

PRESERVING RECORDS BEARING ON THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN IN  
NORTH AMERICA: THE WOMEN'S ARCHIVES MOVEMENT AND ITS  
SIGNIFICANCE FOR APPRAISAL FOR ACQUISITION

by

GABRIELLE LILI EARNSHAW

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Schohl  
Department of Library, Archival + Information Studies

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an historical study of efforts which have taken place in English-speaking North America to preserve records bearing on women's experience. It has been found that efforts have centered on two positions: separation from traditional archives and reform of traditional archives. Approaches have varied and changed according to the political ideology of the women's movement at different historical moments. In the 1930s, efforts were made to develop separate "Women's Archives" to complement the records held by traditional archives. In the 1960s and 1970s, some feminists, primarily radical and lesbian feminists aimed at the establishment of independent women-centered archives that were separate from traditional archives and were operated according to feminist principles. Other efforts by liberal feminists have concentrated on the reform of traditional archives through the development of preferential acquisition policies for records bearing on women's experience. In the 1980s and 1990s, while earlier efforts continued, challenges of racism and classism have been made to traditional archives and the women's archives movement by women of color and other minorities. Most recently, feminist scholars have argued for the integration of women's history with that of men. This has influenced a growing trend towards integration of women's records with those of traditional archives.

The women's archives movement suggests that appraisal for acquisition in traditional archives has discriminated against the records created by women. Although archival theory and methodology of appraisal for acquisition are not inherently biased, in practice acquisition of private records takes place in a haphazard manner according to the value system of the ruling political ideology. Because of structural and societal discrimination women have not been part of this ruling elite and interest in the

preservation of their records has been minimal. To ensure the preservation of women's records archivists must develop national, systematic and comprehensive acquisition strategies which acquire records from all spheres of human activity, improve intellectual access to women's records, and recognize and respect efforts which have taken place outside of traditional archives. The role of the archivist must be expanded to provide consultation and outreach for creators of records bearing on women's experience and the women-centered archives which preserve them.

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## INTRODUCTION

Archivists are entrusted to preserve a documentary heritage which is representative of all spheres of human activity. Yet, the ability of archivists to achieve this goal has come under increasing question. Studies of the records of First Nations, the Chinese community in Vancouver, other ethnic groups, volunteer organizations, and the working-class have found that few records of these groups exist in the holdings of archives.<sup>1</sup> In 1977, historian Howard Zinn argued that archival institutions tended to acquire and preserve records which reflect only the status quo. "The archivist, in subtle ways, tends to perpetuate the political and economic status quo simply by going about his [sic] ordinary business."<sup>2</sup> Gould P. Colman has also maintained that archivists are "skewing the study of culture by the studied preservation of unrepresentative indicators of that culture."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most influential articulation of the problem came in 1975 from F. Gerald Ham, who concluded that "something is fundamentally wrong: our methods are inadequate to achieve our objective, and our passivity and perceptions produce a biased

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<sup>1</sup>For example, Nancy Stunden, "Labor, Records and Archives: The Struggle for a Heritage," Archivaria 4 (1977): 73-91; Walter Neutel, "Geschichte Wie Es Eigentlich Gewesen or the Necessity of Having Ethnic Archives Programmes," Archivaria 7 (1978): 104-110; Jian Xiang Liu, "The Potential for Acquisition of Ethnic Archives: A Case Study of Five Chinese Organizations in Vancouver, B.C." (Master's of Archival Studies thesis, University of British Columbia, 1993); Susan Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations" (Master's of Archival Studies thesis, University of British Columbia, 1989); Mary Ann Palypchuck, "A Documentation Approach to Aboriginal Archives," Archivaria 33 (1991-1992): 117-125.

<sup>2</sup>Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives and the Public Interest," The Midwestern Archivist 11 (1977): 20.

<sup>3</sup>Gould P. Colman, "The Forum: Communications from Members," American Archivist 35 (July/October 1972): 483.

and distorted archival record."<sup>4</sup>

Similar arguments have been made for the lack of adequate documentation of women's experience in established archival repositories. Eva Moseley, curator of manuscripts for the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College, wrote in 1973 that negative cultural attitudes towards women as well as bias both "toward *who* makes history and *what* activities are historically significant had caused records bearing on women's experience to be lost or destroyed."<sup>5</sup> She argued that "any and every means should be used to collect and make available the records of women's lives and activities."<sup>6</sup> These arguments were echoed by Canadian historian Veronica Strong-Boag in 1978. She maintained that archival repositories had not equally represented the experience of women in their collections, and argued that archival repositories should actively foster the acquisition of records pertaining to women's experience.<sup>7</sup>

While these preliminary studies raised the issue of preserving women's documentary heritage in the 1970s, continued interest by mainstream archivists in the subject has been negligible. A survey of thirty-seven issues (1975-1994) of Canadian archival journal Archivaria, revealed that, aside from Strong-Boag's article and books and

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<sup>4</sup>F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," American Archivist 38 (Jan 1975):5-13, reprinted in A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory, ed. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walsh (Washington: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 1984), 326.

<sup>5</sup>Eva Moseley, "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of Women in America," American Archivist 36 (April 1973): 216.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 222.

<sup>7</sup>see Veronica Strong-Boag, "Raising Clio's Consciousness: Women's History and Archives in Canada," Archivaria 6 (Summer 1978): 70-82.

exhibition reviews, the subject of women and archival preservation has been the topic of only two other articles.<sup>8</sup> In the fifty-seven issues (1938-1994) of The American Archivist women's records and archives had been the subject of four articles.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the articles in both Archivaria and the American Archivist focus on the availability of archival sources for the writing of women's history. Other literature available also concentrates on this issue, including Diane Beattie's thesis "The Informational Needs of Historians Researching Women: An Archival User Study," publications on the historiography of women, and guides to archival sources on women. There has not been one published article or book which describes from a multi-institutional point of view the efforts that have been taken to preserve women's records in Canada or the United States.

This thesis is meant to begin the process of filling this gap in our understanding of the development of archives in North America. It will study the efforts of archivists and others to ensure the preservation of records bearing on women's experience in English-speaking Canada and in the United States. Although there are significant differences in the social and political context in Canada and the United States, arguments and efforts for the preservation of records bearing on women's experience have been remarkably similar in both motivation and action. In fact, patterns are so similar as to

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<sup>8</sup>Sharon Larade and Johanne Pelletier, "Mediating in a Neutral Environment: Gender-Inclusive Language or Neutral Language in Archival Descriptions," Archivaria 35 (Spring 1991): 99-109 and Diane Beattie, "An Archival User Study: Research in the Field of Women's History," Archivaria 29 (Winter 1989-90): 33-50.

<sup>9</sup>This survey did not include articles on the status of women in the archival profession (of which there have been three) or an article about the papers of International Women's Year, 1977. It also did not include the mention of "women's archives" in the "Notes" section in 1939 and 1966 or short references to sources on women's history in specific repositories.

reflect a North American women's archives movement.

