

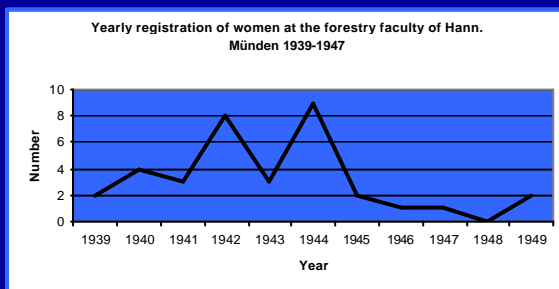
# Forestry – a men's world?



## History of the first female forestry students at the forestry faculty of Hannoversch Münden 1939-1945

### Introduction

In autumn 1939 two women registered as students of forestry in the "Album of the Royal Academy of Forestry in Münden". More followed, so that in 1945 more than 30 women had been enrolled then. At other forestry faculties barely a woman matriculated at that time. In contrast, between 1945 and the early 1970s entries of only 16 further female students can be found. None of these women became forest officers, even though two of them became forestry professors.



### Method

We interviewed seven of these earliest female forestry students regarding their occupational biography. From these interviews and the complementing study of archive material we learned more about the background and the motivation of the women.

### Results

#### The background of the women

The majority of these pioneering females in forestry came from traditionally educated, intellectual middle-class families with either a rural background in forestry or the small-town background of Hann. Münden. The motives of these middle class families to send their daughters to the male attributed forest science are understandable. On the one hand it was important that the young women got a good education according to their social status. On the other hand the major university towns were much too dangerous during wartime. Therefore the choice of forestry as study programme was rather a choice of the comparatively safe location Hann. Münden. It is no coincidence that the women either had a forestal background - as their fathers and brothers had studied there - or came from Hann. Münden themselves. The latter took the extra advantage of living cost-efficient at their parents place.

#### The point of view of the staff of the forestry faculty in Hann. Münden

The forestry apprenticeship was traditionally connected to the military service. Therefore almost all male students and scientists went to war. The female students were a stroke of luck to the forestry faculty of Hann. Münden. Without the women the faculty probably would have been closed down. At that time this sudden "welcome" of women was common in all German universities. Besides, the women could be employed for research work. They were available for longer periods and - in contrast to the few remaining (mostly seriously injured) male students - they were able to do all kinds of (physical exhausting) research work.

#### The point of view of the state forestry administration in Germany

The state forestry administration was not interested in qualifying and consecutively employing these female forestry alumni. Hence three additions regarding women were made to the apprenticeship regulations. Women were allowed to work in forestry sciences only. Exceptionally, woman could assist in forest valuation. Women could not become forest officers as military service was a mandatory part of the obligatory traineeship at the state forestry administration.

#### The point of view of the women themselves

Only two of the interviewed women chose forestry studies purposely. Forestry studies were merely an emergency solution during chaos of the wartime. Some women originally intended to work in "womanlike" professions like botany or medicine, but the main part seems to have had no idea what to do in a time where the "normal" way of live (i.e. marriage) was suspended temporarily. An other motivation to start studying was the "Arbeitsdienst" (fatigue duty) which was mandatory for all unoccupied women that were able to work. In the worst case the woman had to do physically hard work in the ordnance factory. Studying was a better alternative.

Therefore it is understandable, that none of the women intended to be a forest officer later on. On the contrary, it was "natural" to them that forestal carriers were reserved for men.

*"We not even thought of becoming forestry professionals"*

*(„Uns wäre im Traume nicht eingefallen Forstmeister werden zu können“ Citation of an interviewee)*

#### The working life of the female pioneers

Some of the women quit their studies without certificate in order to do war service as nurses or alike. During and shortly after the war the women worked as scientists at one of the forestry institutes in Hann. Münden or in forestry offices as administration secretaries. With the return of the men at the end of the war most of the female foresters disappeared silently. Almost all of them married - predominantly foresters - and became housewives. Two women became forestry professors - more or less accidentally because of their specialisation on exotic topics.



Forestry as it was seen in the 1930ies

Source: Waldarbeitschule Hölzfel/ Forstliches Ausbildungszentrum Matorch Ein Erfolgsmodell wird berlegt (2001) Forstregion Freiburg Forstliches Ausbildungszentrum Matorch/ Hfmg 18:16

### Timeline

**1921:**  
first woman as guest auditor at the forestry faculty of Eberswalde

**1923:**  
first women as guest auditors in Hann. Münden and Tharandt

**1923/ 1924:**  
first woman with the status "forestry student - second rank" (Studierende zweiter Ordnung) in Tharandt matriculated

**1932:**  
state of affairs: no female forestry students any more

**1939 till 1945:**  
more than 30 women matriculated in Hann. Münden  
But no female forest officer

**1945 till the beginning of the 1970s:**  
just about 16 more female forestry students - still no female forest officer

**1970s:**  
slow- going increase of female forestry students

**1973:**  
first woman participates the obligatory traineeship of the state forestry administration

**Middle of the 1970s:**  
first female forest officers in Germany

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