

This Week in Eden History

March 14 | Eden Board of Directors opens theological education to women



Anna Astroth became Eden's first female faculty member in 1945 | Photo: Eden Seminary Archives

Often big changes start from simple steps. Former Eden Archivist Clifton Kerr in *Heritage Moments: Treasures from the Archives at Eden* quotes a statement from the 1933 Board of Directors Minutes: “It was voted: that Eden Seminary make its facilities available to qualified women students, who desire to find their life work in professional religious work on the same basis as men.” This simple decision seems unremarkable to most of us today but was a significant action for individuals raised in a relatively small, emigrant denomination and for a seminary slowly breaking out of its parochial isolation. This small step was the official beginning of the movement toward gender equality in the ministry of the Evangelical Synod of North America.

The Seminary had admitted woman students before: Louise Koepke and Vera Segur Munro, wife of the Disciples of Christ religious educator H. C. Munro, were special students, 1928–1929. From 1933 to 1945, ten additional women students enrolled, including Irene Congehl, a German refugee with a Ph.D. who completed her Eden work in 1943. The Seminary was more intentional in welcoming women beginning in 1945–1946, when it announced “a course of study on the professional level for women preparing for full-time Christian service...” This new program enrolled six for the 1946–1947 academic year, 18 for 1947–1948, 15 for 1948–1949, eight for 1949–1950, nine for 1951–1952, 15 for 1952–1953, 12 for 1953–1954, and five for 1954–1955. In addition to this new MA

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program, the Seminary hired in 1945 its first female faculty member, [Anna Astroth](#), as Supervisor of Field Work “in charge of women preparing for full-time Christian service.”

As many denominations and American culture became more open to women in ministry in the 1960s and 70s, more female students pursued the M.Div. degree and ordination. Today, at Eden, the student body is consistently 50 percent women or more. This change began with a small step in 1933. Ninety years later, however, Eden continues to be the only seminary in St. Louis preparing women for ordination.

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