The term "women's archives movement" is used to refer to the diversity of efforts that have taken place to preserve women's documentary heritage outside and within established archival repositories. In some ways to call these efforts a movement is a misnomer, for it suggests that there was a kind of overarching cohesion to efforts when in fact there was not. But the term is appropriate in another sense, because most of the efforts spring from a common motivation to respond to the needs of the women to gain control of their history.

Strategies and efforts to preserve the records of women's past have varied in different historical moments depending on the political ideology of the women's movement. In other words, the women's archives movement developed according to the political rhythms of the women's movement and as such was influenced by its ideological changes and contradictions. The often paradoxical nature of the women's movement is noted by historian Nancy Cott who writes:

The women's movement aims for individual freedom by mobilizing sex solidarity. It acknowledges diversity among women while positing that women recognize their unity. It requires gender consciousness for its basis, yet calls for the elimination of gender roles. These paradoxes of feminism are rooted in women's actual situation, being the same (in a species sense) as men; being different with respect to reproductive biology and gender construction from men. In another complication all women may said to be the 'same', as distinct from all men with respect to reproductive biology, and yet 'not the same', with respect to the variance of gender construction.<sup>10</sup>

These tensions which exist in the women's movement between solidarity/diversity, recognition/elimination of gender roles and sameness/difference have been played out in

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<sup>10</sup>Nancy F. Cott, "Feminist Theory and Feminist Movements: The Past Before Us," in What is Feminism?: A Re-Examination, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 49.

the women's archives movement in variations of two extreme positions. Some feminists stress that women's records should be preserved separately from mainstream archives and call for the creation of independent women-centered archives which are based on feminist principles and under feminist control. Others believe that efforts should be directed towards the improvement of acquisition of women's records by traditional archives. This group argues for the implementation of acquisition policies which give women's records preferential treatment. They may also advocate working towards devising acquisition strategies which are truly integrated, inclusive and reflective of the totality of human experience.

This thesis is not a comprehensive survey of archives dedicated to women. That is an important task that must be completed in the future. Rather it is a preliminary and broad overview of the history of efforts undertaken in North America to preserve women's documentary heritage. For this reason archival repositories described in this study are used as examples of the broad patterns which have been established to preserve records created by women in North America. There may be other repositories not mentioned in this study which have similar characteristics and could fit into these patterns, or those which have taken a different course, but they have not been included in this study.

While the similarities of experience in Canada and the United States are startling there are some significant differences which should be understood. One is the starting date of the first efforts to preserve women's records: efforts to preserve women's records began fifteen years earlier in the United States. This may reflect the slower pace of the women's movement in Canada. Another important difference is contact with European feminists. In the United States, it was a European refugee who actually ignited the

movement. In Canada, contact with European influences came later in the form of visits to "women's archives" first in England and later in the United States. Another important difference is that the archives system in the United States has a strong so-called "historical manuscript tradition" within college and public libraries. The establishment of "women's archives" fit well in to this pattern. In Canada, public archival institutions acquire both private and public records, and few libraries outside the universities have actively pursued acquisition of private archives. The National Library, for example, has only in the past ten years established a manuscript division such as the Library of Congress has had for over a century. Moreover, on the whole Canada has produced far fewer thematic archives based on collecting in a defined subject area, than has the United States.

Despite these important differences in the American and Canadian experience, the thesis is not meant to be a comparison between the two systems of archives. Rather it seeks to describe the women's archives movement as it developed, and to assess the implications it has for the archivist. This approach has been chosen for three reasons. First it is more important to see the patterns of activity in this realm and their implications than it is to detect the differences in the two countries. Second, the women's movement is fluid and flows across national boundaries. As with every social movement, the unique circumstances of each individual country will affect the direction the movement takes, but fundamental concerns may be evident no matter the setting. Third, American and Canadian archivists experience a free flow of ideas of archival theory and methodology, and this thesis places itself in this context.

The thesis is organized into four chapters. The first three chapters provide a history of the women's archives movement as it progressed from the early 1930s to the

present. The last chapter evaluates and reflects upon this movement in light of archival theory, method, and practice. The conclusion offers recommendations to the archival community for improving acquisition and accessibility of records bearing on women's experience.

Women make up a majority of the population in both Canada and the United States. If their experience is not adequately represented in archival holdings, there is something fundamentally wrong with the way archivists select records. As Carol Smith-Rosenberg writes: "Women are not a forgotten minority. Rather, women constitute the forgotten majority in virtually every society and within every social category. To ignore women is not simply to ignore a significant subgroup within the social structure. It is to misunderstand and distort the entire organization of that society."<sup>11</sup> The question is, to what extent have the actions of archives contributed to this distortion, and what can be done to ensure that documentation of women's experience is preserved in North American archives.

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<sup>11</sup>Carol Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 19.

## Chapter One

### EARLY EFFORTS TO PRESERVE WOMEN'S RECORDS, 1935-1970

The first stage of the women's archives movement began after the first wave of feminism and developed almost completely independently from traditional archives. Just as feminists at this time were not striving to alter society in any radical way, the progenitors of the women's archives movement had no interest in changing traditional archives. While motivated by a scholarly desire to improve the recognition of women's contribution to society, especially in historiography, the early leaders of the movement made no archival claims for their activities.

By the late 1960s, the women's movement was revitalized by the second wave of feminism. Where in the first stage of the movement there had been only an implicit challenge to traditional archives, the second stage of the women's archives movement confronted established institutions directly. Liberal feminists in the historical and archival professions challenged the practices of existing archives for the first time with demands of reform. Radical and lesbian feminists advocated separation from the mainstream and the establishment of women-centered archives operated according to feminist principles and under feminist control.

The third stage began in the mid-1980s as "'plurality and difference' split 'feminism' into 'feminisms.'"<sup>1</sup> At this stage, earlier activities came under increasing attack from women of color and other minority groups as being motivated by racial and

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<sup>1</sup>The words are of Arun Mukherjee in Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States, ed. Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal and Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 9.

class prejudices. Other efforts concentrated on the integration of women's records with traditional archives, and questioned the usefulness of separation as a strategy for improving the preservation of women's documentary heritage. This stage continues into the present.

The first stage of the women's archives movement began in the United States in 1935. It started with concern about the loss of records created during the first wave of feminism and the lack of interest shown in these records by traditional archives. The impetus for concern came from the women's movement which had begun to argue that women were different from men but should be treated equally. Similarly, the progenitors of the women's archives movement believed that separate "Women's Archives" which would gather women's "uniquely feminine" contribution were necessary to complement the holdings of traditional archives. It was believed by these early advocates that women's archives would provide the necessary sources for the writing of women's history, and would eventually assist in the integration of "women's culture" with that of men in a properly rounded picture of the past. To more fully understand what sparked this feminist historical consciousness and the corresponding interest in the preservation of women's records, it is necessary to look back to the roots of the modern women's movement and the beginning of interest in women's history.

