

For Mrs. Benm
Jacobson

"SHOWCASE OF AMERICAN WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD"

An Exhibit Prepared by
The Association of American Foreign Service Women

The American taxpayer gets two for the price of one when a United States official assigned overseas takes a wife to his post with him. "Showcase of American Women Around the World" displays in picture and poster the great variety and scope of volunteer activities of American Government wives living in countries around the world. The exhibit is now open to visitors in the Exhibit Hall of the Department of State in Washington.

As portrayed in this exhibit, the wives of our representatives overseas emerge, in the words of a State Department official, as a "strategic diplomatic resource." They form a pool of many diverse abilities and talents as painters, doctors, sculptors, writers, and in a variety of fields. To increase their effectiveness in voluntary activities overseas, many take language training both before and after arriving at their husbands' posts -- not only in relatively popular languages, such as French and Spanish, but also in more difficult tongues like Pushtu, Chinese, Japanese, and Swahili. The local language, they all find useful while abroad.

Through their many activities, American women are making lasting friends for the United States wherever they serve. To many people in many countries, their only knowledge of Americans and our way of life comes through the American women they meet and the American homes they visit overseas. The first job of the American official's wife abroad therefore, is to establish a happy home and to open its doors to citizens of the country.

Community activities of American women abroad fall into three main categories. First are the welfare services, designed to relieve human suffering. These include work with orphans, with young people generally, with the sick, the blind, the aged, the victims of natural disaster.

Second are the types of training which make possible self-help projects in local communities. These range from teaching illiterates to read and write and giving training on other basic skills such as infant care, hygiene, and preparing food, to providing scholarships for advanced study.

The third great area of activity embraces the sharing of arts and skills -- cultural exchange.

Such interests of American women also serve to build international trade, promote understanding of the United States, and to provide foreign people with the skills they need to help themselves. In many ways these women thus help to forward our foreign policy goals. But American women realize that they are in a foreign country as guests; and guests in a strange house do not try to rearrange the national "furniture" -- except with and at the request of their hosts.

Mrs. Jacob Beam, President of the Association of American Foreign Service Women sponsoring the exhibit, sent a personal request to Association members throughout the world for the material which appears in this exhibit.

One unusual testimony to the dedication of these women came from Mrs. Josephine N. Manbey, wife of our Charge d'Affaires in Kigali, Rwanda. Mrs. Manbey said she had nothing to report on the community activities of American wives at that central African post because she herself was the only American woman there, and she was working full-time as a secretary in the Embassy so that a single girl would not have to be sent in.

In Ecuador two wives expanded the influence of their work beyond the national borders to include all of South and Central America. Mrs. Maurice Bernbaum, wife of the Ambassador, and Mrs. James Watson, wife of a USAID official, are "ham" radio operators and have been instrumental in passing many messages of life-or-death importance between persons in remote places. Several years ago, Mrs. Bernbaum was decorated by the President of Ecuador for organizing an emergency radio network for service in rescue operations after a severe earthquake.

In Pakistan local craftsmen are increasing their incomes by making reproductions of ancient household wares; American women advised them which styles would appeal to Western tourists and helped them to market their products. Throughout the world, people are being taught to read through the direct efforts of American women, and others in the thousands are learning English.

The exhibit goes beyond its title to include the activities of American children and teenagers who teach English to local children and join in other activities with them.

A little girl from our American Embassy in Burma entered a hospital to have her face put back together after a particularly bad accident. During the recovery period she told doctors of a little boy in her neighborhood whose face also needed fixing and asked if they thought her allowance would be sufficient to buy an operation for him, too. Doctors learned that the boy had a harelip and told her the operation would be no problem but that she did not have enough to pay for the hospital bills.

When the girl was released from the hospital, she asked her parents if they couldn't sell all her toys and things she didn't need in order to make the boy's operation possible. The toys were sold and other American families contributed money to make a successful operation for her little neighbor a reality.

Secretary Rusk, in opening the exhibit, recalled a remark of de Tocqueville who observed that when an American finds something that needs doing, he looks around, finds a few like-minded neighbors and forms a committee to do something about it. These American women serving abroad with their husbands are giving new meaning to this tradition.

GREAT BRITAIN -- EMBASSY WIVES TELL ABOUT THE UNITED STATES

The Speakers Bureau of the Embassy Wives Association provides two to three hundred speakers for British audiences each year. Each of these speakers has the opportunity to tell a church, labor, farm, or charity organization about aspects of American life.

PAKISTAN -- CONSULAR WIVES "SHIPWRECKED" WHILE AIDING FLOOD VICTIMS

Two wives from the United States Consulate at Dacca set out in a small boat to distribute food during last year's disastrous floods. Their boat capsized during a sudden and violent storm, but the women managed to get to an island. There they lived on mangoes for five days before being rescued by a helicopter. As soon as another boat could be found, they were out distributing food again.

NEPAL -- AMERICAN WOMEN INTRODUCE COURSES IN SANITATION. TRAINING IN NEPAL COMMUNITY BENEFITS ALL

Domestic sanitation as Americans know it is almost non-existent in this mountain kingdom; so a group of American wives arranged to give sanitation courses to their household help. Many Nepalese became interested in the ideas spread by these courses and finally even an incorrigible hotel owner whose standards of domestic sanitation were extremely low and who had resisted all suggestions for improvement asked if the American women would allow his staff to take the course. Of course, they did.

VIET-NAM -- AMERICAN WOMEN AID REFUGEES FROM THE VIET CONG

The American Women's Association of Saigon supports its activities by running a thrift shop in the city, where they sell used items donated by Americans, Christmas cards painted by a Vietnamese artist, and handicraft articles made by recipients of their assistance. One of the interesting items sold in the shop is the cloth woven by Montagnard tribesmen. Profits from the sale of this cloth go to the Tribe Clinic in Dalat, where the American women have aided thousands of mountain refugees from Viet Cong terror.

JAPAN -- AMERICAN WOMEN PROMOTE UNITED STATES PRODUCTS

Wives of American officials act as guides at United States trade shows throughout Japan. These women stimulate interest in and increase importation of American-made products by showing their usefulness and quality to Japanese women.

ECUADOR -- FOREIGN SERVICE WIVES BOOST ALLIANCE FOR PROGRESS

In Ecuador American women have helped to organize a community center which has served as a model for training in self-help development activities, including home economics, nursing and child care, home industry, civics and literacy. Centers like this one -- so similar to the work of county agents in this country -- are one of the prime movers in attaining the goals of the Alliance for Progress.

IRAN -- AMERICANS HELP QUEEN TO LEAD PERSIAN WOMEN OUT OF PURDAH

American women in Tehran are cooperating with Queen Farah, wife of the Shah of Iran, and the Iranian Women's Club, "The New Way," to show how women can organize to raise money, establish homes for juvenile delinquents, support orphanages, clinics, child care centers for working mothers, and a host of other constructive purposes. Their most spectacular project was to get relief supplies to victims of last year's devastating earthquake in Iran.

LIBERIA -- RURAL EDUCATION AIDED BY AMERICAN WOMEN

In Liberia, AWARE has come to mean the American Women's Assistance to Rural Education. This group of American wives has made up thousands of primary readers in English for rural schools. It has also assisted in developing flashcards for use on flannel boards and conducted other experiments in literacy teaching methods for Liberian use.