Behind the Scenes in the Sophia Smith Collection

What happens once a set of papers arrives at the Sophia Smith Collection? What steps are taken to ready collections for research use?

Much of this preparatory work is known as "processing" and is carried out by "manuscripts processors." It takes place anywhere there is a flat surface large enough to accommodate it. First, having examined all donor records to determine if access restrictions have been stipulated, the processor goes through the collection to locate relevant documents. Even when collections are initially unrestricted, processors may uncover potentially sensitive material overlooked by the donor, as happened recently with client case records found in the papers of a social worker.

The bulk of the work of processing involves identifying the "intelecual order" of the materials (usually the creator's filing system) and maintaining or restoring that order. If the papers arrive in no apparent order, the processor must devise a logical system that will make sense to researchers. An individual's papers might be arranged into series that include, but are not limited to, biographical material, correspondence, writings, professional activities, photographs, and memorabilia. Material in organization records often falls into such categories as administration, annual meetings, public relations, programs, publications, and subject files. The processor then writes a finding aid, which provides a folder-level description of the contents of the entire collection, as well as a general overview and information on how most effectively to use the collection. At this point, a collection-level record is prepared for the Five-Colleges Libraries' on-line catalog. The final step involves supervising student assistants, who carry out preservation measures, place the collection in clearly labeled acid-free folders and boxes, and, finally, put it in its designated location in the stacks.

The rewards of processing are many. Among them are the joy of discovering something wonderful about a donor, such as her sense of humor, and the satisfaction of introducing scholars to a collection's treasures and knowing that the historical record will be enriched as a result. Processing ensures that irreplaceable, one-of-a-kind documents are properly cared for, that issues of privacy and confidentiality are addressed, and that researchers can quickly and easily locate material that is relevant to their work. Although processing is a meticulous, laborious, and time-consuming endeavor (we count on 25 hours of work per foot of materials), it is now more efficient thanks to Amy Hague, Margaret Jessup and Burd Schlessinger, who recently wrote A Guide to Processing Collections in the Sophia Smith Collection.

Generous funding provided by President Ruth Simmons, by donors, and by the National Endowment for the Humanities has allowed the SSC to embark on a more aggressive processing program. Margaret Jessup and Marla Miller have finished work on the papers of civil rights advocate and federal judge Constance Baker Motley, and those of political activist and social reformer Frances Fox Piven. Burd Schlessinger has processed the records of the Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund for University Women, a philanthropic organization that regularly underwrites conferences, workshops, and educational projects that further learning and employment opportunities for women. She also organized the records of the Valley Women's Union, a Northampton-based women's organization founded in 1970 to address, at the grassroots level, a wide range of problems particular to women. Burd also supervised student intern Monique Daviau in processing the papers of social work educator, Lydia Rapoport. Amy Hague processed the recently acquired papers of suffragist Portia Willis FitzGerald. Recent purchases have allowed us to double the size of the Temperance Collection, and Kathleen Nutter has been hard at work incorporating the acquisitions and revising the finding aid.

— Burd Schlessinger
Nearly 300 participants from 83 countries kept an army of translators busy. Participants on the docked clipper ship I called home included women from Palestine, Kazakhstan, India, Switzerland, Norway, Poland, Denmark, and Australia.

It was exciting to learn of the work of these information activists who use all imaginable tools and techniques to forward women’s interests. Some use direct interaction, taking puppet shows and plays about issues such as birth control to remote locations lacking libraries, electricity, or even a written language. Others, like the International Women’s Tribune Centre, run global electronic networks that have been phenomenally successful in using the Internet to monitor governments’ records on women’s issues and to alert feminists worldwide to exert pressure for positive change. What a treat it was to get better acquainted with SSC donors, Anne S. Walker and Vicki Semler of the IWTC, and women’s movement photographer Dori Jacobson.

I used the forum to distribute SSC publications, give an update on the Collection, and to participate in a session on women’s biography. A high point was the tour of the IIAV’s new quarters in a handsomely converted domed church. The energetic and multilingual 30-member staff of this venerable institution (founded in 1932) did a masterful job of hosting the conference. The IIAV has also created a lasting legacy with Mapping the World of Women’s Information Services, a descriptive directory which you can check out on its website at www.iiaw.nl/mapping-the-world. — Sherrill Redmon

**SOPHIA SMITH COLLECTION**
*Women's History Manuscripts at Smith College*

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*The Sophia Smith Collection is an internationally recognized repository of manuscripts, photographs, periodicals, and other primary sources in women's history. It was founded in 1942 to be the College library's distinctive contribution to Smith's mission of educating women. Named to honor the founder of Smith College, today, the Collection consists of nearly 6,000 linear feet of material documenting the historical experience of women in the United States and abroad from the colonial era to the present.*

**IMPOSING EVIDENCE is published when the spirit moves us.**

Visit our Web site or contact us by mail for more information about the Sophia Smith Collection and to learn how to help support our mission.

