

Women of GIA: A Portrait of Three Innovators

Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta

February 28, 2014



Since Robert and Beatrice Shipley formed GIA in 1931, the Institute has relied on the commitment and drive of its employees: No resource has enriched the Institute more than the men and women who walk its halls.

When GIA began, however, few could have anticipated the mark women would make on its future. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, only 22% of American women over the age of 10 worked outside the home. Of those, more than one-third were employed in "domestic and personal service." Even during the Great Depression, women were not expected to pursue employment in professional positions, or to stay in the workforce once married.

Bucking such trends since its beginnings, GIA has always welcomed and encouraged the contributions of women to advance gemology, whether in the lab, in business operations, or in publishing. In this way, the Institute has been ahead of the curve in cultivating the trailblazing aspirations and achievements of women.

Here we honor three women whose contributions ultimately changed the course of GIA's history.

BEATRICE SHIPLEY: THE ‘BACKBONE’ OF GIA



Beatrice Shipley (1888-1973); photo © GIA.

Robert Shipley may have ignited the spark that created GIA, but his dream could never have survived its first few years without the emotional, financial, and managerial support of his wife and business partner, Beatrice Shipley. Their chance meeting in 1928 at the Louvre in Paris led to a 43-year marriage and a revolutionary change in the field of gemology. Her background in management, education, and administration, as well as her fiscal acumen, helped the Institute get through the Depression years while her husband traveled around North America to spread interest in GIA's programs. An employee who worked during those difficult years said that Beatrice Shipley was “the backbone, the one that kept GIA going and made it a success.”

Beatrice Woodell Bell, a divorcée who was no stranger to hardship or practicality, worked as an administrator for the Episcopal Church and as dean of the exclusive Marlborough School for Girls in Los Angeles. Upon her marriage to Robert Shipley in 1930, she ran a small art gallery while her new husband developed his plans for a comprehensive gemological training program. Initially skeptical of this endeavor, she nonetheless threw her entire support behind her husband, closing her art gallery in 1932 to manage GIA's day-to-day affairs.

Working under the name “B.W. Bell” to disguise both her female identity and her connection to Robert Shipley, she implemented standards, protocols, and budgets, while creating and maintaining a professional business environment. During lean years, she kept payroll running and morale high, yet was never afraid to do the most basic tasks, even assembling and stapling course materials before they were mailed to students.

In addition to her office work, she gave speeches to women's groups on gems and jewelry. In one such presentation to the mothers of Hollywood stars such as Rosalind Russell, Gary Cooper, and Cesar Romero, called “Gems & Personalities,” Mrs. Shipley explained the properties of each gemstone and, based on physical appearance, paired each celebrity mother with a flattering gemstone. Talks such as these brought GIA to a

mainstream audience, attracting ever more attention to the Institute's gemological work.

Largely due to the Shipleys' efforts to establish a sister organization as a professional guild for jewelers, the American Gem Society (AGS) was established in 1934 with Mrs. Shipley serving as its chief administrator.

Beatrice Shipley retired from both GIA and AGS in 1943, eventually serving as president of the Los Angeles Girl Scout Council. Her devotion to the advancement of gemology never wavered, however, and she remained an advisor to her husband on Institute matters throughout her life. After her death in 1973, she was lauded throughout the gemological industry as a pioneer in the field, recognition that was hard-earned and well deserved.

EUNICE ROBINSON MILES: "MOTHER GIA"



Eunice Miles (1917-1997); photo © GIA.

Thanks to her grandmother's gemstone and mineral collection, Eunice Miles (née Robinson) developed a passion for gems as a child. It was a natural progression for her to pursue a degree and career in the field of gemology. In 1953, Miles made history as the first female gemologist at GIA's laboratory. Her time at the Institute yielded groundbreaking research and dynamic lectures that influenced students and colleagues alike, earning her the nickname "Mother GIA" from no less than Richard Liddicoat.

The only female student in her classes at MIT, Miles earned a Certified Gemologist (C.G.) diploma from GIA in 1944. She lectured extensively on gemological topics, even appearing on television, before joining the lab in New York, where she remained for 15 years. While Miles quickly earned the respect of her co-workers when they saw her abilities in action, dealers and other members of the trade proved more challenging. She was mistaken for the lab's receptionist, and was at one point told, "You are a woman! What can a woman know about diamonds?"

A great deal, it seems. Miles later pioneered research into diamond-coating techniques

and identification. Her work was recognized by the U.S. Department of Mines, and was ultimately used by the FBI to apprehend a dealer in fraudulently coated diamonds. Her initials on diamond grading reports upheld the Institute's reputation for excellence.

In addition to her work in the lab, Miles served the Institute as a lecturer, instructor, and career counselor, creating rapport with students and building relationships that lasted decades. Upon her retirement, she became GIA's official historian, a position she held until her death in 1997.

