**Organizing Women: Archives and Activism**

As soon as activist Loretta Ross calls UPS to arrange to ship her papers to the Sophia Smith Collection, her staff form a human shield around the boxes. Only half in jest, they protest, “No. You can’t take our history away.”

This playful moment captures the mixed emotions stirred up by the long and exhausting days of packing. Loretta is up and down ladders to retrieve boxes from attic eaves and closet shelves. She is up and down the scale of emotions, too. At one point she calls a friend with a crowbar to pry open old file cabinets. As the contents tumble out, datebooks and position statements, political buttons and newsletters, a rolodex and videotapes flash before her as so many moments in her life.

Flyers announcing demonstrations recall Ross’s involvement in black nationalist politics and tenant organizing in Washington, D.C. in the early 1970s. A poster for the First National Conference on Third World Women and Violence signals her years as Executive Director of the D.C. rape crisis center, the first in the country staffed primarily by women of color. Videotapes bring back the excitement of the first national conference on Women of Color and Reproductive Rights, an event she organized in 1987 as the first Director of Women of Color Programs for the National Organization for Women.

“This is intense,” Loretta remarks more than once as she comes across a poem she wrote at a particularly happy moment, or a memorial program for a friend murdered in what she believes was a political killing. An early manual she compiled explains the self-help process central to the National Black Women’s Health Project. Board-of-director files offer glimpses of the National Political Congress of Black Women, the Women’s Commission of the National Rainbow Coalition, and the SisterLove Women’s AIDS Project. Loretta’s reports for the Center for Democratic Renewal track links between white supremacist and anti-abortion groups. An unpublished proposal details her political thinking in the mid-1990s as she launched the National Center for Human Rights Education, the organization she now directs.

Every item triggers a story. Sitting down with an album of photos taken while monitoring elections in South Africa, Loretta recounts the tale of a harrowing drive to obtain ballots that otherwise would not have reached the black township where she was posted and where people were waiting in line for days to vote. When an election official turned away a frail elderly woman because she was unable to make her way alone into the voting booth, Loretta intervened, and the woman cast her ballot. The album slips into a box of materials from Loretta’s other international commitments — delegations she led to UN Women’s Conferences, and the Network of East-West Women she helped create.

Fifteen, twenty, twenty-five boxes, a growing tribute to decades of organizing by and for women of color. The more boxes pile up, the more reluctant Loretta becomes to part with them. “It reminds me of arriving home from college,” she continued on page 2
muses, recalling that her mother had reclaimed her bedroom and disposed of some belongings. Gradually she makes peace with the process. After all, this has all been out of sight and out of mind for ages anyway, Loretta observes, and in a way the information will be more accessible once it is at the archives and arranged for use. There is also consolation in knowing she will have a chance to ponder it all again soon when she records her story for the SSC’s Visions of Feminism Oral History Project.

Besides, the phone keeps ringing. The calls re-immersing Loretta in her current responsibilities as co-director of the upcoming pro-choice March for Women’s Lives. By the time the UPS driver pulls away, Loretta is strategizing about involving rural women. As she goes back to organizing for the future, archivists at the SSC will begin the parallel task of unpacking her past. By preserving and organizing her papers and making them available to the public, the SSC ensures that lessons learned are not forgotten and that the voices of women of color will be heard by scholars and activists analyzing the feminism of today and charting paths to social justice in the years ahead.

—Joyce Follet

"Empanadas [the] famous Chilean pastry filled with meat, raisins, olives, etc.,” Santiago, Chile, circa 1921. Photographer unknown. From the newly processed Frances Drake Papers.
Greetings from the Head of the Sophia Smith Collection

It’s a pleasure to report some preliminary results of the first two years of a major collecting initiative to increase our holdings which document the experiences of women who have been underrepresented in the historical record by virtue of their race, class, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. In addition to the papers of Loretta Ross (see cover story), we have added the papers of:

• Rebecca Adamson, founder of the First Nations Development Institute, an organization working to improve the lives of Native Americans and other indigenous peoples through culturally appropriate economic development.
• actor, feminist, and peace activist Jane Fonda.
• historian, peace and racial justice activist Blanche Wiesen Cook.
• playwright, peace and racial justice activist, and feminist therapist Clare Coss.
• Vermont lawyer and domestic violence activist Wynona Ward.
• lesbian author and organizer Anne MacKay and the records of the North Fork Women for Women Fund, of which she was a founder.
• the Black Women’s Health Imperative (formerly National Black Women’s Health Project).