Please recycle this newsletter by passing it on to a friend or donating it to a school or library where it might be read with interest.

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The Whys and Wherefores of Collecting

When the Sophia Smith Collection was founded in 1942, it was one of a very few institutions collecting women’s history manuscripts. In those early years, the staff, eager to preserve the record of women’s contributions to the world, collected a little bit of everything and rarely turned down an offer of material.

More than half a century later, the SSC is faced with an embarrassment of riches. The dramatic expansion of women into all fields of endeavor, combined with technological advances (such as photocopiers and computers) that have made easy the production, distribution, and reproduction of documents, means that many more women are producing and saving many more materials. Fortunately, we are no longer “the only game in town.” Today, many repositories are eager to document how women have played an integral part in our shared history. A growing number of them even focus specifically on women.

Because there is so much to collect and we have so many partners in the endeavor, the SSC must be much more selective than previously about what we commit to preserve. Collections come to the SSC either as the result of an intentional solicitation by SSC staff or because a donor decides to offer a collection to us. In either case, we evaluate potential additions with a set of goals in mind.

These days our collecting efforts are generally concentrated in the subject areas for which the SSC is already internationally known such as birth control, women’s rights, feminism, social reform, and the international work of U.S. women. As we consider new collections we give preference to papers of individual women whose work has been primarily for or about women and organizations that are woman-centered.

In recent years a major priority has been to increase our holdings relating to women who are members of groups that have been underrepresented in the historical record by virtue of their race, class, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. Partly in response to the demands of researchers who wish to study these groups, most of our work in identifying and approaching new donors is centered on this objective.

We give special consideration to the papers of Smith alumnae. One of Smith’s greatest strengths has always been its active and accomplished alumnae. They have served as an invaluable pipeline for the SSC, through the donation of their own or their family papers and through their help making contacts with their distinguished friends and colleagues. More than one third of the SSC’s nearly 400 collections came as a result of a Smith association. While this connection has helped to make the SSC what it is today, it has also meant that the Collection’s holdings reflect the demographics of the alumnae rather than the more diverse population-at-large.

Ideas for donors to approach come from anywhere and everywhere. We pursue leads suggested by our reading and attendance at lectures, as well as by discussions with faculty, students, donors, friends, researchers, and colleagues. Research on the woman or organization in question is followed by a letter inviting placement in the SSC and, if we succeed, by negotiations about transfer. Sometimes materials start arriving almost immediately. Sometimes we approach someone in mid-career and twenty-five or more years pass before a first transfer is made.

Two or three times a month, we receive a letter or phone call out of the blue offering papers. In these cases we request general information about the papers and their creator(s) to help us determine the size and strengths of the collection and assess its historical value. Then, twice a year, we hold a “Collecting Summit” where the staff reviews the various offers we have received and evaluates their appropriateness to our collecting priorities. We have been accepting about one third of the collections offered in this way.

It is always difficult to turn down the papers of a woman who is clearly talented, dedicated, and committed — particularly if she is a Smith alumna. But, no single institution with limited staff and space could possibly do justice to all of women’s achievements. It is necessary, therefore, for us to focus our collecting efforts and carefully evaluate every potential addition to the SSC. The good news is that there are now so many repositories interested in documenting women’s many achievements, that we can feel sure deserving papers will find an appropriate home somewhere, if not at Smith.

