

# Women in Plating— Their Contributions to the Finishing Industry

By W. Joan Harrison

**Opportunities ... they really are everywhere. Sometimes we have to search for them and sometimes they fall right in our laps. Robert Frost said in his famous poem that, when he reached a fork in the road, he “took the road less traveled ... and that has made all the difference.” Today I’d like to invite all of you to take a brief walk down a road few have taken, but one that has made all the difference in their lives ... and in mine.**

**T**oday, there are more than 400 women who chose the long and bumpy road that led them to a career in the plating industry. We make up almost eight percent of the Society’s total membership. We hail from 36 states, Canada and Puerto Rico, as well as from Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, India, Israel, Mexico, Romania, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan and Venezuela. We have distinguished ourselves throughout the history of the Society, even when it was unpopular to do so. We are authors, inventors and entrepreneurs, and we serve the finishing industry in numerous capacities—from presidents and owners of companies to lab technicians, chemists, office managers and executive assistants. We are high school graduates, PhDs, CEFs and, yes, even an AESF Fellow.

## The Legacy of Zalia Jencks

Our presence in the industry was not always acknowledged or accepted, but we persevered. Our heritage dates back to the Society’s Seventh Annual Convention, held July 1919 in Philadelphia, when Mr. H.H. Posbeck, president of the Chicago Branch, announced that they had elected to honorary membership a lady scientist, and took this

occasion to present Miss Zalia Jencks (Mrs. Esther Zalia Jencks Gailey Rowe) of the Bureau of Standards in Washington, DC, with a bouquet of American Beauties in appreciation of the privilege. Immediately, Mr. George B. Hogaboom made a motion that Miss Jencks also be elected an honorary member of the Supreme Society, and the motion carried.

Ironically, it appears that there must have been a sense of guilt concerning the spontaneous election of Miss Jencks to National Honorary Membership. At the next day’s morning session, Mr. Hogaboom made this announcement: “The society has made a grave error. There is a man who has worked faithfully for the society, who has done a tremendous amount of work, and who has not been honored with anything at all.” Having said that, Mr. Hogaboom immediately nominated Dr. William Blum for National Honorary Membership. Miss Jencks, by the way, is still the only woman to be elected to National Honorary Membership.

Apparently, Miss Jencks was a very popular member. There were numerous mentions made of her in the Society’s official publication, the *Monthly Review*. Her picture graced the pages of the August 1919 issue with the following caption: “We throw established precedents to the wind and here offer to our readers the likeness of our first lady member. We believe it is the first time our pages have ever been adorned by a photo, and with this standard as a beginning, it will be many moons before we have another.” Later that same year, a page-long poem appeared titled “Miss Jencks and the Platers.” The following year, another poem by the same author lamented the loss of “Our Lady Member.” The loss, it seems, referred to her impending marriage to Mr. Walter Gailey.



Zalia Jencks

As an aside, it’s interesting to note that in the April 1920 issue of the *Monthly Review*—just nine months after Miss Jencks’ debut—Miss Jessie Minor was elected an associate member of the New York Branch with no fanfare whatsoever. Finally, six

years later, we find mention of another prominent lady who joined the Society at the age of 19. Joan Trumbour Wiarda was an active member



of the Chicago, Buffalo and Newark Branches for 40 years. She was President of Metals & Plastics Publications, as well as advertising director for its publications, *Metal Finishing* magazine and *Metal Finishing Guidebook & Directory*. When she died in 1966, she was still actively involved in the Society.

Moving on, we come across the name of Grace E. Riddell—a true mile-marker on our road to success. Mrs. Riddell is the co-discoverer, along with her colleague, Dr. Abner Brenner, of the first practical electroless process. Both worked for the U.S. Bureau of Standards. They presented their paper at the 33rd annual AESF Convention in Pittsburgh in 1946.

**Editor’s Note:** W. Joan Harrison, AESF assistant executive director, was an invited speaker at the AESF Golden West Regional Conference in November. This is an edited version of her speech.

