New Funding Programs for Research

THREE NEW PROGRAMS to provide support for research in the Sophia Smith Collection and the Smith College Archives were initiated in 1999. The Margaret Storrs Grierson Scholars-in-Residence Program, the Caroline D. Bain Fellowship, and the Travel-to-Collections Fund offer an opportunity for scholars who might otherwise be unable to afford a research trip to discover and make use of our resources in a variety of exciting projects. It is fitting that one of the new programs bears the name of SSC founder and longtime College Archivist, Margaret Grierson. While she went out of her way to avoid public recognition of her achievements, she was thrilled to do whatever she could to promote use of the collections she had gathered and cared for.

Grierson Scholars-in-Residence are awarded stipends of $2,500 (intended to support visits of four to six weeks) or $5,000 (for visits of two to three months). Faculty members, independent scholars, and graduate students whose research interests would be significantly advanced by extended research in our holdings are all welcome to apply. Three of our current crop of successful applicants have made research visits this summer. Nicole Van Os, Leiden University, The Netherlands, examined the papers of Ruth Woodward, Florence Billings, and the Pearce Family; and records of the International Alliance of Women, among other collections. Her dissertation research is on the experiences of women in the Ottoman Empire during World War I, “Their Part in the Struggle: Ottoman Women, their Nation and State.” For her dissertation, tentatively titled “Writing the Life of an Icon: Harriet Tubman,” Kate Larson, University of New Hampshire, used the Garrison Family Papers. Mary Ann FitzWilson, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Missouri, looked at materials in the Smith College Archives and the papers of Mary van Kleeck in the SSC for her dissertation, “Innocents Lost: University Sex Surveys of the 1920s.” Slated to visit early in 2000, Sara Dubow, Brown University, will conduct research in the Planned Parenthood Federation of America Records, among other collections, for her dissertation, “Ourselves Unborn: Fetal Meanings in Modern America.”

According to Mary Ann FitzWilson, the Grierson award “gave me the opportunity to examine fully and over a lengthy stay the abundant resources at Smith College. The fellowship, along with the excellent and helpful staff, made my visit to Northampton an especially wonderful and rewarding experience.”

The first Bain Fellowship will be awarded in the spring of 2000. Established through the generosity of Caroline Dwight Bain (Smith ’44), the fellowship consists of a stipend of $2,500 to support four to six weeks of research in the SSC.

The Travel-to-Collections Fund, available on an ad hoc basis, is designed to provide smaller amounts of money to offset expenses of short-term trips to Northampton. Researchers already engaged in a study that would benefit from access to the holdings at Smith College or doctoral candidates at the pre-proposal stage are especially encouraged to apply. This year’s recipients included eight scholars so far (funds are still available), researching topics as diverse as “The Domestic War Work of the National Association of Colored Women in WWI,” “The Specter of Salem in American Culture,” and “The Rise of the Birth Control Clinic in the U.S. and England.”

For more information about application procedures, contact Sherrill Reddin (SSC) or Nanci Young (College Archives).

—Amy Hague
Greetings from the Head of the Sophia Smith Collection

In the year since our last newsletter we have seen imposing evidence that the Sophia Smith Collection has generous friends and faithful supporters. We learned the full extent of Margaret Grierson’s posthumous generosity—not to mention her impressive record as a money manager—in January when word came that her estate provided very handsome sums to support the work of the SSC and the College Archives. It was a pleasure to name our new joint research support program for our founding director. Margaret refused to let us honor her in her lifetime, but even she knew better than to think she could prevent it once she was no longer around to stop us. Simple justice demands that we honor Margaret’s singular contribution to women’s history and our abiding affection for her makes that a great pleasure.

More good news came in the form of a commitment from the Provost to help us expand our processing program. Special funding for the current fiscal year will allow us to make ready for research several collections that are difficult to access in their current condition and much in demand. Making collections available as soon as possible following their acquisition is the goal of every repository, but keeping up with annual growth in an era of dramatically expanding collecting opportunities can be a challenge.

We would be remiss if we didn’t express our gratitude to our friends in the Office of Advancement for their efforts over the next few years to secure additional sources of support for the Collection. We thank you, too, in advance for doing what you can to help support women’s history through a gift to the SSC.

A comprehensive, yearlong review of the SSC and CA’s joint reference program led to some important improvements. Last winter, with coaching from Kathleen Chatwood, Smith’s Director of Training and Development for Human Resources, we undertook a customer survey and then employed a team approach to implementing its findings. The result has been our decision to add four more hours to the weekly schedule. In September, we began staying open until 9pm on Wednesday nights during term. Other changes addressed the respondents’ requests for increased photocopying, fewer forms, clearer signage, and a direct entrance to Alumnae Gym.