— Maida Goodwin

"The prettiest suffragette in New York state," Portia Willis, 1915. (From the newly processed FitzGerald Papers)
Collecting in the Cold War Era

The Cold War period of American history is remembered now as a time of great fear — fear of atomic attack by the then Soviet Union and of Communism at home. It was the era of "duck-and-cover" bomb drills at school and heightened government surveillance of anyone remotely connected to radical, even liberal politics. At times, the surveillance spilled into the nation's college classrooms and threatened the principle of academic freedom. Amidst all this fear and suspicion, America was enjoying one of its most prosperous periods as memories of the Great Depression faded with a booming economy. Pushed out of the workforce, American women were marrying at a younger age and bearing more children as society sought a sense of stability after a half century of war and depression. More than just socially constrictive, especially for those white, middle-class women who would later find out they suffered from what Betty Friedan called The Feminine Mystique, the Cold War era was politically dangerous for women as well. Both national political parties abolished their Women's Divisions which had been founded in the heady days of the 1920s, following the passage of the women's suffrage amendment. Even the word "feminism" became suspect in an age when all "isms" seemed to threaten national security.

Against this backdrop of social and political oppression, it is striking that Margaret Grierson assembled in the Sophia Smith Collection one of the most significant collections of primary sources related to the activities of women. During the height of the Cold War, from 1945 until Grierson's retirement in 1965, a total of 105 collections came to the SSC, many of which remain to this day the most in demand by researchers. It was during these years that the records of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and papers of its founder, Margaret Sanger, began to be transferred to the SSC. So too did the Garrison Family Papers arrive, documenting the women's rights movement from the Seneca Falls convention of 1848 through passage in 1920 of the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote. Long before women's history was recognized as a legitimate realm of study, Grierson was gathering historical material for an unforeseen but much-desired future.

"An exceedingly interesting" addition to the SSC was the papers of Helen Tufts Bailie, who, according to Grierson's 1949 annual report, "led the protest from within the ranks against the official stand of the Daughters of the American Revolution" as a result of the "red menace" scare of the mid-1920s. Twenty-five years later, in the midst of an even greater "red scare," Grierson ensured that the record of Bailie's fight against the earlier red-baiting would be preserved. When Bailie sent her journals in 1954, they provided proof "of an independent and courageous woman's concern for old principles in new applications to succeeding problems of contemporary American life." Grierson's 1954 annual report told her readers that here, within the SSC, could be found not only the evidence of women's struggles in the past but inspiration, even guidance for the struggles ahead. Upon learning that Bailie's 1956 novel, Darling Daughter, was being boycotted because of its condemnation of the DAR and the red scare mentality in general, Grierson wrote words of encouragement: "It will not ever be so, and I am sure that your story will be exceedingly popular when copies are no longer available." But there will always be at least one copy of Darling Daughter available — the copy Bailie sent to the SSC. There, safe from boycotts or inquisitions, Bailie's papers — along with the papers of dozens of other women and the organizations they founded — would await a freer political climate and a new generation of scholars willing to "bring to light" the contributions of women in American history. — Kathleen Banks Nutter

Pamphlet by Helen Tufts Bailie, 1929. (Bailie Papers)
Snapshots

In April, the Sophia Smith Collection co-sponsored a Northampton Center for the Arts showing of *Kate Millett, Sculptor: the First 38 Years*, a retrospective of the writer and feminist's artwork organized by the University of Maryland Baltimore County. As part of the festivities, Kate gave a gallery talk and a reading with Shulamith Firestone. In June, Kate gave the SSC the records of The Farm, the colony for women artists she started near Poughkeepsie, NY, with royalty money from her book *Sexual Politics*.

Helen Gurley Brown has also been sighted lately around campus, having made a visit in June. Recently retired from her position as editor-in-chief of *Cosmopolitan*, Helen now oversees *Cosmo*’s international publications. She had dinner with faculty at the President’s house and toured the campus.

*Vida Grayson* added two more oral history interviews to the Social Work Archives at the School for Social Work’s 80th birthday celebration in July. SSW alumna *Louise Silbert Bandler* chose that occasion to deliver her long-awaited personal papers.

In honor of the 150th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention Amy Hague and Kathleen Banks Nutter created the exhibit, *‘The Great Work Before Us’: The Legacy of Seneca Falls*. On display through January 1999 are documents, drawings, and photographs selected from the SSC. In September, we took advantage of the wealth of talented young women’s historians on our staff to open the exhibit with the panel, *The Work Continues: Recent Scholarship in U.S. Women’s History*. Marla Miller, Kathleen Banks Nutter and Kate Weigand spoke about their research on women, labor, and radical politics.

October saw extensive use of SSC materials in the documentaries *Margaret Sanger and Africans in America* on PBS.