The modern women's movement in the United States is generally believed to have begun with Elizabeth Cady Stanton's speech in favour of women's right to vote given at the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention in 1848. While this convention put the issue of women's rights on the political stage little came of this demand for suffrage until the Progressive movement began in the late nineteenth century. Amid this era of optimism for change, women's volunteer and reform organizations flourished. This faith

in a better future is described by Carl Schneider and Dorothy Schneider in their work American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920: "For though their world scandalized and oppressed them with economic injustices and corporate wrongdoing and afforded many of them neither longevity nor good health, they believed in the possibility of changing it."<sup>2</sup>

In this early period, suffragists were primarily white, middle and upper-class women who argued from the ideological position of women's difference from and superiority to men. Rhetoric supporting women's right to vote argued that women's participation in the political process would help "clean up" corruption, and that the vote for women would be a means of purifying American society.<sup>3</sup> They asserted that with the right to vote women could exercise their knowledge in areas requiring "women's distinctive feminine training and power."<sup>4</sup> Olive Banks notes that "the feminist movement was based, not so much on the doctrine of male and female equality as on a notion of female superiority that was accepted not only by women but by many of their male supporters."<sup>5</sup>

The fight for women's suffrage in the United States continued until 1920 when, seventy-two years after Stanton's declaration, the 19th Amendment of the American constitution was ratified establishing women's right to vote. Although the achievement

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<sup>2</sup>Schneider, Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider, American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920 (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 11.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>4</sup>Sara M. Evans, Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America (New York: Free Press, Division of Macmillan, 1989), 153.

<sup>5</sup>Olive Banks, Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), 84.

of the vote for women did not reform politics overnight, the first wave of feminism created increased awareness that women had a greater contribution to make to society than had traditionally been supposed.

In Canada, the first organization for suffrage began in 1877, disguised as the Women's Literary Society.<sup>6</sup> By 1918, women were granted the right to vote in the federal election. Provincial legislation followed soon after except in Quebec where the franchise was withheld until 1940. Compared to other countries, the fight for women's suffrage in Canada was relatively easy. This was due to the moderate character of the movement and the high social status of its members. Many of those involved in women's suffrage were involved in other reform groups in the "social gospel" movement, including many prohibitionists. Like their American counterparts, these women and men joined together not with a radical vision of women's liberation, but rather with a sense of women's potential to curb immorality and corruption. Indeed, maintains Carol Bacchi, "...the [Canadian] suffragists justified their entry into the public sphere by emphasizing the benefits to be gained from women's traditional virtues. Very few saw the need for a radical restructuring of sex roles."<sup>7</sup>

### **Writing Women Into History**

In their call for political and social change, these early feminists naturally developed a sense of women's past. In this they displayed an impulse common to many groups struggling to change their status and identity within society. The historian Sara

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<sup>6</sup>Carol Bacchi, Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918 (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 3.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., vii-viii.

M. Evans writes:

Groups of people outside centers of power who consciously intend to affect the course of history by altering power relations in a democratic direction require a historical consciousness. One cannot build a future without a sense of the past. Movements require history, because history provides an explanation for oppression. And it impels action by offering a vision of transferrable future.<sup>8</sup>

This impulse to interpret women's past in the light of the new movement was an essential element in women's struggle for equality. It was only by recognizing and naming the source of women's inequality that plans for change could be made.

Much of the problem of the lack of knowledge about women's history lay with the nature of historical inquiry and discourse itself. In essence, history at this time concentrated on the limited spheres of political and economic activity; spheres in which men were the key players. "Historians had not situated women," observes Rosemary Gagan "apart from a few vociferous and vexatious viragos..."<sup>9</sup> The result was that history was "defined in terms of the deeds of men, and little value was given to the actions of women who contributed to other spheres of human activity; women's lives became ahistorical, lived outside the world of masculine achievements."<sup>10</sup>

Writers of women's history at this time did not want to challenge the boundaries of political/economic history. Instead, they wrote of "Great Events" in women's history such as the suffrage movement and the progressive movement, or of "Women Worthies," the female equivalents of the great men of history, evaluating them using the same

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<sup>8</sup>Sara M. Evans, "Visions of Women-Centered History," Social Policy 12 (Spring 1982): 46.

<sup>9</sup>Rosemary G. Gagan, "Putting Humpty Together Again: The Challenge of Canadian Women's History," British Journal of Canadian Studies 4 (1990): 276.

<sup>10</sup>Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, eds., A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), xviii.

standard of historical significance which applied to men. They wrote about upper and middle class women, portraying them as super-beings who, as Margaret Andrews observed, were "simultaneously complete as women and successful in men's ways--able to invade the world of masculine work without abandoning their uniquely feminine characteristics and responsibilities."<sup>11</sup> The purpose of these histories was to inspire young women, but only as far as proper "ladylike" behaviour would allow.

### **Preservation of Sources: Mary Ritter Beard and the Dream of a Women's Archives**

As women's contributions to American and Canadian history were being added to conventional accounts, the destruction of records created by women became a growing concern within the feminist community. In the 1930s, many women grew alarmed that without evidence of their struggles for equality, women's rights could be rolled back in the increasingly conservative atmosphere of economic depression.

The impetus to act on this concern came indirectly from Europe. An increasing backlash against women's rights brought on by the depression and the rise of fascism had created a climate in Europe where women had become increasingly aware of the importance of preserving records which documented the first wave of the women's movement and other movements generated for social change. The psychological and archival barriers faced by Catherine Marshall, a British feminist, as she tried to find a place for her records at the end of her career is illustrative of the problem faced by feminists in Europe and North America. Her biographer writes of the questions she had to ask herself: "Should she try to interest some library in making room for them? But no;

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<sup>11</sup>Margaret Andrews, "Review Article: Attitudes in Canadian Women's History, 1945-1975," Journal of Canadian Studies 12 (Summer 1977): 69.

the papers were not quite old enough, she was no longer well known and above all there was no academic interest in women's history, and archival imagination might find it hard to make the leap needed to suppose there ever would be."<sup>12</sup>

A similar fate awaited the records of Roshika Schwimmer, an Hungarian refugee, feminist, and peace activist residing in the United States. Schwimmer believed that the "facts of women's struggle and achievements during the last century" had to be assembled and preserved in order to ensure continued support to improve women's status. She was afraid that women's economic and political status was in a worldwide decline, and that many of the records of the leaders of the feminist-pacifist movement were at risk of being lost.<sup>13</sup>

Convinced of the impending loss of documents and no doubt aware of similar efforts being undertaken in Europe such as at the International Informatiencentrum en Archivef Voor de Vrouwenberg (The International Informational Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement) in Amsterdam, Netherlands,<sup>14</sup> Schwimmer contacted feminist and historian Mary Ritter Beard in 1935 with a proposal for the establishment of a "pacifist-feminist" archives in the United States. Beard was enthusiastic in her response:

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<sup>12</sup>Jo Vellacott, From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage: The Story of Catherine Marshall (Montreal, Kingston, London and Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), xi.