By the time of her retirement, Eunice Miles' influence on the field of gemology was widely recognized. She was the recipient of numerous awards, including an Honorary Fellowship from the Gemmological Association of Great Britain, the Hall of Fame Award from the Women's Jewelry Association, and the International Society of Appraisers Gems and Jewelry Industry Service Award. In 1986, the Association of Women Gemologists named their Lifetime Achievement Award after Miles, the inaugural recipient. Her gemological work still influences students today, both in the field of research and through the GIA scholarship established in her name, awarded to Institute students annually since 1989.

ALICE KELLER: "STALWART GUARDIAN OF *G&G*"



Alice Keller; photo by Eric Welch, © GIA.

Readers of today's *Gems & Gemology* can see the influence of Alice Keller on every page.

Part of Robert Shipley's vision for enhancing GIA's reach and impact was a professional journal. *G&G* was established in January 1934 as a repository of gemological research for both gemologists and the retail jewel industry. From 1934 to 1980, *G&G* operated under the guidance of two editors-in-chiefs: Robert Shipley and Richard Liddicoat. Over the decades, the journal kept the same look and format it had at its inception. The publication was 5.5 x 8.5 inches, printed primarily in black and white with few photos. *G&G* published groundbreaking research and content, but with a modest appearance

and limited readership, the journal needed an overhaul to get the attention of the gemological community at large.

In 1980, in anticipation of the Institute's 50th anniversary, Liddicoat picked Alice Keller, an editor with a decade of experience in professional journals, to assume the position of managing editor and to overhaul GIA's flagship publication. Under Keller's leadership, *G&G* changed to an 8.5 x 11 inch, full-color publication. She established the peer-review system and cultivated an editorial review board that included some of the world's most prominent gemologists and researchers.

Her efforts culminated in widely read, award-winning articles, and greater attention to gemology as a science. *G&G* itself won 34 awards under Keller's leadership. She also oversaw the publication of the three-edition *Gems & Gemology in Review* series, which reprinted decades of articles on synthetic, treated, and colored diamonds, respectively, in book form.

After 22 years of service, she became editor-in-chief of *G&G* in 2002, continuing to move the journal into the electronic age with the same level of excellence and attention to detail she devoted to the print version. In addition to her editorial duties, she co-chaired GIA's International Gemological Symposiums in 1999, 2006 and 2011. She was called the "stalwart guardian of *G&G*" by GIA's then-CEO in 2010.

One of the Institute's Staff of the Year recipients in 1991, Keller earned many accolades outside of GIA for her work, including an Excellence in Publishing award from the Women's Jewelry Association and an Honorary Lifetime Membership from the American Gem Trade Association, both in 1998. She received GIA's highest honor, the Richard T. Liddicoat Award for Distinguished Service, in 2003. She retired in 2011 but remains *G&G*'s editor-in-chief emeritus.

Beatrice Shipley, Eunice Miles and Alice Keller epitomized the ideals set forth by GIA, but they are by no means unique in the Institute. These three women changed the course of GIA, extending its global reach and setting the stage for the thousands of other women—and men—who have come through its doors as both employees and students. In the manner of Shipley, Miles, and Keller, the people of GIA continue to change the face of gemology, in 14 countries around the world, well into the 21st century.

> **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

MORE ON GIA HISTORY



Explore a comprehensive timeline detailing GIA's scientific and educational development since 1931.

[LEARN MORE](#)

RELATED ARTICLES

- [Celebrating 75 Years of Gems & Gemology \(2009\)](#)

GIA STORE: LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP



[LEARN MORE](#)



Join Us at
Converge

[REGISTER NOW](#)



Discover
A New Era in
Retail Training

[LEARN MORE](#)



Explore GIA
Laboratory
Promotional Offers

[LEARN MORE](#)



Shop the
GIA Store

[SHOP NOW](#)



[Gem Encyclopedia](#)

[Education](#)

[Research & News](#)

[Analysis & Grading](#)

[About GIA](#)

[GIA Instruments](#)

[Retailer Support](#)

[GIA Store](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Pressroom](#)

[GemKids Website](#)

[Student Consumer
Information](#)

[Gem & Jewelry Careers](#)

[Careers at GIA](#)

[Locations](#)

[Report A Concern](#)

[Email Preferences](#)

[Cookie Preferences](#)

[Download the New GIA App](#)

[Follow Us](#)

[Alumni Collective](#)[Support GIA](#)[Quality Assurance
Benchmarks for Jewelry](#)[Contact Us](#)[Developer APIs](#)[4Cs of Diamond Quality](#) [Change Language: English \(US\) ▾](#)[Copyrights and Trademarks](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Cookie Notice](#) | [Ethics and Compliance](#) | [Transparency in Coverage Rule](#) | [About This Site](#)

© 2002 - 2025 Gemological Institute of America Inc. GIA is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. All rights reserved.