In November, the SSC hosted a publication party for *Betty Friedan And the Making of THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE* by Smith College professor of History and American Studies Daniel Horowitz. Partially researched in the Sophia Smith Collection and Smith College Archives, the book traces the roots of Friedan’s landmark work. The event was taped for broadcast in December on C-SPAN2.

This year, the Sophia Smith Collection became a co-sponsor of the Valley Women’s History Collaborative. This is an exciting grassroots effort to document the history of the Pioneer Valley’s lesbian community and the 1970s era women’s movement. Longtime Valley resident Kaymerton Raymond has been presenting a slide show on both these subjects for several years and is embarking on an ambitious oral history project.

Recent SSC acquisitions include the records of *Informed Homebirth/Informed Birth and Parenting* donated by midwife Rahima Baldwin Danya; and the papers of *International Herald Tribune* columnist Pauline Avery Crawford. We have also received substantial additions to the records of *Ms.* magazine, and the papers of cancer researcher Jane C. Wright and Northampton peace activist Frances Crowe.

In addition to Kate Millett’s donation, the SSC has received a number of new materials from friends and acquaintances of Phyllis Birkby. Sidney Abbott and Jan Roby gave us first installments of their papers and Ellen Perry Berkeley, a co-founder with Birkby of the Women’s School of Planning and Architecture, more than doubled our holdings of records of the School by adding the materials she had saved to those we received with the Birkby Papers. Anne MacKay has sent her own and other women’s history publications.

Those of you who have read Martha Cooley’s 1998 novel *The Archivist* may be interested to know that Emily Hale, recipient of the T.S. Eliot letters central to the plot of the novel, was herself a volunteer archivist. Hale worked with Margaret Grierson in the 1950s and 60s using her connections to solicit papers for the SSC. Among the most important collections Emily Hale helped to bring in were the papers of author Nancy Hale and the Hale Family. — Jennifer Grisom
Gems from the Stacks

One of the collections being processed as part of our NEH-funded project, Agents of Social Change, is the papers of civil rights lawyer Mary Metlay Kaufman. This letter was written by one of Kaufman's clients, Claudia Jones, from prison. Jones was one of seventeen Communist Party members arrested and charged under the Smith Act with "conspiring to teach and advocate the forcible overthrow of the Government" in U.S. v. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, et. al. Kaufman defended Communist Party-U.S.A. members in five Smith Act trials and appeals in New York, St. Louis, and Denver, from 1949 to the early 1960s. Limited to a single sheet of paper per letter, Jones seems to have conserved space by writing in a shorthand style.

—Margaret Jessup

August 28, 1955
Alderson Prison, W.V.

My dear Mary:
I too, as ever, was happy to see you when you came so quickly in response to my call. You have, you know, a faculty for sensibility that makes you more than an advocate of law but of human kindness. Some day I'll pen a poem to you and yours which will put this much more lyrically, dear Mary....

Read with interest Dean Harry Griswold's defense of lawyers who use the Fifth Amendment or merely stand on their perogative not to be robbed of their constitutional rights of freedom of association and beliefs, etc. It is an augury of sanity as well, I think, of the recent magazine article written by John Egan, editorial writer of the

Times, who called for an examination (note, with the 'cold war's recession and relaxation of international tensions') of the dangerous invades to individual liberty and constitutional freedoms. No doubt tenacious vigilance will be required to assure the turn, however....

Two days ago it was seven months since we were incarcerated. From my mountain haunt I can see how much has happened and how ever-present change wreaks its 'magic' — born of the people's will for peace, liberty and bread. My shepherds of clay grow in beauty and I think often as I pursue them, how the Kingpins seek to juggle pawns like clay I mold from. I started on the pawns today and they will be more beautifully formed — if rough-hewn! I must not forget to tell you news of my victory in winning a ribbon from judges in the W. Va. State Fair for my placemats — one of which you saw me hemstitching at the hospital — at the time of your visit! ... Of course I get quite a kick out of this — even greater although equally pleasurable as the occasion when this cottage won on Independence Day a prize for originality in the Davy Crockett costumes I (with others) helped to fashion!

This morning catching up on my magazine reading following the continued fight around desegregation schools and right to vote issue I see where the blatant use of unconstitutional force and violence brutally claimed another victim — 60 year old Lazar Smith, Negro farm owner of Mississippi! When add to this the cynical restudying of numerous Southern state legislatures of their adherence to the Supreme Court decision, the founding of new 'white supremacy' councils you will know share my rebellion and revolt of mind and heart. Sanity creeps thru the vote of Negro & white Methodist women 80 strong for an end to their 'Negro division.'

