



Early WILPF Women

Name: Aletta Henriëtte Jacobs
Dates: 9 February 1854 - 10 August 1929
Born: Saapmeer, Netherlands
Education: University of Groningen, graduated 1879 as first female physician in the Netherlands.
Profession: Doctor, Feminist, Peace Campaigner
Languages: French, German, Latin, Greek



Wanting to be a doctor, Aletta was persuaded to study for her pharmacy exams as an interim measure. She then gained permission from the Dutch government to enter the University of Groningen for, initially, one year in 1871/72. She was the first Dutch woman to go to university. In 1876 Aletta went to Amsterdam University and received her medical degree in 1878 and her doctorate one year later.

After graduating Aletta travelled to London where she met, among others, women's suffrage activists and birth control advocates. She set up her medical practice in Amsterdam where, despite male opposition, she issued pessaries (diaphragm), and held free clinics for poor women. Aletta's was one of the first birth-control clinics in the world; both Margaret Sanger and Marie Stopes visited her in the Netherlands to find out more.

In 1892 Aletta married Carel Victor Gerritsen (died 1905).

Aletta Jacobs campaigned on behalf of female shop assistants to get a law passed obliging employers to provide seating to alleviate some of the physical ill health she had noticed resulting from their standing for many long hours whilst working.

In 1883 Aletta tried to register to vote - this led the Dutch government to insert the word 'male' to the list of voting qualifications in 1887. In 1893, she became head of the Amsterdam Woman's Suffrage Alliance and in 1903 was elected President. In 1904 she became a founder member of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) and in 1908 she hosted the IWSA conference in the Netherlands.

1911-1912 Aletta travelled with Carrie Chapman Catt on a suffrage fact-finding tour to South Africa, the Middle East, India, Ceylon, the Dutch East Indies, Burma, the Philippines, China and Japan. Aletta wrote reports of their travels and observations for the Dutch paper, De Telagraff.

1914 Aletta called for an International Women's conference in The Hague to seek a solution to the war in Europe. The Congress met in April 1915, Aletta was then one of the members of the [delegations](#) from the Congress who travelled to meet with European, Scandinavian and USA heads of government to persuade and encourage a mediated settlement to end the war.

In 1919 the Netherlands granted women the vote.

Since 1990, the University of Groningen has awarded a biannual prize to women who have distinguished themselves in the field of women's emancipation.

Publications

Aletta translated the following into Dutch:

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (1900)

Olive Schreiner, *Women and Labour* (1910)