<sup>13</sup>Anne Kimbell Relph, "The World Center for Women's Archives, 1935-1940," Signs: Journal of Women's Culture and Society 4 (September 1979): 597.

<sup>14</sup>This institution flourished until the German occupation in May, 1940. In the early 1990s, the records it had acquired were discovered in the "Special Archives" in Moscow. The records were returned to Amsterdam and the Archives is fully operational today.

It should also be noted that similar efforts to preserve women's records were being initiated in Europe and many continue to operate. For example, the Women's History Archives, University of Gottenberg, Sweden; Fawcett Library, London; Bibliotheque Marguerite Durand, Paris and the Gosteli Foundation Archives for the History of the Swiss Women's Movement in Worblaufen, Switzerland.

As for your project it has my fullest sympathy. I think it is imperative to put this material together. No doubt we have many of the same reasons for seeing it that way but it does me great good to learn that one so competent as you stands ready to assume the task. I shall be only too happy to tell you how I visualize the thing, parts of which I have longed to tackle myself but have not done and see no way to do myself."<sup>15</sup>

The loss of archival sources created by women was of particular concern for the historian Beard. As Zinsser sees it, Beard "understood that women's and men's experiences differed, and that therefore the historical records and evidence of those experiences would differ as well. She came to feel a sense of urgency about the loss of documents and artifacts, for example, the diaries, letters and photographs that made up women's history as distinct from men's."<sup>16</sup> Beard also attributed women's ignorance of their contribution to history to bias in higher education, and imagined that the preservation of women's records would help stimulate a new education for women. "In Cott's judgement, Beard believed that "the fuller portrayal of women's history [was] the antidote to women's underestimation of their own efficacy and the corrective to career-minded women's blithe dismissal of the relevance of gender."<sup>17</sup>

Beard believed that women-- precisely because of their gender--had different qualities which could positively affect the nature of society. In this way she was unlike some "difference feminists" who argued that women were victims subjected to oppression. She believed in women's superiority and looked for "women's leadership in social

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<sup>15</sup>Nancy Cott, Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 129.

<sup>16</sup>Judith P. Zinsser, History and Feminism: A Glass Half Full (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 32.

<sup>17</sup>Cott, Woman Making History, 48.

reconstruction, in values alternative to the ones that had brought the economic crash and fascism."<sup>18</sup> She believed that it was essential that women learn to value their different characteristics from men and use them to improve society. In her estimation an archives which preserved these values for future generations was integral to realizing this goal.

After meeting with Schwimmer, Beard drew up a proposal for an archival institution. She conceived of the Archives as "a repository of women's individual and organizational struggles, inspiration and achievement" and as "a vital educational plant in which the culture represented by the archives will receive the attention at present given in 'seats of higher learning' to the culture of men alone."<sup>19</sup> She believed that the archives would be the foundation of an education center where women would learn and cultivate their unique qualities for the betterment of society. For Beard, the ultimate purpose of the preservation of records created by and about women was the integration of women's culture with the rest of society. She believed that the preservation of archives could act as a stepping stone towards equal education and knowledge of women. In other words, in Beard's view, special efforts were necessary in the short term for the future integration of women's culture with society. "If, for instance, from such a place could go forth the demands and the protests, issued by a watching committee with its power increased by its wealth of data at its hand, then possibly the women's culture could be integrated into the study of culture in the large and all our common intelligence enriched. Such is my dream anyway."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 40

<sup>19</sup>Relph, "The World Center for Women's Archives, 1935-1940," 597.

<sup>20</sup>Cott, Woman Making History, 135.

Her views on integration, however, are not to be confused with arguments that prevail in the 1990s for integration. Beard hoped that women's culture would be integrated into society only to the extent that it was recognized as being different. In this way integration is used by Beard to mean integrated separatism. This is well illustrated in her choice for the location of the Archives.

It appears that Beard never considered locating the Archives within an already existing archival institution. She had little confidence or trust in established institutions' interest in preserving records generated by the women's movement, and accepted that most archives and libraries were animated by a prevailing concern for traditional historical themes. She appears to accept that women's records were not being acquired by traditional archives because of "lack of funding or storage space."<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, she believed the Archives should ideally be located and sponsored by an educational institution to facilitate the study of women's history. Above all, Beard wanted the archives to promote courses on women's history and other subjects tailored to the needs of women.<sup>22</sup> The concept however, proved far too radical for the conservative climate of the time, and Beard was forced to consider other possibilities.

Upon agreeing to help Schwimmer, Beard immediately began to recruit women to support the archives project. Her main targets were "old friends from suffragist days who had continued in anti-militarist efforts, obvious big names in women's organizations, potential sympathizers who had risen to importance in the New Deal and women with

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<sup>21</sup>Anne Kimbell Relph, "The World Center for Women's Archives," 398.

<sup>22</sup>In 1934 she compiled an outline for a course called "A Changing Political Economy as it Affects Women". As an encyclopedia on feminism notes: "Although the syllabus was never used, she is now considered to have invented the concept of women's studies." Lisa Tuttle, "Women's Studies," Encyclopedia of Feminism (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1986), 367.

money."<sup>23</sup> By September the first meeting of initial supporters took place in New York. In October a second, larger meeting was held. According to Nancy Cott, this meeting allowed Beard to secure "the sponsorship of such women as birth control reformer Margaret Sanger, well-known physician Dr. Florence Sabin, lawyer and pacifist Elinor Byrns, novelist Fannie Hurst, head of the American Association of University Women, Dathryn McHale, as well as stalwarts Emily Newell Blair, Harriot Stanton Blanch and Lena Madelin Phillips."<sup>24</sup>

In addition to these influential mainstream women, Beard was determined that the archives acquire the support and records of a broader range of women, including women of colour, Jewish women, and "aborigines" (Native Americans). She also hoped that women of all political persuasions would be represented and take leadership roles in the Archives.

In September 1935, the New York Public Library expressed interest in collaborating with Beard and her supporters. Although Beard was thrilled at the increasing interest in the project, she still hoped that the archives would make a connection with an educational institution. In the end, however, the library's interest dwindled. Beard persevered with plans for an independent institution, which was finally launched as the World Center for Women's Archives on December 15, 1937. The gala event held in New York City was marked by the donation of charts, maps, and letters of aviator Amelia Earhart by her husband George Putnam. At that time there were forty-eight members of the Center, including Alice Stone Blackwell, Fannie Hurst, Alice Paul,

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<sup>23</sup>Cott, Woman Making History, 130.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 136.

Georgia O'Keefe and Eleanor Roosevelt.