—Sherrill Redmon

Detroit, August 28th 1930. From papers received this year from Ann Burlah Timpson, a.k.a. “The Red Flame.” A.B.T. is in the front row, second from the right. Photographer unknown.

SOPHIA SMITH COLLECTION
Women’s History Manuscripts at Smith College

Smith College • Northampton, MA 01063

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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.

IMPOSSIBLE EVIDENCE (ISSN 1524-9972) is published when the spirit moves us.

Visit our website 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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Since October 1997 the staff of SSC’s Agents of Social Change Project have been working hard to provide access to selected collections of twentieth century women activists and organizations. Six of the eight collections are now open to research: the papers of Constance Baker Motley, Dorothy Kenyon, Mary Metlay Kaufman, Frances Fox Piven, and Gloria Steinem, plus the records of the Women’s Action Alliance. The papers of Jessie Lloyd O’Connor and the records of the National Congress of Neighborhood Women are nearing completion. The project timeline has been extended until the fall of 2000 when the SSC will host a symposium (on September 22 and 23) and an exhibition to celebrate the opening of the collections.

Other collections newly open to research include the records of the Thomas Thompson Trust, processed by Kathleen Banks Nutter thanks to gifts from the Trust and Marilyn Schultz Blackwell (Smith ’69). The will of Thomas Thompson established a trust for “the relief and support of poor seamstresses, needlewomen and shop girls...” in Brattleboro, Vermont, and Rhinebeck, New York, circa 1900 to the present. The records shed light on working-class and poor women, as well as charities, welfare programs, and the development of nursing education for women in the first half of the 20th century.

Several intriguing new collections were donated over the past year, including the papers of fiction writer and first lonely hearts columnist Marie Manning (1872-1946), a.k.a. Beatrice Fairfax; labor organizer and longtime Communist Party activist Anne Burlak Timpson (1911-); and Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse (1928-99), psychiatrist, author, lecturer, and Episcopal priest. We welcomed the papers of California Congressional representative Jane Harman (Smith ’66), the first Smith alumna to be elected to Congress. Other new acquisitions include a first installment of the Southworth-Dickinson Family Papers (1840s- ) donated by Mayotta Southworth Kendrick (Smith ’44) and a small amount of correspondence and writings relating to primatologist Dian Fossey, donated by her friend and executor Betty Schwartzzel. Recent donations of papers from midwives Carol Leonard and Penfield Chester will complement the SSC’s holdings of the Midwives’ Alliance of North America Records. Chester’s papers include interviews with midwives and other material for her book, Sisters on a Journey.

The Sophia Smith Collection and College Archives staff were saddened to bid farewell this year to three esteemed colleagues. In May former intern and event planning maven Crystal Daugherty (Smith ’98) left the area for a job with Neighbor to Neighbor. In July the NEH project’s Marla Miller accepted a position as Assistant Professor in the University of Massachusetts’s Public History Program. In August Karen Eberhart left her full-time position in the College Archives to train for more adventurous pursuits as an outdoor leadership program instructor.

We welcome two new staff: Amanda Izzo (Smith ’99), a former SSC intern, and Kate Weigand who, with a Ph.D in women’s history, brings to the SSC a strong background in 20th-century American radicalism. After doing some excellent work for the NEH grant project, both Amanda and Kate are now hard at work processing collections with special funding provided this year by Smith’s Provost.

A number of “our women” who deserve to be better known are represented in a major new reference work, the American National Biography, published this year by Oxford University Press. SSC staff members contributed articles on Eleanor Coit, Nancy Hale, Jessie Lloyd O’Connor, Ruth Frances Woodsmall, Martha Collin Wright, and several others.
—Margaret Jessup
Writer Nancy Hale (1908–88) donated her own papers and those of her family to the SSC beginning in 1960. The following exchange is from Hale’s correspondence with William Maxwell, her good friend and editor at the New Yorker which published many of Hale’s stories from the 1930s through the 1960s. These excerpts are about her story “Georgetown Nights” which appeared in the New Yorker on September 19, 1942. Gus Lobrano was an editor at New Yorker and Harold Ober was Hale’s literary agent.

—Maida Goodwin

W.M. to N.H.

...The negro story is wonderful, and has Mr. L[obrano] caught in a very fancy dilemma from which he ought to extract himself by the end of the week. Didn’t you know it was good? ...

N.H. to W.M.

