “world food production and trade.” Later she managed the Bureau of Occupations, an employment-finding entity within the Cal Alumni Association. She improved the Bureau by finding positions for women as well as men, providing vocational guidance to students and graduates, and strengthening

the Bureau's visibility. Earlier after her graduation from Cal in 1913, she worked for two years as assistant to the Dean of Women, and in 1916 she obtained a Master's degree in statistics from Columbia University.

Women Gain Expertise: 1926 - 1939

Marjory Bridge Farquhar (1903 – 1999)

Rock Climber, Conservationist. A developer of the sport of rock climbing using the innovations of belaying and roping, she climbed all the 14,000 feet peaks on the Pacific Coast except for one. The first woman to ascend the Higher Cathedral Spire in Yosemite (1934), the east face of Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the Continental United States (1936), and Mount Ansel Adams (with Ansel Adams). She was the first woman to swim through Muir Gorge -- a 5,000-foot depth drop -- in the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne. A leader in the Sierra Club (Member 1929 - 1999, Director 1951 – 1955) and Save the Redwoods League (Director 1977). Her home was a hub for the conservation movement and the international mountaineering community. She hosted Heinrich Harrer, Maurice Herzog, and Sir Edmund Hillary.

Susan S. Stevens Potbury Gilmore (1909 – 1969)

Paleobotanist. She studied fossilized plants and recorded vegetation change by largely concentrating on fossils she found in an abandoned placer mine in the Sierra Nevada California Gold Rush Country. In 1935, she analyzed those fossils. From comparisons she made to extant plants on location at the Washington National Museum, the New York Botanical Garden and the Arnold Arboretum in Boston, she determined the types of fossilized flora by size, species, margin tooth edges, and climate temperature and precipitation. She recognized 41 species. Modern day botanists appreciate her careful and timeless work. She worked for the Washington Carnegie Institute.

Gertrude E. Comfort Morrow (1892 -1987)

Architect. With Irving Morrow, she designed the architectural aspects of the Golden Gate Bridge—the art deco styled towers, the walkways, the toll plaza – and selected the bridge's international orange color. The Morrrows designed the Alameda-Contra Costa County Building for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition at Treasure Island. She was the supervising architect for St. Francis Woods in San Francisco, and the architect for the Women's Athletic Club in Oakland and the music building at Monrovia Seminary and College for Women in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Anne Swainson (1900 - 1955)

Industrial Designer and Business Innovator. She founded and oversaw the first industrial design division in an U.S. corporation. Working at Montgomery Ward, she created the concept of the modern mail order catalog by using photo shoots and incorporating models who interacted with the merchandise. Her division analyzed thousands of products and redesigned those that did not meet her standards. She invented and patented a few products for household use.

Theodora “Cleo” Damianakes Wilkens (1895 - 1979)

Etcher, Illustrator and Muralist. She designed first edition dust jackets for scores of authors including iconic jackets for Fitzgerald’s All the Sad Young Men, and Hemingway’s A Farewell to Arms and The Sun Also Rises. Major museums hold her work including the Smithsonian, the De Young Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Toronto Museum of Art. Her etchings commonly depict women dancers in Hellenistic Greece similar to scenes at the Prytanean Fetes of her day. She produced a mural for the Berkeley High School Auditorium.

Women Mobilize and Embrace Convention: 1940 - 1959

Natalie Burdick Clark (1922 – 2010)

Drive-In Restaurant Pioneer. The first woman student body president at Cal, she graduated in 1943 when the male student population diminished and the World War II military population swelled. After graduation, she became a Navy lieutenant in the women’s branch of the U.S. Naval Reserves. In 1947, she and her husband opened *Johnny Mac’s Drive-in* in Redwood City, California. Along with a hamburger and shakes for twenty-five cents, their menu featured the original “Big Mac” years before *McDonald’s* introduced a similar item in 1967 – 1968 that became popular worldwide. Their restaurant embraced car culture and attracted a high school student clientele. A carhop delivered the trayed food car-by-car. With business partners, the Clark’s started another *Johnny Mac’s* in Mountain View which was renamed *Big Mac’s* in the 1960’s. They also launched the *Burger Bar* and *Burger Pit* restaurants.

Loda Mae Davis (1898 – 1989)

Government Administrator, Psychologist, World Traveler, and University Administrator. Under her direction as the first Dean of Women at UC Riverside, UC Riverside became the first UC campus to give male and female students the same dormitory privileges. Davis fought for women faculty members to have the same working conditions as the men. Earlier in 1936 she worked for the W.P.A. In 1940 she consulted for the Consumer Division of the U.S. National Counsel of Defense, and became the head of the first field staff of the Office of Price Administration. She traveled through the U.S. encouraging the public to cooperate with the federal rationing and price control program. For four years she traveled alone throughout the world. The Prytanean Society of UC Riverside established the Loda Mae Davis Endowed Award in 1964.