By 1939, the World Center for Women's Archives had reached a certain peak of achievement. There were over sixty sponsors, not including the thirty college presidents who had lent their names to the efforts. More support groups had formed in Michigan, New Jersey, Indiana, and Pennsylvania, and an impressive collection of private papers had been donated. In addition, the Center established separate committees dedicated to the records of native, Jewish, and black women.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these accomplishments, the World Center for Women's Archives had still not secured a permanent location, and was plagued by lack of funding and factional strife among its members.<sup>26</sup> Schwimmer, who sensed the trouble brewing, had withdrawn from the project in 1936.<sup>27</sup> According to Cott, by the end of 1939 the Archives faced a crisis. Staff and the National Board overseeing the Archives squabbled. There was not enough money to pay the rent and support the program.<sup>28</sup>

In 1940, the war delivered the last blow to the struggling Archives. Beard's outspoken sentiments against American involvement in the war generated hostility against her by some members of the Board. She resigned in June 1940. Her resignation, though influenced by her husband's impending move and the outbreak of war, was primarily caused by the continued fighting among the Board, which was impeding the success of

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<sup>25</sup>Cott, Woman Making History, 195.

<sup>26</sup>Some of the differences began with the appointment of Meg Irwin, a supporter of the National Women's Party as chair of the Archives. Women such as Carrie Chapman Catt, who was suspicious of the Archives affiliation with the National Women's Party, donated their papers to the New York Public Library instead.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 150. She eventually donated her papers to the New York Public Library.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 195.

the Archives. In her resignation letter she predicted that "unless new strong blood can be transfused into our movement's management, neither my continued service nor any other service, old or new, will carry us further toward our goal."<sup>29</sup> Without her leadership, and in the face of continued organizational difficulties, the World Center for Women's Archives was disbanded in September 1940. The records which had been accumulated were stored temporarily in various locations until a more permanent arrangement could be made.

The failed effort of the World Center for Women's Archives does not mark the end of the first stage of the women's archives movement. Significant efforts were carried on by black women under the leadership of Mary McLeod Bethune for the establishment of an independent black women's archives. Other activity centered on the establishment of women's archives programs in the libraries of two private women's colleges.

#### Mary McLeod Bethune and the Archives Committee of the National Council of Negro Women

As part of her effort to represent all races, creeds and political persuasions in the Archives, Beard had asked two black women to serve as sponsors for the World Center for Women's Archives.<sup>30</sup> One of these women was Mary McLeod Bethune, the founder of the National Council of Negro Women and President of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Bethune's interest in black women's history began as early as 1927 when she was President of the National Association for Colored Women. She

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 211.

<sup>30</sup>Bettye Collier-Thomas, "Towards Black Feminism: The Creation of the Bethune Museum-Archives," Special Collections 3 (Spring/Summer 1986): 45.

understood that black women could not raise their history from obscurity unless they themselves made efforts to preserve archives and other forms of documentation.<sup>31</sup>

As a sponsor for the World Center for Women's Archives before it folded, Bethune asked Dorothy Porter to chair the Negro Women's Committee of the World Center for Women's Archives to make suggestions for collecting priorities.<sup>32</sup> After the failure of the World Center for Women's Archives in 1940, support for the preservation of black women's documentary heritage was continued by the National Council of Negro Women's Committee on Archives (chaired by Dorothy Porter). In 1941, this committee voted to establish a Mary Bethune Memorial in the form of the National Archives of Negro Women. According to Collier-Thomas, the committee presented a series of recommendations to the Council for the realization of this goal: "for the National Council of Negro Women to designate a permanent center to receive and preserve documents and materials donated to the Archives; to identify funds for clerical service; to provide authority for the Committee to continue to locate and collect materials; to sanction the development and circulation of a small loan exhibition to colleges, universities and other; and to encourage the active support of the membership of the National Council of Negro Women membership in the location and collection of materials."<sup>33</sup> Although efforts to promote the importance of black women's heritage<sup>34</sup> were serious and vigorous, the

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<sup>31</sup>Linda Henry, "Promoting Historical Consciousness: The Early Archives Committee of the National Archives of Negro Women," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 1 (Autumn 1981): 252.

<sup>32</sup>Collier-Thomas, "Towards Black Feminism," 45.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>34</sup>For example, efforts were made for a "National Archives Day" to "instill courage and pride" and to give impetus to the efforts of black women's organizations through the dissemination of

Archives would take thirty-nine years to materialize.<sup>35</sup>

These early efforts of black women illustrate two significant characteristics of the women's archives movement. First, white women and women of colour had different priorities and needs. Although Beard invited the participation of black women in the establishment of the World Center for Women's Archives, they still felt peripheral to the predominantly white movement. The division of efforts along racial and other lines would become a familiar theme as the history of the women's archives movement unfolded. Second, some black women were already becoming more radical and separatist than white women like Beard. They believed that in order to build a strong identity for themselves as women and as blacks, they needed complete separation from established archives and educational institutions. This impulse towards independent women-centered archives foreshadows future directions of more radical women in the 1960s and 1970s.

### Women's Archives in Women's Colleges

While some feminists within the women's movement struggled with the archives question, several libraries began collecting women's records in the United States, where a strong tradition of historical manuscript collections had evolved in the universities, historical societies and public libraries. In this tradition, manuscripts or private archives in a particular sphere are acquired according to the research needs of scholars.

Even before the World Center for Women's Archives was disbanded, Beard had

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information about black women's achievements." *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

been busy contacting educational institutions about the need to include material on women in their curricula and library collection policies. One of these institutions was Radcliffe College.

The idea for the establishment of an archives at Radcliffe College began in 1943 with the acquisition of the Women's Rights Collection and other materials Maud Wood Park had accumulated during her campaign for women's suffrage. Park, a leading suffragist and first President of the National League of Women Voters, was an alumna of the college. The collection included correspondence and papers on the women's rights movement, as well as photographs, posters, books and other material. After the acquisition of Maud's collection, Wilbur K. Jordan, the President of the college, decided that "rather than leaving [the] Library-Archives-Museum as a static memorial to the suffrage movement,"<sup>36</sup> Radcliffe would develop a continuing acquisitions program in the women's sphere.

Jordan contacted Mary Beard and historians Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger for advice on the development of the Archives. Beard recommended that the Archives be expanded to include more than just materials related to the struggle for equal rights. In a letter to Jordan in January 1944, she argued that: "If you should undertake to conform merely with feministic jingoism you could 'restrict' your collection both chronologically and topically to what is called the equal rights credo..."<sup>37</sup> Instead she proposed that the Archives acquire records about all facets of women's contributions to British and American society. "The topical composition of collected documents could be quickly,

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<sup>36</sup>Moseley, "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of Women in America," 216.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 231-232.

easily outlined. They could represent the most comprehensive archives of British-American feminism in the modern form to be found anywhere."<sup>38</sup> In 1945 Beard donated to Radcliffe papers over which she had gained control from the World Center for Women's Archives: the Leonora O'Reilly papers, the Inez Irwin papers, and other important collections.