No, I didn’t know that (Georgetown) was a good story and furthermore I don’t yet. WHY did you like it? It gives me a funny startled feeling as if I were all backwards. You — although you are probably quite different from what you have come to represent to me on pieces of yellow paper — are a kind of artistic conscience to me and I would have said, I guess I did think, that you would have disliked that story or at least thought it the things I thought it, bald, unlighted. I recede and saw it was the best I could do with the episode and the general belief that there are good and bad people and that’s all — not black and white or hook-nosed or whatever. But I certainly was surprised....

W.M. to N.H.

Lobrano and I edited the Georgetown story last Friday afternoon. I was starting for the five-forty-five and put my head in the door and saw by his face that he was in trouble, so we went at it. Both of us enjoy editing together. It’s like playing duets. We only do it when there is something complicated and first rate, and usually we end in a rapture of satisfaction with the writer, ourselves, and life in general. You produce the most overwhelming effect when read sentence by sentence. That panic beginning “She shut the door on the night” is something. I’ve decided that you’re the greatest living writer, or would be, if you only had a little more sense.

But why did you stop at the top of the last page? The idea was there and carried the piece to its proper conclusion, but the writing was dead and hell and all to edit. It isn’t as if you couldn’t take the final jump high, wide, and handsome. I’ve seen you do it too many times. Actually it’s as if the phone rang, and you had to come back after fifteen minutes, and do the ending calmly, in cold blood. Did it?...

N. H. to W.M.

...Why am I not sensible? I’m awfully stupid but that generally passes as sensibility. How am I not sensible? PLEASE REPLY PROMPTLY....

W.M. to N.H.

...I should be caught dead telling you why you aren’t sensible when it makes a fine and useful club to hold over your unreasoning head. But if you should ever sometime catch yourself repeating something Ober has said, for example, about your work, and wondering whether just because he’s somebody who isn’t you that he might just possibly be right — then at that moment you’ll know, if you should also happen to remember, what I mean when I say you aren’t sensible. It’s metaphysical, and has something to do with the souls completeness....

N.H. to W.M.

I’m sending the proof back and I reread the last page but I don’t know if it’s any better. Not a lot different. I attended to the queries....

...I STILL don’t see why you like the story any. I thought maybe it would seem better when I read proof. But I think it’s bare and uninteresting. Sort of a dull little story about dull little people. There’s nothing galumptious about any of it....

Do you mean by my not being sensible that I ought to be more self-assured?

W.M. to N.H.

...Part of the reread of the last pg helped, part didn’t. But you were right not to strain it....

But I see now I am going to rue the day I said you weren’t sensible. Can we change it? Can I say you have a hair lip? More self-assured as an artist, and because you are an artist. Being self-assured as a person depends on the attitude of friends, husbands, children, neighbors, the mail-man, the cleaning woman, the whole social conspiracy. It’s possible, or should be, to feel unloved, unwanted, unbeautiful, and uneasy, at the same time you know you’re the lamb of God. As indeed you are, Miss Nancy Hale. Nobody can do what you can....
**At the Berks**

On June 4-6, over 1500 historians, activists, and interested “fellow travelers” gathered on the campus of the University of Rochester to celebrate the exciting work being done in women’s history today. The occasion was the 11th Berkshire Conference on the History of Women. Several Sophia Smith Collection staffers were fortunate enough to be a part of what is affectionately known as “the Berks”.

Founded in 1930, the organization that came to be known as the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, seeks “to facilitate the exchange of ideas and to foster friendship among women historians in every field of scholarship.” Initially forged because the founding members felt themselves to be outside of the profession, the incredible growth of the Berks in the last twenty years is certainly a direct result of the same increase — in sheer size as well as in “acceptability” — of the field of women’s history itself. Beginning in 1973, when the 1st Berkshire Conference on the History of Women was held at Douglass College, growing numbers of women historians and historians of women have met every two or three years. Smith College hosted the Berks in 1984.

The theme in 1999 was “Breaking Boundaries” and the opening plenary from Vicki Ruiz of Arizona State University set the tone. Ruiz told her audience that the boundary between the university and the community should be a fluid one, allowing for the exchange of ideas as well as the exchange of services. It was in this spirit that many of the almost two hundred panels that met over the next three days brought together scholars and activists, women’s historians with many years of experience and newcomers to the field, and yes, even historians and archivists. SSC Head Sherrill Redmon chaired a roundtable, “Brokers of the Boundaries: Archivists and Historians Finding Common Ground.” She was joined by fellow archivists Brenda Marston of Cornell University’s Human Sexuality Collection, Karen Mason of the Iowa Women’s Archives, and Susan von Salis of the Schlesinger Library as well as audience members in a meaningful discussion of the shared goals but sometimes conflicting needs of historians and archivists. Archivists must respect the wishes of donors who, in the interest of privacy, request that a portion of their papers be closed for a certain period — a frustrating experience for the scholar who feels that total access to all the material is vital to her work. But, it became clear in this exchange that archivists and historians alike want basically the same thing — the preservation of the historical record and the fullest access to those records consistent with donors’ wishes.