Joan “Jody” Christine Zuber Earle (1931 – 2021)

Child Witness to the December 7, 1941 Attack on Pearl Harbor. Before the United States’ entry into WWII began within view of her window, she lived with her father, the Commanding Officer of the Marine barracks, her mother, and her sister, on a tiny island in the center of the Harbor. Ships in the U.S. Pacific fleet were anchored 500 feet from her home. In the morning attack, she saw exploding bombs, ships “like broken toys in burning oil,” and strafing airplanes. An unexploded bomb rested near

the door of her family's lanai. She sheltered in a fortification under the house of the Harbor's Admiral. Another child witness reported that the Harbor's children, in an enforced blackout, learned to load cartridges in a machine gun belt. Sixty years later Joan Earle recollected the attack from a ten-year-old's child perspective. Her memoir, The Children of Battleship Row: Pearl Harbor 1940 – 1941, is known for its description of an idyllic, pre-attack childhood in Pearl Harbor, the horror of the bombing and its aftermath, an evacuation by a crowded military ship to San Francisco, and attempts to assimilate at a mainland school while dealing with psychological pain and displacement. From 1989 until 2012 Earle helped traumatized children and young adults who experienced reading difficulties and foster care. She taught and counseled at the non-profit Fred French Youth Center in Oakland. She had earned a Bachelor's (1953) and a Master's (1955) degree in History from Cal, and four types of teaching credentials.

Phyllis Kahn Fisher (1919 – 2009)

Writer and Psychiatric Social Worker. During 1944 through 1946, she lived in Los Alamos, New Mexico, the site of the Los Alamos National Laboratory. There her husband, a physicist, helped to design the nuclear atomic bomb. She described this part of her life in Los Alamos Experience (1985). The book describes the secrecy and isolation of the Laboratory, her husband's silence, and the attendant restriction. Phyllis Fisher said that her book was "a plea for peace." She was inspired to write when she lived in Japan from 1979 to 1982. In Japan, she taught at the Tokyo International School of the Sacred Heart, met survivors of the atomic bombing, and visited the Hiroshima Peace Park. She lectured about Los Alamos in Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, and Thailand. Most of her career was spent in Palo Alto as a psychiatric social worker. Phyllis Fisher held a Bachelor's degree in Economics (1940) and a Certificate in Social Welfare (1942) from Cal. She remembered that when she was a Cal student, she persuaded the University President to add the first course on race relations to the University curricula.

Mary Louise Lyman Talbot (1920 – 2010)

Pioneer Flight Attendant. She was one of the first two stewardesses to fly above the Pacific Ocean. After graduating from UC Berkeley in 1941, she joined the Traffic Department of Pan American World Airways. By 1944 male stewards were leaving the commercial airlines to fight in WWII. Pan Am chose Talbot and one other woman to initiate the role of woman flight attendants on the Pan Am Clipper flying from San Francisco to Hawaii. In 1945 she began a pattern of working five round trips with a weekly vacation in Hawaii after each fifth trip. Pan Am drilled and trained her to prepare meals and berths, memorize Flight Service Manuals, act calmly in crash landings, and deal with airsick, frightened, and unruly passengers. She performed well. In the following three decades, the positions of flight attendants were filled overwhelmingly by women.

Women Self-Examine: 1960 - 1980

Lucile Kathryn Czarnowski (1897 – 1985)

Folk Dance Revivalist. From 1923 – 1973 she was a Professor of Physical Education at UC Berkeley teaching folk dance. Her notations became the basis for international dance description. Her teaching repertoire included dozens of dances from the Alewander to the Zaječarka. Her drive for authentic folk material led to the organization of the Research Committee of the Folk Dance Federation of California. She was the Federation's fourth President in 1945. She was a founder of the folk to dance movement featuring folk dancing parties, and she was a staff member of the annual University of the Pacific Folk Dance Camp and the California Idyllwild Folk Dance Camp. For her contribution to the dance field, the King of Sweden awarded her the Lingiad Gold Medal. In 1968, she received the Dance Heritage award of the National Dance Division of the American Association of Health Physical, Education and Recreation. She received a Master of Arts in dance from the University of Wisconsin and taught there in 1931. She published the influential book, *Dances of Early California Days* and wrote several books on dance cues and how to teach folk and square dance. Many of the folk dances she organized at Cal took place at the Senior Men's Hall log cabin.