Despite this donation, Jordan's commitment to Beard's vision for the Archives seemed to wane. While the Women's Archives was officially opened in 1949, and in 1950 became a department of Radcliffe, Beard was disappointed with the results. Jordan had not used many of her suggestions in the development of the archives. In a letter written in 1951 she describes how she had "led many women to believe that Radcliffe was the place in the U.S. for a great collection."<sup>39</sup> She continues: "I have regretted that Radcliffe...was in no great sense apparently warranting that belief."<sup>40</sup> In her uncertainty of the outcome for women's archives at Radcliffe, Beard began to push in the same direction at Smith college.<sup>41</sup>

In 1941 President Herbert Davis of Smith College, a scholar of English literature, had proposed to the college alumnae to build a rare book and manuscript collection of women writers. In 1942 the Friends of Smith College Library was inaugurated as part of Davis' plan for a women's literary collection. As Voss-Hubbard reveals, "Margaret Grierson, Smith College Archivist since 1940, was appointed Executive Secretary of the

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Anke Voss-Hubbard "'No Documents-No History': Mary Ritter Beard and the Early History of Women's Archives," [unpublished paper received by the author by permission], 12.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Cott, Woman Making History, 245.

Friends of the Smith College Library and director of the women's collection, which was introduced as a special project of the society."<sup>42</sup> With Grierson's support, the Sophia Smith collection began to grow steadily.<sup>43</sup> Herbert Davis, like President Jordan at Radcliffe, was ambivalent in his commitment to the project. In 1943 Margaret Grierson wrote of his indecision and the comparatively stronger and more compelling vision of Mary Beard: "As you know, there has been considerable difference of opinion as to what we should attempt. I think you are right in feeling that President Davis is not clear in his own mind as to what he wants....Mrs. Mary Beard, as you know, rather hoped that we would be interested in carrying on the work of the abandoned Women's Archives."<sup>44</sup> Eventually, as a result of Grierson's efforts, Davis's idea for a literary collection was broadened to include "works about, as well as by women...[,] material that records and reflects the ideas, interests, visions, endeavors and achievements of American women as a force in shaping the patterns of our national growth."<sup>45</sup>

By the end of 1947, the women's collection was growing in popularity. According to Voss-Hubbard: "The Friends of the Library had to report that its growing membership of over 700 was largely due to "the increasingly popular enterprise of the collection in

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<sup>42</sup>Voss-Hubbard, "'No Documents-No History'," 15.

<sup>43</sup>Some of the first documents in the collection were donated by Beard from among materials gathered for the World Center for Women's Archives.

<sup>44</sup>Quotation drawn from photocopy of text of captions used in an exhibit entitled "'Never...Another Season of Silence': Laying the Foundation of the Sophia Smith Collection, 1942-1965," mounted by Amy Hague and Rebecca Carr in 1993, supplied to the author by Amy Hague, Assistant Curator, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>45</sup>Voss-Hubbard, "'No Documents-No History'," 16.

the social and intellectual history of women."<sup>46</sup>

As the Archives continued to grow, Beard began to push more ardently for courses and seminars to be attached to the archives. While Grierson "did not share Mary's ardor for organizing seminars"<sup>47</sup> she did try "to further the proposal."<sup>48</sup> But with the inauguration of President Benjamin Fletcher Wright as a replacement for Davis in the 1950s, plans for classes in women's history remained unfulfilled. Wright was not a great supporter of the Sophia Smith Collection and according to Voss-Hubbard the only result of repeated requests by Beard for classes was to provoke annoyance. In one case, Beard wrote to the President to suggest a women's history course be taught, to which Wright responded by instructing his secretary to "Stop these!"<sup>49</sup>

A major issue for Grierson and the Sophia Smith Collection was whether the collection should be integrated with the rest of the Library. This debate runs throughout the women's archives movement, and indeed is at the centre of the women's movement. It is the question of whether or not separation from the mainstream, in this case libraries, would ameliorate or entrench women's subordinate role in society. Grierson was adamant that the collection not reinforce sex segregation. For her it was clear that "[t]he purpose of the collection is certainly not to sharpen the distinction between the sexes...but further to diminish the distinction by gathering an imposing evidence of work of women in every

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>47</sup>Quotation drawn from "'Never..Another Season of Silence'," mounted by Amy Hague and Rebecca Carr, 1993.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Voss-Hubbard, "'No Documents-No History'," 21.

way [equal] to that of men."<sup>50</sup> Thus, books and publications were integrated in the main library collection. Archival materials were segregated from the rest of the collection for conservation purposes.

The opposite view, which was held by organizers at Radcliffe and Mary Beard herself, was that separate treatment of the collection, at least as to cataloguing, was essential to provide optimal access to women's records. Grierson had continuing problems with this issue, but eventually in 1947 (and perhaps under Beard's influence) "the Smith Library developed a separate subject card catalog of materials in the library related to the history of women."<sup>51</sup> By 1949, Grierson was listing the acquisitions of the Sophia Smith Collections in the annual report in an entirely separate section.

In the 1950s and 1960s, paralleling the experience of Radcliffe's collection, the curators of the Sophia Smith Collection found that "support from administration was intermittent and unpredictable."<sup>52</sup> This decline in support and interest persisted and hampered all efforts until the late 1960s. By then shifts in the social climate provided an impetus for increased radicalism in efforts to preserve women's records.

### **The Early Women's Archives Movement in Canada**

The women's archives movement in Canada began in the 1950s, fifteen years after similar initiatives had begun in the United States. The reasons for this later starting date are not entirely clear. An explanation might lie in the smaller and more marginal nature

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 23.

of the women's movement in Canada during the first part of the twentieth century. Although women's suffrage had been won by 1918, the movement for women's equality lost momentum after this victory. Another possibility for the later starting date might be connected to the different political setting of the Canadian archival system compared to the United States. In Canada, where the people have a more trusting relationship with the state, the preservation of private records was one of the responsibilities of the Public Archives of Canada. In the United States, where suspicion of government intervention runs parallel with the spirit of individualism, independent private archives, such as the one proposed by Beard have become very much part of the American archival scene.