SSC staff attended various panels that included the work of scholars who had used our resources. For archivists, it is quite exciting to see the primary sources we maintain and protect become the focus of intense intellectual discussion. The conference also demonstrated the breadth and depth of our holdings as the variety of the work presented can attest. Papers that relied at least in part on our collections ranged from Rosemarie Holz’s “What Mothers Want: Birth Control Clinics, Women, and the Diaphragm, 1923-1960,” (records of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America) to Ronald Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray’s “Months of Mondays: Women’s Reading Diaries and the Everyday Transcendental” (Garrison, Hale, and Sturgis-Tappan Family Papers).

The SSC hosted a very successful wine and cheese reception to meet and recognize the first group of Grieson Scholars. The event also featured a screening of the award-winning documentary, *Step by Step: Building a Feminist Movement, 1941-1977*, which chronicles the modern women’s movement as it evolved in the midwest. *Step by Step* producer Joyce Follett joined us and said a few words about the making of this thought-provoking documentary that, in its clarity and accessibility, represents the exciting potential of the work being done in women’s history today. That same excitement shapes the very Berks itself and is the reason why the SSC staff and 1500 others went home from the University of Rochester tired but at the same time reinvigorated and ready to tackle the work that lies ahead.

—Kathleen Banks Nutter

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Judge Hilda G. Schwartz presents a cake to New York City mayoral candidate Judge Ferdinand Pecora, October 1950. Received this year with a substantial addition to the Schwartz Papers. Photographer unknown.
Dorothy Kenyon: Agent of Social Change

Thanks to funding from the NEH and Smith College President Ruth Simmons, the processing of the papers of Smith alumna and New York lawyer/judge/activist Dorothy Kenyon (1888-1972) is now nearly complete. Kenyon's papers — one of the eight collections represented in the SSC's "Agents of Social Change" grant project — constitute an extremely rich source for researchers interested in a whole range of twentieth century social justice movements.

Born in New York City in 1888, Kenyon graduated from Smith College in 1908. After a period as a self-described "social butterfly," Kenyon entered New York University Law School where she transformed herself into a social activist and earned her J.D. in 1917. Kenyon reached national prominence in the 1930s and 40s as the U.S. representative to the League of Nations Committee for the Study of the Status of Women and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Due to these government appointments, and to her large political and social networks, Kenyon's papers contain abundant information about local and national Democratic politics and U.S. domestic and international policy between the 1920s and the 1950s.

In addition to traditional politics, however, Kenyon's papers also document a much wider spectrum of political activity. As one of Joseph McCarthy's first targets in 1950, Dorothy Kenyon experienced anti-communism first hand. Although her public reputation suffered in the wake of McCarthy's charges, her unabashed condemnation of the Senator and his tactics undoubtedly contributed to his downfall. As a feminist whose activism spanned from the suffrage movement to women's liberation, a lifelong advocate of cooperatives, a nationally known civil libertarian, a civil rights activist, a fighter at the forefront of the War on Poverty in New York City, and a longstanding critic of anti-communism, Kenyon served as an important link between the progressive movements of the 1930s and those of the 1960s.

Kenyon's papers — promised to SSC founder Margaret Grierson by Dorothy Kenyon in 1951 and donated after her death in 1972 — span the years 1850-1972. They consist of biographical material; correspondence; memorabilia; published and unpublished writings; and documents relating Kenyon's participation in a vast number of organizations, including the United Nations, the ACLU, and Mobilization for Youth, among many others. Despite their partially processed state, Kenyon's papers have contributed significantly to two recent books: Susan M. Hartmann's The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment (Yale, 1998) and Linda Kerber's No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship (Hill and Wang, 1998). Now that they are more "user friendly" the records of Dorothy Kenyon's life and work will undoubtedly receive much more exposure and make new contributions to our understanding of gender, law, and politics as they evolved over the course of the twentieth century.

—Kate Weigand

Center: Press coverage of Dorothy Kenyon's appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in March 1950.