Rhoda Haas Goldman (1924 – 1996)

Philanthropist and Civic Leader. In 1989 she co-created the Goldman Environment Prize -- often called "The Nobel Prize for Environmentalists." The annual monetary prize goes to six grassroots environmentalists throughout the world. She also co-created a foundation that donated over half a billion dollars to organizations that promote art, culture, and a healthy environment. She supported non-profit organizations in the City of San Francisco by serving as: Chair of the City's Memorial to Holocaust Victims, Director of the Mount Zion Health System, President of the Mount Zion Hospital, President of the San Francisco Symphony, President of Congregation Emanu-El and Chair of the Stern Grove Festival Association. And she served on the Board of Directors of Levi Strauss and Company. UC Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy is named after her and her husband.

Marii Kyogoku Hasegawa (1918 – 2012)

Peace Activist. For five decades she was involved with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and served as the League President from 1971 to 1975. She organized protests against the Vietnam War including an international protest delegation in the war zone of North Vietnam. Born in Hiroshima, Japan, she immigrated to California as a baby when her father, a Buddhist priest, came to minister. The U.S. Government removed her and her family from their home with force, and interned her in Topaz, Utah from 1942 to 1945. While interned, she performed social work and oversaw a field kitchen. Later in Richmond, Virginia, she was on the Board of the Richmond Human Relations Council, worked for the Virginia Office on Aging, and was a founding member of the Richmond Peace Education Center. She spoke throughout the country on her ideas about achieving world peace. She received the international 1996 Niwano Peace Prize to honor and encourage her devotion "to inter-religious co-operation in the cause of peace and to make [her] achievements known." The prize consisted of a certificate, a gold medal and twenty

million yen, worth \$180,000 in 1996 dollars. The documentary [Marii Hasegawa: Gentle Woman of a Dangerous Kind](#) outlines her life.

Beulah Ong Kwoh (stage name “Beulah Quo”) (1923 – 2002)

Actor, Community Activist, Stage Producer, Teacher. For forty-six years from the 1950’s through the 1990’s, she appeared in more than 140 films, television shows, and plays. Her work includes character acting in the films: *Flower Drum Song* (1961), *Gypsy* (1962), *San Pebbles* (1966), *Chinatown* (1974) and *McArthur* (1977). The first film she appeared in, *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955), garnered three Oscar awards and eight nominations. She received an Emmy nomination in 1978 for her role of the Empress of China in the television “Meeting of the Minds” series. Beyond her acting, she advocated for quality, multidimensional roles for Asian actors and co-founded several organizations to achieve this goal. In 1965 she co-founded the acclaimed and longstanding East West Players, an Asian-American repertory group. And she led a successful campaign to fund the building of the 240-seat East West Theatre in downtown Los Angeles. In the late 1970’s, she worked to eliminate stereotypes in the entertainment industry and mass media by organizing and helping to lead the Association of Asian/Pacific American Artists. She received an Emmy for producing the documentary “James Wong Howe—The Man and His Movies.” She organized a campaign to publicize that Vincent Chin, an Asian man, was bludgeoned to death in 1982 because of racial hostility. Her efforts resulted in the production of the 1998 play “Carry the Tiger to the Mountain” which told Chin’s story. Born in Stockton to impoverished immigrants from China, she earned a Bachelor’s degree in sociology from UC Berkeley, membership in Phi Beta Kappa, and a Master’s degree at the University of Chicago. She taught at Ginling College in Nanjing until, in 1949 at the onset of the Chinese Communist Revolution, she fled from China on a U.S. battleship with her husband and infant son. Settling in Los Angeles, she worked at the YWCA managing a nursery school. She involved herself in the Chinese Christian Movement, worked as a dialect coach, and taught sociology at Los Angeles Community College. She is an inductee in the California Public Education Hall of Fame, and a recipient of the Los Angeles YWCA Silver Achievement Leadership Award, the Association of Asian Pacific American Artists’ 1990 Lifetime Achievement Award, and the 1999 45th Congressional Woman of the Year Designation. The East West Players’ Beulah Quo and Edwan Kwoh Endowment promotes theatre education.

Madeline Holcomb Mixer (1928 – 2018)

Advocate for Tradeswomen. She helped women to obtain apprenticeships, training, and placement in skilled jobs that are nontraditionally held such as construction jobs. For thirty-three years, beginning in the 1960’s, she was the Director of the Women’s Bureau, Western Region, U.S. Department of Labor. In that capacity, she provided a place where fifty tradeswomen met each Saturday to discuss organization and job issues such as harassment and isolation. In 1979, she co-founded *Tradeswoman Inc.*, a national nonprofit association that continues today to serve its mission of “outreach, recruitment, retention and leadership development for women in blue-collar skilled craft.” She founded the *Tradeswomen Magazine*. That journal, written by volunteers for two decades, was the main communication node for

tradeswomen in the United States in the 1980's and 1990's. She also founded the *Pride and a Paycheck*, a newsletter that is "A Guide to Blue Collar Jobs."