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times as organizer of the 8th and 9th AESF-EPA Conferences. No women currently serve on the Board, but the opportunity is always there.

A very significant “first” for women in plating was announced at SUR/FIN® in Cincinnati this past June. Linda Mayer of Lucent Technologies became the first woman to receive the designation of AESF Fellow. Linda is in the Garden State



Branch and has been a member of AESF for 25 years. She has chaired numerous sessions at SUR/FIN® conferences, has been author or co-author of more than 20 papers, and is responsible for seven patents assigned to Lucent.

In recent years, *P&SF* has published feature articles on some of the women who have successfully traveled this road of ours. A few that come to mind are:

- Carmen Rosa, president of Dorado Antilles Electroplating in Puerto Rico, is referred to by her colleagues in the San Juan Branch as “a real gem.” She began her career working in a jobshop in 1958 and, 10 years later, founded her own company.



- Joanne Marozza, who, along with her sisters Judy and Jennifer, are the three “Js” who own and operate Three J’s Industries in Chicago—a business they learned from their dad, the late Erwin Herz, who founded the company.
- Sister Diane Couture, who founded and operates the Sisters of St. Joseph Architectural Stained Glass studio in Winter Garden, FL.



*The women who help manage the day-to-day operations at AESF Headquarters include, from left (seated): Lisa Gray, Elizabeth Miranda, Audrey Shields, Brenda Gross, Joan Harrison, Penny Harney; (standing): Sylvia Baxley, Debbie Swank, Kathy Schumacher, Lisa Day-Eastman, Kathi Provost, Paula Chase, Jackie Gibson, Janice Williams and Noreen Henault.*

This is just a sampling of today’s women in plating. There are so many more who have not been in the spotlight, but deserve recognition. There are the women who serve on AESF’s Boards, Sections and Committees—unfortunately, there are only 15 of them—whose names and faces we all recognize: Kathie Mayer, Julie Rogers, Brenda Whalen, Joan Dwyer, Katherine Schweich, Laura Blaser, Shayla Barrett, AESF Course Instructors Joeline Hill and Martha Martin, Becky Zinni-Kettering, Gina Flanagan, Vicki Sherwood, Marlene McCloud, Maria Nikolova and Linda Wing.

There are, of course, many other active women members who, although not on committees, work very hard for the Society at both the branch and national levels. It would be impossible to name them all, but their contributions are noted and appreciated.

### Women at AESF Headquarters

This review also wouldn’t be complete without mention of the special women who help manage the day-to-day operations at AESF Headquarters. Some of us have been around a long time—longer than we’d like to admit—and some are relatively new to the Society. You know many of us on sight and most of us by name, and our combined service to AESF totals more than 150 years. Quite a few of us have accepted opportunities as they became available to advance our careers. At least four of the current staff members, for example, began their association with the Society as receptionists, and have since moved into management positions.

### The Road Less Traveled

And so it goes for women on the road to success in the plating industry.

Every situation, properly perceived, can become an opportunity. According to the survey responses, most women have worked their way up to positions of prominence. Some were born into the business; others fell into it by chance. Most said they have stayed because of the personal satisfaction it affords them and because of the overall friendliness of the people they encounter. All of them expressed a genuine love of their work.

One woman said she considers plating “a combination of chemistry and alchemy” and asked the question: “Where else do you get to do a little magic in your profession?” These women have learned to adapt to a predominantly male workforce and have helped others succeed in an industry that, to quote one survey, “challenges your innermost strengths.” The majority of respondents agreed that they would recommend this industry to other women. Their reasons varied, but the underlying theme was that plating is an interesting field with tremendous opportunities ... that it can be very gratifying, once you manage to establish your credibility ... that the skills you learn are globally marketable ... and that you’ll never have a dull moment at work!

More and more women are choosing the road less traveled these days, and it’s making a difference. So, gentlemen, think twice before you scoff at our ambition or provoke us unjustly. We not only have access to cyanide ... some of us have been known to be quite handy with an axe! *P&SF*