Many of these collections have just arrived, so it will be some time before they are open for research. But these sources and those of the many other women we are in discussion with, promise to help broaden the scope of women’s history as we know it.


Out of a sense of deep personal loss, I wish to extend our sympathies to the family of feminist literary scholar and writer Carolyn Heilbrun, who died in October. She was a good friend of the Collection and Smith College. Carolyn began sending her papers to the SSC in 1989; they are scheduled to open in 2015.

The Pioneer Valley lost one of its most dedicated peace and justice activists when Margaret Goddard Holt died in January. Margaret’s papers began coming to the SSC in 1983. Our condolences to her family and close friends.

—Sherrill Redmon
In addition to the numerous subject collection finding aids that have been revised and cleaned up in order to encode them and mount them on the Web, we have recently processed or reprocessed a number of interesting collections. Here are a few of them:

- In 1958, when the Governor of Arkansas closed Little Rock, Arkansas, public schools rather than integrate them, Vivion Lenon Brewer (1900–91) helped found the Women’s Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools. Not only do her papers contain minutes, correspondence, speeches, reports, and publicity of the organization, but they also provide details of Brewer’s personal and professional life that shed light on the motives and experiences of white Southerners who opposed racism and segregation.

- Social reformer and researcher Mary van Kleeck (1883-1972) left voluminous records of her professional life as an advocate for the rights of workers. Her papers document her work with the Russell Sage Foundation’s Department of Industrial Studies, the International Industrial Relations Institute, the American Civil Liberties Union, Bryn Mawr Summer School for Student Workers, National Research Council and other organizations, through speeches, writings, research notes, subject files and organizational records.

- The personal papers of two YWCA staff members describe their work overseas through reports, correspondence, and photographs. The papers of Bessie Boies Cotton (1880–1959) document her work in Russia during World War I and the Middle East in 1935. Frances Drake (dates unknown) helped found the YWCA of Montevideo, Uruguay. Her papers provide details of the YWCA’s work in South America.

- Women’s history and American studies pioneer Annette Baxter (1926–83) taught at Barnard College from 1952 until her death. Her papers reflect the development of women’s studies in the United States, along with the political conflicts that occurred at academic institutions — specifically the struggle for Barnard’s independence from Columbia University, and issues associated with a single sex institution.

- Settlement house worker Florence Kitchelt (1874–1961) left detailed diaries and correspondence about her settlement work at 95 Rivington Street, New York City; Mount Ivy, New York; and Lowell House in New Haven, Connecticut. The papers of Vita Dutton Scudder (1861–1954) provide insight into life at Denison House in Boston. These two collections nicely complement the SSC’s twelve other settlement-related collections.

—Kara M. McClurken
Historian Annette Baxter (1926–83), a pioneer in the fields of women’s history and American studies, spent her summers in Point O’Woods, New York, a private, family-oriented community that fostered close friendships. In the summer of 1982, Baxter, who spent the better part of her career exploring the new field of women’s studies, gave a talk there on Margaret Fuller, entitled “A Forgotten Feminist.” She began her lecture by providing the following definition of feminism.

—Kara M. McClurken

About feminism I wish only to say that it is a term often misused today, in that it is applied narrowly to such matters as affirmative action, the E.R.A., equal pay for equal work, Betty Friedan and the Second Stage, whether working mothers at Point O’Woods are a good thing, and so on. These are concrete and presentist matters, having rather little to do with the many ways in which feminism has been understood throughout history. . . .