Write when you can and as always, warmest regards to your family & our other mutual friends. Yours sincerely, Claudia Jones

Sixteen of the New York Smith Act de fendants as pictured on the poster "We Appeal to You For a Fair Trial" issued by the Self-Defense Committee of the 17 Smith Act Victims, 1952. The poster reads in part, "...we are 17 Communist defendants framed last June by politicians bent on gagging anybody who opposes their bankrupt war policies." Claudia Jones is second from the left in the first row. (Kaufman Papers)
Donor News

This year, as always, our community of donors continues to shape the world in which we live. We are pleased to highlight the recent activities of a few of them, and look forward to hearing news from others.

Anti-nuclear activist Dr. Helen Caldicott continues to speak out on the threat of nuclear power; in addition to lectures across the country, she recently convened a symposium in New York where she went toe-to-toe with spokespersons from the nuclear industry. Dr. Caldicott chronicles her family life, her awakening to feminism, the international arms race, the rewards of activism, and the founding of Physicians for Social Responsibility in her recently published autobiography A Desperate Passion (Norton, 1996). Gloria Steinem continues to serve as a Board Member for the Ms. Foundation for Women, the National Women's Political Caucus, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women, and to write and speak on issues critical to women, perhaps most notably in a celebrated New York Times editorial that catalyzed debate over feminist reaction to the Clinton-Lewinsky affair. We are pleased to report, too, that Gloria has joined the Smith College Board of Trustees.

Congresswoman Patsy T. Mink (D-Hawaii) continues to advocate for causes of interest to us all. Representative Mink announced this year (together with Betty Reiser of SHARE, or Self Help for Women with Breast or Ovarian Cancer) the collection of more than 15,000 petition signatures supporting H.R. 953. The bill allocates $90 million for Ovarian Cancer Research; launches a research initiative at the National Cancer Institutes; and establishes a public program to distribute comprehensive information concerning ovarian cancer.

The Family Planning Council of Western Massachusetts, has chosen a new name — Tapestry Health Systems, Inc. — to reflect more accurately the panoply of services it provides.

Several of our donors have published new work in the past year. Look for Constance Baker Motley's autobiography, Equal Justice Under Law (Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1998), tracing the trajectory of her own life together with the trajectory of racial integration from the 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson decision to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Political scientist and activist

(continued on next page)

Heartfelt thanks to these special friends of the SSC who made generous monetary contributions in 1998:

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Dr. Helen Caldicott and Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament Executive Director Diane Aronson, 1984. Photo by Olive Pierce. (WAND Records)

Please add the following names to the SSC mailing list:

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Make check payable to: SOPHIA SMITH COLLECTION
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Frances Fox Piven has published *The Breaking of the American Social Compact* (New Press, 1997), a collection of scholarly essays exploring the gradual dismantling of the “tacit compact between labor and capital” as business leaders, citing (dishonestly, the authors argue) the globalization of the market, cut wages and benefits while slashing public welfare programs. Distinguished scholar and mystery writer Carolyn Heilbrun — a.k.a. Amanda Cross, who just published *The Puzzled Heart* (Ballantine, 1998) the 12th mystery featuring scholar-sleuth Kate Fansler — has also given us *The Last Gift of Time: Life Beyond Sixty* (Dial Press, 1997), a collection of contemplations on the unexpected rewards of aging. Retired *Cosmopolitan* editor-in-chief Helen Gurley Brown has published *The Writer’s Rules: The Power of Positive Prose—How to Create it and Get it Published* (Morrow, 1998).

The Collection lost several of our good friends and donors over the past year: actor and playwright Helen Bragdon, international relations specialist Dorothy Fosdick, journalist Helen Kirkpatrick Milbank, cardiologist and medical researcher Caroline Bedell Thomas, anthropologist Barbara Roll, and jurist Hilda Schwartz. They will be missed.

This year has also witnessed the demise of two landmark institutions critical to the feminist movement of the 1970s, 80s and 90s. The Women’s Action Alliance, which since 1971 has fulfilled its mission of creating innovative program models to effect positive change in the lives of women and girls, has closed its doors. The Ms. Foundation for Education and Communication (not to be confused with the Ms. Foundation for Women, a separate organization) has likewise ceased operations.

— Marla Miller

Sophia Smith Collection
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