Introduction

The career accomplishments of Anna Wagner Keichline (1889-1943) are an inspiration. Click through these pages to discover the record of an inventor, architect, suffrage advocate and patriot who did not allow herself to be limited by conventional attitudes and expectations or legal rights. The historical context of her accomplishments is what makes them so unique.

In the early 1900's it was unheard of for a woman to earn an architecture degree and actually practice the profession, to patent inventions, publish technical articles, become a Secret Service Agent, own, drive and repair an automobile, have an exceptional personal income, and own a business. In 1920, she became the first woman to be registered as an architect in Pennsylvania.

Only recently, women themselves, have been recording their own design history. Books such as Feminine Ingenuity by Anne L. Macdonald (1992), the Goddess in the Details exhibit and catalog by AWID (Association of Women Industrial Designers, 1994), and the Bard Graduate Center's exhibit and book Women Designers in the USA: 1900 - 2000, Pat Kirkham, editor, have documented the work of women designers and inventors.

These histories contain details of Anna's inventions of 1912 -1927. Her inventions reflect her concern for ergonomics, efficiency, ease of use and designing safer products; fundamentals of what would later be termed the profession of 'industrial design'.

Visiting the following pages will acquaint you with Anna's pioneering spirit and success; much of it achieved at a time before women had the right to vote. I am immensely grateful to my great-aunt Anna for her wisdom, tenacity and the legacy she has left for me to discover. My most sincere thanks to AWID for highlighting her record.

Nancy J. Perkins  FIDSA  AWID
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"There is much in this book to arm those concerned with confronting stereotypes and establishing more complex histories and representations of women. In 1903 Anna Keichline, the young girl who declared that she might devote her life to the 'industrial arts', shattered conventional understandings of adolescent female ambitions, and today Eva Zeisel shatters stereotypical expectations about ninety-four-year-old grandmothers by her continuing career as a designer.”

- Pat Kirkham & Lynne Walker (p.75)

Centre county fair's first prize "card table made of oak"

Book & Exhibit by the Bard Graduate Center, New York City, 15 Nov 2000 - 8 April 2001

ANN KEICHELNE.

Special to The Inquirer.

BELLEFONTE, Pa., Oct. 18—Such a liking has she taken to industrial art that Miss Anna Keichline, the fourteen-year-old daughter of John Keichline, a prominent attorney of this place, expects to make it her life study. She has just taken the first prize at the Centre county fair for a card table made of oak, and a walnut chest which she made with her own hands. They, in quality and finish, compare favorably with the work of a skilled mechanic. At her home here she has a workshop complete in every detail, and is in possession of the best outfit of carpenter implements to be found in the town. She goes to school, but every spare moment is put in her shop.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, 1903
After graduating from Bellefonte High School in 1906, Anna studied mechanical engineering at Penn State University for a year. She transferred to Cornell University to study architecture becoming the fifth woman to receive an architecture degree from the school. Anna was elected an officer of the junior class, was a member of the Drama Club, Raven & Serpent, the Women's Basketball Team, and Der Hexenkreis sorority which later became Mortar Board.
Women's Suffrage Advocate

Anna Keichline

March for Women's Suffrage, July 4, 1913

Undaunted by some disgruntled spectators or the risk of alienating potential clients, Anna is leading this 1913 March for Women's Suffrage in conjunction with Bellefonte's Fourth of July parade. The photo was taken by Anna's sister Daise from the Temple Court Building, 116 South Allegheny Street where Anna and her father shared an office.

Minutes of the Bellefonte Chapter D.A.R. meeting of October 1, 1914 state:

"The entertainment of the evening was given by Miss Anna Keichline - her topic was 'Colonial Architecture'. This paper was very interesting and enjoyed by all. It showed much thought in preparation. Miss Keichline is probably the only woman in central PA who has chosen 'architecture' as her vocation, & she is already meeting with considerable success & winning out in competition with men of old standing."

Below: Earliest professional projects included a 1912 patent for a space saving sink designed for apartment kitchens. Anna's first known architecture project was this schoolhouse in Milesburg (Central City), PA built in 1912.
During World War I, from June until the end of the war in 1918, Anna was a Special Agent in the Military Intelligence Division of the Army in Washington D.C. She volunteered for this service.

In a letter dated February 6, 1918 to Captain Harry A. Taylor of the Military Intelligence Division of the Army, Anna described her qualifications for the position:

“With reference to my history, past experiences, etc. - Bellefonte High School four years, graduated 1906, one year in Mechanical Engineering at Penn State, four years in Architecture at Cornell, office experience and six years independent practice in the general run of work in planning and construction. Am twenty-eight and physically somewhat stronger than the average.

Might add that I can operate and take care of a car.

The above would suggest a drafting or office job, but if you should deem it advisable to give me something more difficult, or as I wish to say more dangerous, I should much prefer it.

You have asked for my salary in order to rate me... last year my fees amounted to something over six thousand.”

In today’s terms, her fees were over $92,000 that year.

Anna’s attitude about serving the country is reflected in her 1918 resignation letter as a Secret Service Agent:

“I was pleased with your mention of your appreciation of my services, but... I feel that the appreciation should be all on my side - my having been given the opportunity to serve. I know of no other way to express this - than to say that I will bear my experience in mind, study when possible, so that should the occasion arise, I will have more to offer.”
In 1920, Anna became the first woman to be registered as an architect in Pennsylvania.

Pictured are her known architecture projects. At least thirteen more projects need to be verified and documented. In addition, her projects in Washington D.C., State College, Altoona and Centre Hall, PA have not yet been located.

Homes in Bellefonte, PA

Orthner Home & Office, Huntingdon, PA 1940  Blueprint & Detail  Cadillac Garage & Apartments, Bellefonte, PA, @1916  Plaza Theater, Bellefonte, 1925
At right: shown are a few of the watercolor renderings by Anna Keichline. This series has been masterfully reproduced as iri giclee prints by publishers Art Press of Los Gatos, CA. The renderings are the exact size of the originals and are printed on handmade Somerset Velvet 100% rag paper.

The prints can be purchased by contacting: AnnaKawid@earthlink.net or by calling 888.223.5211.

Your investment in these prints can serve as a reminder of Anna's pioneering spirit and success; much of it achieved before women had the right to vote.

A portion of the print sales proceeds will be donated to AWID (Association of Women Industrial Designers) for the advancement of its programs.
Patented Inventions

Anna Keichline

Building Block #1,653,771
Filed: 16 March 1926
Issued: 27 December 1927

“This unit is so designed, proportioned and measured as to lend itself to all construction details." The brick features reduced weight and cost, flexibility for finishing on site, and a hollow chamber for insulation. Technical articles about the 'K' brick were published in the June 1932 issue of The Clay Worker, and presented at the 1931 Annual Meeting of the American Ceramic Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

Anna explained the features of her 1926 Kitchen Construction patent:

“In Kitchen furnishing people seem to have been content to place one box upon another, install a few shelves and drawers and call it a kitchen cupboard or to ... carry out this same unstudied scheme with all other kitchen equipment.

In considering the large number of inconveniences we have hitherto accepted in the work of cooking and cleaning, in the storage of foods, this is most surely a step forward for a more convenient working arrangement."