Feminism, as it has appeared in various periods among various peoples, has in fact meant many things: female conspiracy in the interests of peace, as in Lysistrata, but also wifely submissiveness in . . . mid-Victorian America. It has meant untraditional careers, as with Amelia Earhart, Eleanor Roosevelt or Calamity Jane, but also traditional careers, as in the early national period of our history when women took official pride in raising the coming generation of American males, a task too risky to entrust to husbands and one on which the future of the republic was said to rest. It has meant an ascetic devotion to duty, whether in female monastic orders or in eastern women’s colleges at the turn of the century, but also the adoption of flagrantly permissive sexual mores, as in the 1920s. There have been feminists who have been opposed to suffrage for women, on the grounds that moral superiority of women required them to remain distant from the corrupting domain of male politics, and there have been feminists who believed that only by means of political action could women attain the economic independence essential to sexual freedom.

Just as much variety exists in the strategies considered “feminist.” Some women, for example, have believed that feminism and a certain degree of separatism are synonymous. They reason that women can discover their path only in partial isolation from the influence of men and in the greater strength afforded them by association with other women. Dissenting from this position are women who call for immediate penetration of male institutions and enclaves with full co-existence the goal. These are not satisfied with the Ladies’ Dining Room at the University Club; they want the swimming pool. Still another group opts for androgyny, not to be confused with a compromise between the two previous positions, but instead a third position, characterized by a willingness to allow social and economic pressures to recast the habitual attitudes of both men and women. Structures which they claim now inhibit the healthy development of both sexes would thus undergo evolutionary transformation. The resulting Utopia would not result in feminine men and masculine women. Rather it would be gender-free in negative ways yet be in full possession of gender in the positive ways. . . .

. . . feminism is not a political issue, a slogan or a cause. Rather it is a historically recurrent impulse to re-think the meaning of women’s relation to man as it affects civilization. As simple, and as complicated, as that.

Suppose you are a writer looking for sources for your work on Gloria Steinem. A search in a national library database or even via Google reveals that her papers are in the Sophia Smith Collection, but is there enough material to make a trip to Northampton worthwhile? Now, the complete inventory of Steinem's papers as well as seven other SSC collections containing Steinem materials are available from the comfort of your own personal computer. But what if your research topic is something less likely to be found in a repository specializing in the history of American women, such as Mahatma Gandhi? A similar Web search will show you that letters, photos and other items by and about the revered Indian leader appear in four SSC collections — the papers of Margaret Sanger, Gloria Steinem, Madeleine Doty, and Elminda Lucke. Now, with a few more keystrokes, you can place an order for copies of the documents in question.

For the past two years, the Sophia Smith Collection has been working with other local colleges to make our finding aids available on the Five College Archives and Manuscript Collections Web site (http://asteria.fivecolleges.edu). The site includes over 800 finding aids to date, representing collections of the archives and special collections at Smith, Amherst, Hampshire, and Mount Holyoke Colleges and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Finding aids are detailed inventories of archival collections that provide important information to researchers. A typical finding aid includes a biographical or historical note, an overview of the collection highlighting significant topics and people represented, and a detailed listing of the contents of each box. It provides a researcher with an understanding of both the contents and historical context of a collection and allows her to determine whether the collection is relevant to her topic. Until recently the only way to see a SSC finding aid was to visit or request a copy via phone or email. Having finding aids available online allows potential users to preview a collection's folder titles from home and plan a research trip accordingly, saving valuable time.

Perhaps most importantly, the finding aids have been entered in a database that permits users to search across multiple collections by keywords, names, dates, or subject terms. This means that a distant scholar or Smith student (whether on campus or overseas) can explore the Web site for collections with materials on her topic and gain access to detailed information on potential archival sources in the SSC and the other four colleges. Then, she can fill in the electronic reference request form on the Web site to request assistance, photocopies or more information.

Our reference staff has already felt the impact of having these finding aids available online. Even before they were publicized, researchers were discovering them through Internet searches, and contacting us with their queries. The Five

The Five Colleges Archives and Manuscript Collections Home Page.

College Finding Aids Access Project, funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, has made it possible for the SSC to mount finding aids for all of our processed collections. More are being added as new collections are processed and older finding aids are revised and encoded for the Web. In the meantime, basic information about all of our collections, including our most recent acquisitions, can be found at our Web site (http://www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/ssc/collections.html) and most SSC collections are now described briefly in the Four Colleges Library Catalog (http://fclibr.library.umass.edu/) where they are linked to the online finding aid, if available.

