

UCC ROOTS

Remembering our History

March 2021

“Women Often Make a Difference”

During the early twentieth century, the education of girls in Turkey centered on teaching skills that would prepare them to be wives and mothers. “Home Economics” dominated the curriculum. Congregational women in the United States wanted to improve education for women.

In 1952 a woman named Helen Louise Morgan (1912-2004), who had taught Spanish at secondary and collegiate schools in the Chicago area, accepted an educational position at the American Academy for Girls in Uskudar, Turkey, not far from Istanbul. She was sponsored by the Congregational American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM).

Morgan was an extraordinary teacher and administrator. She literally transformed girls’ education in Turkey. She introduced a science curriculum, overseeing the addition of labs and faculty to teach biology, chemistry, and physics. She increased programs and classes in the fine arts, and she expanded athletic opportunities for the girls. The library collection increased four-fold under her leadership, the student body grew, and many of the school’s buildings were modernized. Those who worked with Morgan commented that her innovation moved from “a top-down leadership style to more inclusivity, through more faculty committees and an encouragement of student leadership.” In 1994 the school celebrated her ground-breaking contributions by naming a new science building in her honor.

The arts were just as important to Morgan. After leaving Turkey in 1977, she returned to the United States and lived for 25 years in a UCC retirement community known as Pilgrim Place in Claremont, California. There, she helped establish the “Peterson Intercultural Art Museum”—a special arts collection where retiring missionaries were able to share, preserve and display artistic treasures they encountered during their missionary careers.

Helen Louise Morgan’s devotion to education and the arts invite us to remember the ways women in the United Church of Christ have made a difference in our world.

Contributor: Rochelle (Shelly) Stackhouse