Despite these differences, similar patterns are evident in the circumstances and goals of the early progenitors in both countries. For example, the early founders of the movement in the United States were well-educated, white, middle and upper class women interested in the development of archives for scholarly purposes. In Canada, the early founders of the movement were members of a women's organization, the National Council of Women of Canada, an organization founded in 1893 as part of Canada's first feminist wave. The majority of its members were urban, anglophone and middle-class.<sup>53</sup>

In 1954, Beatrice Brigden, the Chairman of the Council's Committee on Arts and Letters visited the Fawcett Library on the History of Women in London, England (a library established and operated by the British Women's Suffrage Association). Upon her return to Canada, Brigden recommended that the National Council "authorize, as a project for the Arts and Letters Committee, the collection of reference books and material to form

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<sup>53</sup>The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2nd ed., s.v. "National Council of Women of Canada."

the nucleus of a library by and about women."<sup>54</sup> This recommendation was adopted and the National Council on Women library (later to be called the Lady Aberdeen Library) was begun. In 1957, Elizabeth Long, Brigden's successor, visited the Fawcett Library, the International Archives in Amsterdam, as well as the Sophia Smith Collection. Long's successor, P.H. Woycenko, visited Radcliffe College in 1961. The importance of the European and American institutions as role models is expressed by Woycenko in a report submitted to the Council upon her return in 1961. "It is only when we learn of institutions with similar objectives, and become acquainted with their work, [that] we seem to realize more than ever before, the importance, the need and value of our own project-- The Lady Aberdeen Library."<sup>55</sup>

By the early 1960s, the National Council had acquired over 1500 books. After several publicity pieces in the media, it also began to receive donations of private papers. In addition, material acquired from other women's organizations began to accumulate to such an extent that finding a permanent location for the collection became a growing concern. There were several discussions with W.K. Lamb, then the National Librarian and Dominion Archivist, but the Council decided that the National Library could not offer the kind of commitment to the integrity of the collection which donors of the material expected.<sup>56</sup> This desire to keep the collection together as a "women's library" closely paralleled the hope of American women to develop an independent home for women's

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<sup>54</sup>National Council of Women, The Lady Aberdeen Library on Women: The National Council of Women of Canada 1967, Centennial Project (Ottawa, [1967]), 3.

<sup>55</sup>Olga Woycenko, "The Lady Aberdeen Library and Its Forerunners," Lady Aberdeen Collection, Master Files, Special Collections, Library, University of Waterloo, 2.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 6.

materials. Canadian efforts to locate the collection with the National Library differ significantly however from their American counterparts who had steered clear of government institutions.

In 1964, Doris Lewis, Chief librarian at the University of Waterloo expressed interest in the collection. Lewis was personally interested in the question of documentation of women's activities, and she also recognized its usefulness for the increasingly popular women's studies program just getting under way.

When the University of Waterloo received the collection, it consisted of "more than 1800 books, photographs, etc., all contained in over 80 cartons...."<sup>57</sup> There were also the private records of fifteen prominent Canadian women, among them Cora E. Hind, Elizabeth Shortt, Emily Murphy, and Ishbel Aberdeen.

Further attempts to acquire private records were planned by the library at Waterloo. In 1969, M.I. Belle Grant informed Long of the University of Waterloo Library's long-range plan to "send request[s] to contemporary Canadian women (authors, public figures) for manuscripts, papers and correspondence."<sup>58</sup> To accomplish this goal a list was drawn up of over one hundred names of potential donors, mostly authors and poets, including Margaret Atwood and Charlotte E. Whitton.<sup>59</sup> Despite this lengthy list and great enthusiasm, active requests for papers were never undertaken by the University of Waterloo. The Library did receive unsolicited papers. In a report entitled "A Report

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<sup>57</sup>Suzanne M. Cox to Doris Lewis, 9 April 1965, Lady Aberdeen Collection, Master Files, Special Collections, Library, University of Waterloo.

<sup>58</sup>M.I. Belle Grant to Elizabeth Long, 7 May 1969, Lady Aberdeen Collection, Master Files, Special Collections, Library, University of Waterloo.

<sup>59</sup>[List of Potential Donors], Lady Aberdeen Collection, Master Files, Special Collections, Library, University of Waterloo.

on the Last 12 Years" Susan Bellingham (Special Collections Librarian), wrote that: "Probably the most exciting donations during the last [twelve] years have been the large collections of archival and manuscript material which have been presented to the library by the heirs and executors of notable Canadian women and in many cases donated by the women themselves."<sup>60</sup>

Today books from the Lady Aberdeen Collection have been integrated (for practical reasons) with the rest of the library collection at the university. Rare books and archival material have been placed in the Doris Lewis Rare Book Room.

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The first stage of the women's archives movement reflected the marginal nature of the early women's movement, which made no searching criticism of society or traditional archives. Instead, progenitors of the women's archives movement concentrated on preserving both library and archival materials to insure that the experiences and accomplishments of women would be recorded. These efforts can be summarized by the statement of Margaret Grierson who saw her work as "a purely scholarly undertaking" and believed that she was "preparing the way for scholars, and not in any sense an activist."<sup>61</sup> "Women's Archives" were established to complement the holdings of traditional archives, not to change them.

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<sup>60</sup>Susan Bellingham, "The Lady Aberdeen Library on the History of Women: A Report of the Last 12 Years" 1979, Lady Aberdeen Collection, Master Files, Special Collections, Library, University of Waterloo, 2.

<sup>61</sup>Quotation drawn from "'Never...Another Season of Silence'," mounted by Amy Hague and Rebecca Carr, 1993.

## Chapter Two

### REFORM AND REJECTION, 1970-1983

In the 1960s, amid the growing social ferment of the Vietnam War, the Black Power Movement and other New Left movements, a new generation of American women began to fight more ardently for "women's liberation" from what they increasingly regarded as women's oppression by men. In Canada, a similar politicization of women began in the late 1960s. As Margaret Fulford notes, "established women's organizations lobbied for and then advised the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which was set up in 1967. By the time the commission reported in 1970, radical women's groups emerging from campus and left-wing organizations had dramatically transformed Canadian feminism."<sup>1</sup> In this second-wave of feminism, women became more conscious of the limitations prescribed for them in society and therefore sought to change their role in it. In this highly politicized climate, new approaches also seemed necessary to preserve women's documentary heritage.

While efforts in the first stage had centered on the establishment of "women's archives" that were identical to traditional archives, activities at this stage reflected a growing tension between the need for separation from and the need for reform of traditional archives. Some feminists, primarily liberal feminist historians and archivists, argued for the need for reform of society to assure women's equality with men. They translated these political arguments into the need for reform of androcentric practices of

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Fulford, comp., The Canadian Women's Movement, 1960-1990: A Guide to Archival Resources/ Le Mouvement Canadien des Femmes, 1960-1990: Guide des Ressources Archivistiques (Toronto: ECW Press, 1992), 8.

traditional archival repositories in order to reflect women's experiences equally with those of men. They believed that efforts to change the system from within would best ensure women's equal representation in mainstream archives.

Other feminists, such as radical and lesbian activists, advocated the complete restructuring of society and saw a need for complete separation from mainstream society in order to build an alternative culture. They believed that separation from traditional archives and the establishment of women-centered archives was necessary to build a strong feminist consciousness and the strength to make radical changes in the future. These two strategies developed in tandem until the early 1980s.