—Margaret Jessup

Mary van Kleech, right, with a colleague, circa 1930s. Photographer unknown. From the newly processed van Kleech Papers.
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Heartfelt thanks to these special friends of the SSC who made generous monetary contributions since our last issue.

Marylin Bender Altschul (Smith ’44)
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2003–04 Grierson Fellowships

Rebecca Davis, Yale University
“Planned Parenthood, Marriage Counseling, and the Family, 1940–1970”

Abigail Lewis, Rutgers University
“The YWCA’s Race Work and the Foundation of the Women’s Liberation Movement”

2003-04 Bain Fellowship

Julie Des Jardins, Brown University
“American Women Historians, Historical Memory, and the Institutionalization of Women’s History, 1950–present”

2003-04 Travel Grants

Susan Chandler, University of Nevada-Reno
“Social Work and Labor: An Historical Perspective”

Julie Garbus, University of Northern Colorado
“Service and Learning at the Turn of Two Centuries: Lessons from Vida Scudder”

Wendy Kline, University of Cincinnati
“Readers, Feminism, and the Women’s Health Movement”

Kathlene McDonald, Montgomery College
“Audacity within Confinement: Radical Women Writers in the McCarthy Era”

Susan Mallon-Ross, State University of New York-Potsdam
“Dorothy Kenyon: Local and Global Civil Libertarian, Defiantly Loyal American”

Amy Peloff, University of Washington
“Gurley Feminism: Sex and the Single Girl, and Popular Ideas of Femininity on the Eve of the Second Wave of Feminism”

Sherie Randolph, New York University
“Florynce ‘Flo’ Kennedy and Black Feminist Politics in Post-War America”

Leslie Sharp, Georgia Institute of Technology
“Seeking Shelter: Women as Shapers of the Built Environment in the Twentieth Century”

Olga Shnyrova, Russian Academy of Science
“Western and Russian Suffrage Organizations: Cooperation and Networking”
The SSC hosted a record number of public events in 2003. Hardly a month went by without an anniversary celebration, book signing, dedication, or teacher training institute.

On February 11th, historian Harriet Hyman Alonso spoke about her research in the SSC’s Garrison Family Papers and signed copies of her captivating book, Growing Up Abolitionist: The Story of the Garrison Children. On March 5th, Ina May Gaskin, a leader of the modern American midwifery movement spoke about her book, Ina May’s Guide to Childbirth. Gaskin is a prime mover in the Midwives Alliance of North America, an organization whose papers are housed in the SSC. Planned Parenthood Federation of America President Gloria Feldt (whose personal papers will be preserved here along with the records of PPFA) came to campus to talk about her book, Behind Every Choice is a Story, on October 20th.

We helped celebrate the 85th anniversary of the Smith College School for Social Work by hosting a closing retrospective during its anniversary weekend in late June. International Planned Parenthood Council Chair Alex Sanger reflected on the life and work of his grandmother, Margaret Sanger, during a 75th anniversary event for Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts in September.

On March 22nd, the international ecofeminist peace organization Women and Life on Earth marked the donation of its archives to the SSC with a gathering of the group and the world premiere of the theater-cabaret piece “Globalize THIS!!#$$” by local artists Suzy Polucci and Court Dorsey.

July 2003 saw two groups of history teachers using SSC materials to expand the curriculum to include women and primary sources. Fifteen middle and high school teachers from across the country spent a month in the SSC, Amherst College Archives, and Historic Deerfield as part of the National Endowment for the Humanities History Institute, “Voices from Three Centuries: Teaching the History of Women, Family, and Reform from Primary Sources.” The National Women’s History Project’s Summer Teachers Institute also made the SSC part of its four-day conference centered in Northampton.

Both teacher training institutes were skillfully designed and taught by reference archivist Kathleen Banks Nutter, who, we are sorry to report, has since resigned her position. Though her prodigious talents (and keen sense of humor) will be sorely missed on a day-to-day basis, the good news is that Kathleen has agreed to continue her involvement with the SSC on a more ad-hoc basis. She will participate in conducting oral histories for the Voices of Feminism project and will work on a variety of outreach projects.

—Maida Goodwin

YWCA secretaries at El Tigre (park — outskirts of Buenos Aires),” circa 1921. Photographer unknown. From the newly processed Frances Drake Papers.