Women Achieve Proficiency: 1980 - 2000

Florence "Flo" Anderson Gibson (1925 – 2011)

Actor, Narrator, Entrepreneur. She studied dramatic literature at Cal and acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre in New York under Sanford Meisner. Following World War II, she toured in an SFO production of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*. She then held roles in industrial films, radio, and voice-overs including for National Geographic. After raising her family and serving on civic organizations, she spent 1975 to 1995 narrating for Books on Tape, the Library of Congress Talking Books program, Recorded Books, Inc., commercial companies and radio stations. She founded *Audio Book Contractors* in 1983 and soundproofed a home studio, hired local professional actors, and produced and distributed recordings of unabridged classic books. She recorded 1133 books, three of which received Parents' Choice Awards. The American Library Association lists four of her works as *Notable Recordings for Children*.

Joyce Romeyn Richardson Gross (1924 – 2012)

Quilt Historian. Her intent was to preserve material about otherwise ignored women. She sewed and collected quilts, and documented quilters and the processes of quilt-making. Her collection, called "The Joyce Gross Quilt History Collection," is housed in the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas, Austin. The collection contains more than 170 quilts made from the late 1930's to 2002, and several hundred documents, rare books and catalogs. A scholar called it "one of the preeminent historical quilt collections in the world." Joyce Gross aided in organizing the American Quilt Study Group, led national quilting tours, held annual quilting retreats in Point Bonita, California, and founded and published The Quilter's Journal. The Quilter's Hall of Fame inducted her in 1996, and the Alliance for American Quilts called her a "Quilt Treasure."

Joyce Kislitzin Kallgren (1930 – 2013)

China Studies Scholar. She held two scholarly positions at UC Berkeley: Chair of the Center for Chinese Studies from 1983 until 1988 and then the Associate Director of East Asian Studies. She was editor of both The Asian Survey and the Journal of Asian Studies. She was a Professor of Political Science at UC Davis, and received a PhD from Harvard University. A recurrent traveler to China both alone and as a group leader, she accompanied a US Congress delegation to China in 1976. She lectured and wrote books and articles on East Asia including: The People's Republic of China after Thirty Wars: An Overview (1979), Building a Nation-State: China after Forty Years (1990), and Strategies for Support of the Rural Elderly in China: A Research and Policy Agenda (1992).

Irene Takei Miura (1939 – 2007)

Professor, University Administrator, and UC Regent. From the late 1980's to early 1990's, she worked at San Jose State University as a Professor who was named an outstanding teacher, as Chair of the Department of Child Development, and as the executive assistant advising the University President. She was a Regent of the University of California and a Trustee of the UC Berkeley Foundation from 1997 to 2001. She was also a President of the California Alumni Association. Earlier as a Cal student in 1959 when Cal participated in the Rose Bowl and won the NCCA Men's Basketball Championship, she was head pompon girl. After obtaining a

teaching credential and raising a family, she received a Master's in Arts and Teaching in 1981 from the College of Notre Dame in Belmont, and a Doctorate in Psychological Studies in Education and Child and Adolescent Development in 1984 Development from Stanford University. During World War II, she was a child internee at a camp for Japanese Americans in Poston, Arizona. The Irene Miura Achievement Award Scholarship honors her.

Sobun Katherine Thanas (1927 – 2012)

Zen Buddhist Teacher and Abbot. She was an ordained practitioner in the Soto Zen line of Buddhism which was practiced on the West Coast at Sokoji, the San Francisco Zen Center, the Tassajara Monastery, and the Green Gulch Farm. At her ordination, she received "Shiho," a Dharma transmission. She founded the Monterey Bay Zen Center in 1988, and became Abbot of the Santa Cruz Zen Center in 2002, leading classes, meditations, retreats, and trainings, and ordaining priests and practitioners. She visualized herself as "sitting on the ceiling" in her first meditations in 1867 at Sokoji, the Japanese Buddhist Temple in San Francisco. Sobun (a Dharma name meaning "grass writing") edited the publication Wind Bell, co-translated zen Master Dogen's writings, and contributed to Kazuaki Tanahashi's Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Enlightenment Teachings of Zen Master Dogen (Shambhala, 2006), and Moon in a Dew Drop (Northpoint Press, 1985).