

50 Years of ASCB Women in Four Cameos

When I was asked to write a Women in Cell Biology (WICB) column on the women of the ASCB, I was both honored and bewildered. Given a 50-year-long menu of rich and abundant choices, how could I possibly decide whom to write about? How could I avoid having this piece become a very long list of names?

So I invented an arbitrary rule: I would write about women in the history of the ASCB leadership whose last names begin with *S*. Within that subset, I then found four women whose roles in the Society reflect and exemplify its history and its diverse modes of engagement.

Emma Shelton

We begin with Emma Shelton. In the wake of its ambitious Boston meeting in 1976, it became clear that the ASCB could not continue to operate as an all-volunteer organization. Emma had just retired as Group Leader at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) after a fruitful career studying the ultrastructure of proteins, and she agreed in 1977 to lead the project of setting up a professional structure for the organization. She proceeded to serve for three years in the newly instituted Executive Director position, after which she went back to her retirement dream of traveling the world.

I talked with Emma recently on the phone when, at age 90, she had just returned from another long journey with her housemate. She spoke of her deep affection for the Society and her excitement about our scientific discoveries. Emma's splendid successors as Executive Director—Dorothea Wilson, Elizabeth Marincola, and Joan Goldberg—have continued to uphold her spirit of affection and excitement, as have the many outstanding staff members who have joined with them to facilitate our meetings, publications, public policy efforts, and many other programs.



Ursula Goodenough

Dorothy Skinner

Dorothy Skinner, who died in 2005, was actually a crustacean physiologist more than a cell biologist, with a distinguished scientific career at Oak Ridge National Labs. But she took a deep interest in the ASCB, was one of the first women elected to Council (1972–74), and showed up at the Annual Meetings long after her Parkinson's disease made this very difficult to do. Dorothy was a no-nonsense feminist: You tell it like you see it and you insist that things be changed. As we women struggled to articulate our critique of the system in the 1970s and '80s, often in the

context of WICB sessions and tracts, Dorothy served as our ballast and cheerleader. And happily, the ASCB emerged as an exemplar of feminist sensibility in the best sense of that term, where its feminist men were vital to that transformation.

Maxine Singer

Maxine Singer, until recently both president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington and head of a productive nucleic acid biochemistry lab at the NIH, exemplifies the many ASCB members who have engaged in outreach and served on the Society's committees. Maxine's outreach efforts included founding a Saturday Science program for local children and a training program for local elementary school teachers. And her ASCB committee of choice was the Public Policy Committee, where she worked tirelessly and skillfully for many years to help craft policy positions and directly testify on behalf of biomedical research. A favorite Maxine story relates to her appearance before the President's Council on Bioethics in 2002 following its call for a four-year moratorium on nuclear transplantation. She presented a petition, signed by over 2,000 medical school faculty members, opposing the moratorium. And she remarked, "The role of science is to discover answers to



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Sandy Schmid

the unknown. The moratorium supported by a majority of this Commission would ... be nothing more than four more years of ignorance.” Of the many adjectives that describe Maxine, including classy and wise, another is gutsy.

Sandy Schmid

Gutsy is also one of many adjectives that describe Sandy Schmid, others being dynamic,

earnest, and insouciant. As a former ASCB Councilor and now ASCB President-Elect, she represents all those in the elected leadership who have devoted their time and effort over the years to the not-always-glamorous task of guiding the Society. She has also provided unflagging editorial leadership to our basic research journal, *Molecular Biology of the Cell*, as well as chairing her cell biology department at Scripps Research Institute and heading up a big lab that studies receptor-mediated endocytosis. To top things off, she just earned an MS in Executive Leadership from the University of California, San Diego.

In the WICB-sponsored workshops she has offered on negotiation strategies and on time management, Sandy tells students, postdocs, and young faculty members that “while it might be difficult to always have balanced days, weeks, or months, successful scientists can nonetheless have balanced lives by keeping the big picture in mind and shifting priorities under varying conditions.”

The first 15 presidents of the ASCB were all male, but since Betty Hay broke the ice in 1977, 40% have been women. And of course numerous women have served on Council, as committee chairs, and as Annual Meeting session chairs, speakers, and poster presenters. After raising a toast to 50 years of ASCB women, the next toast goes to all you ASCB men who have welcomed our participation, celebrated our science, and joined us in our quest to keep the big picture in mind. ■

—Ursula Goodenough for the Women in Cell Biology Committee

Shelton Recounts Landmarks in ASCB History

Emma Shelton, the ASCB’s first Executive Director, describes the establishment of the ASCB Office in an essay now available on the ASCB website (www.ascb.org/files/ASCBNationalOffice-FirstThreeYears.pdf). In recounting her term as Executive Director (1978–1981), Shelton also discusses the establishment of the E.B. Wilson Award and the Keith Porter Lecture, the launch of the *ASCB Newsletter*, preparations for the 1980 International Congress for Cell Biology, and other important events in the ASCB’s history.

Copies of the essay will also be distributed at the Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. They will be available at the ASCB Booth in the Exhibit Hall and at the ASCB Business Meeting. ■