Mothers learning baby basics at a Baby Welfare Conference sponsored by the Thomas Thompson Trust, 1940s. Photo by Lewis B. Brown from the newly processed records of the Thomas Thompson Trust.
Conference on the History of Midwifery

Undaunted by inclement weather, more than one hundred people from the New England and mid-Atlantic states braved near-blizzard conditions last March to attend a two-day conference on the history of midwifery. The conference, Of Women Born: the Rebirth of Midwifery in 20th Century America, was organized by the SSC in recognition of National Women’s History Month and in celebration of the acquisition of the records of the Midwives Alliance of North America (MANA).

Several speakers addressed the conference. Midwife Carol Leonard recounted her years as a pioneering figure in the reemergence of midwifery in the U.S. in the 1970s, including the founding and early history of MANA. Valerie Lee, professor of English and Women’s Studies at Ohio State University, gave a lively talk, entitled Goose Grease, Ginger Tea and God: How Black Women Birthed and Healed a Nation, about midwifery folklore and her experiences interviewing traditional “granny” midwives in the South. In her presentation, Women Catching Babies: the Politics and Culture of Childbirth Attendance in the Twentieth Century, Charlotte Borst, professor of History at St. Louis University, gave an overview of the history of midwifery in the U.S. The SSC was also fortunate to draw on the expertise of Erika Laquer, historian of 16th–18th century English midwifery and Director of Smith College’s Ada Comstock Scholars Program, who placed “the world’s oldest of helping professions” in an international context. Erika also moderated a lively panel discussion following the scholarly presentations.

The next day, midwife Penfield Chester presented a workshop, “How to Become a Midwife,” to a packed house in a Seelye Hall auditorium.

In conjunction with the conference, student Jamie Meyerhoff mounted a colorful and informative exhibit of photographs and memorabilia from the MANA records and from Penfield Chester’s personal collection. Many thanks to Crystal Daugherty (Smith ’98), Jamie Meyerhoff (Smith ’01), and Penfield Chester of MANA for their superb work on this event.

The MANA records came to the SSC through the efforts of Penfield Chester, who recognized their historical value and brought the first boxes to Northampton from her barn in rural Massachusetts in 1996. Other members have since donated material and the organization will continue to augment the collection.

The SSC is fortunate to have acquired MANA’s records, as well as those of Informed Homebirth/Informed Birth and Parenting and the personal papers of several individual midwives. Due to the extremely personal nature of the subject and the potential legal issues, there is a dearth of archival material documenting the history of childbirth in the United States. As Sherrill Redmon noted in her opening remarks, “It’s our mission to make sure that no part of what women have done, and given, and been, goes undocumented.” Thanks to the wisdom and foresight of historically minded midwives, scholars will be better able to ensure that the historical record is accurate and complete.

—Burl Schlessinger

Heartfelt thanks to these special friends of the SSC who made generous monetary contributions since our last issue.

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Caroline Dwight Bain (Smith ’44)
Marilyn Schultz Blackwell (Smith ’69)
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7
Helen Gurley Brown (center) at a Catalina swimsuit photo shoot, 1955. Photographer unknown.

I knew little about the SSC before taking a history seminar in my junior year. Designed to familiarize students with primary source research through use of the SSC and College Archives, the class made me aware that a great collection of women's history documents was as close as Neilson library.

The seminar so piqued my interest in primary source research that I decided to use Helen Gurley Brown's papers for an honors thesis in American Studies. I wanted to look at Brown's life and work in the context of second-wave feminism, which called for an intensive look at Brown's papers and further research into the 1950s-1970s. Working in-depth with a collection gave me more of an opportunity to explore research options. The SSC staff was eager to share their expertise, leading me to sources beyond Brown's papers. I would have never come upon my own, including manuscript collections of Brown's contemporaries and periodicals of that time.

I interviewed Helen Gurley Brown for my thesis, though this was more of a stroke of luck than a possibility opened up by using her papers. The interview came about because I expressed interest in hearing from others who were interested in my area of research. One of them was SSC head Sherrill Redmon, who passed my seminar paper on to Brown. Brown's positive reaction encouraged me to ask her for an interview. She graciously agreed, and my thesis had both the present and past perspective of its subject.

In terms of academics, my research was rewarded. I received highest honors in American Studies and the Eleanor Flexner prize for best paper based on research in the SSC. Yet, I think the most gratifying component of this project was "making" history, in a way, by researching and writing about primary sources — work I thought was limited to professional academics. I encourage other students to take advantage of the wealth of materials in the SSC. Or else...

—Amanda Izzo

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