It is also important to note that the tradition of establishing archives within libraries of women's colleges or universities with strong women's studies programs continues to be a popular strategy throughout the history of the movement. Initiatives along these lines were especially popular in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, in the United States, the Texas Women's Archives began in 1978 "to locate the historical source material to document the contribution of Texas women to the history of their state."<sup>2</sup>

### **Liberal Feminist Historians and Reform of Traditional Archives**

E.H. Carr wrote that "by and large the historian will get the kinds of facts he wants." Feminist historians began to collect the facts they wanted.

Judith Zinsser

The urge to reform traditional archives came first from historians imbued with a strong feminist ideology who began to ask new questions of the past. The impetus for

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<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Snapp, "The Women's Collection, The Texas Women's University Library," Special Collections 3 (1986): 105.

change in the writing of women's history emerged from shifts within mainstream European and North American history during the early 1970s. A new generation of historians began to criticize traditional historiography for its preoccupation with elites. Realizing the narrow limits of studying "great men doing great things," social historians began to focus attention on the social group as it experienced the effects of industrialization, modernization and urbanization. They focused their attention on new subjects, such as the history of labour, education, children, and the family.

At first this new focus did not include women's history. In fact, as Judith P. Zinsser sees it, "for all that they accomplished in terms of new sources and new perspectives, the leaders among these gifted and revolutionary European and American historians remained traditional in one key respect. They failed to value women's experience equally with men's."<sup>3</sup>

What social history did accomplish was to prepare the groundwork for a new generation of feminist historians. Eventually, the methodologies of social history were taken up by feminist historians and used for the analysis of women as subjects. Canadian historian Veronica Strong-Boag writes of this symbiotic relationship between social and women's history as follows: "Women's history and social history tackle critical variables long under-rated in conventional accounts. Both identify sex and class as crucial to the understanding of historical development. Neither interpretation can stand alone."<sup>4</sup> For Strong-Boag the melding of the variable of gender with social history is essential to writing a complete history. She writes that "Without the inclusion of gender as a

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<sup>3</sup>Zinsser, History and Feminism: A Glass Half Full, 22.

<sup>4</sup>Strong-Boag, "Raising Clio's Consciousness," 70-71.

significant category, social history runs the risk of sharing the overwhelmingly male perspective of its predecessors; without the awareness of socio-economic cleavage, women's history would become little more than the female counterpart to the traditional accounts. A close association of the two provides the surest guarantee of discovering a usable and comprehensive past."<sup>5</sup> For the first time, gender, rather than individual women as the object of inquiry, became an important variable in the historical process. It was also recognized that without an awareness of the social and economic context which influenced collective female experience, women's history would accomplish little more than earlier more traditional accounts. Only with attention to the gender characteristics of the past could the new social history rise above traditional historical accounts.

The change in focus which characterized the "new" women's history initiated a questioning of earlier approaches to evaluating and writing about women's past. In a key article published in 1974, Gerda Lerner, an American historian, wrote of the early stages of women's history which focused on notable women as "compensatory" and as "contribution" history, which although a necessary stage in the development of women's history, limited itself to describing women's contribution to, and subjection in, a male-defined world. She writes: "...historians of women's history have so far used a traditional conceptual framework. Essentially they have applied questions from traditional history to women, and tried to fit women's past into the empty spaces of historical scholarship."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Gerda Lerner, The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 149.

Lerner proposed instead that the new women's history should focus not on women's contribution to history but on women's experience in history. Questions asked of the past should be women-centered and asked according to standards appropriate to women. She suggested that instead of concentrating solely on "Great women," writers of new women's history should explore the ways in which common women were aided and affected by these influential women's work, and the ways in which they themselves grew into feminist awareness.<sup>7</sup> Essentially, this new outlook on history, with women as central players, led "historians to formulate new analytical categories, new ways to determine what was and was not significant."<sup>8</sup> Of course, this re-evaluation of what was significant in history had several implications for archivists.

The new interpretive framework called for a reevaluation of old sources for indirect information they contained on the lives of women, and a search for new sources of evidence of women's past. Because earlier historians had sought to find evidence of women's activity in the public world, they had used traditional sources, such as government records, military records, and the private papers of male leaders. Through these sources they found evidence of women's contributions to political, diplomatic, constitutional, economic and social events.

By the 1970s, the search for women's unique experience outside the public sphere led historians to such sources as "novels, hymn books, songs, criminal records, myths, old wives tales, folk remedies, rituals, women's magazines and oral testimony."<sup>9</sup> Historians

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>8</sup>Zinsser, History and Feminism, 38.

<sup>9</sup>Dierdre Beddoe, Discovering Women's History: A Practical Manual (London: Pandora Press, 1983), 7.

began to look into the daily lives, activities, and beliefs of women who remained in the private sphere. Private papers became the chief archival source for writers of women's history. Canadian historian Margaret Conrad explained that "if public and published papers are few and macro studies difficult, then we must investigate personal, private sources with greater seriousness. If women's participation in politics is peripheral and labour force activity is muffled then we turn to local and family histories where women have figured prominently both as participants and as chroniclers."<sup>10</sup>

As historians searched for women's history, many assumed that there was a paucity of sources pertaining to women in traditional archives. According to Ruth Roach Pierson, "women's historical invisibility was seen to have been the work of the creators of historical records and the designators of historical significance-- an elite of almost exclusively male chroniclers, archivists and historians-- In their hands history had become the records of men's experience."<sup>11</sup> However, as more efforts were made to recover sources pertaining to women, one aspect of the initial criticism of traditional archives proved false. Although they were not always accessible, the sources for women's history would prove to be richer than was first supposed.

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<sup>10</sup>Margaret Conrad, "Sundays Always Make Me Think Home: Time and Place in Canadian Women's History," in Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History, ed. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991), 100.

<sup>11</sup>Ruth Roach Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History," in Writing Women's History: International Perspectives, ed. Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall (London: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd., 1991), 81.

## Criticism of Traditional Archives

Let us hope that the time has come when no archivist, and no woman, will say: these papers are worthless; they're only the papers of a woman.

Eva Moseley, 1972

The criticisms of traditional archives by feminist historians were echoed by feminist archivists, manuscript curators and historians who attended the Society of American Archivists conference in 1972. The conference, the theme of which was "Women in Archives," focused on two main issues: the discrimination experienced by female archivists within the profession (which is an issue outside of the scope of this study), and the treatment of sources created by and about women.

The historians' perspective was articulated by Joanna Schneider Zangrando, who argued that "it is incumbent upon those who work in the field of history to correct misinformation, to analyze the bases for our myths concerning women, and to help transform our social attitudes over the long run. This task falls equally on teachers, authors, archivists, manuscript historians, museum curators, all those engaged in the process of gathering and sharing information about the past."<sup>12</sup> She contended that archivists must address their "limited perspective" on what constitutes historical significance and how this affects acquisition and description of sources. "Archivists, after all," she maintained, "stand at the entry way to historical knowledge. They make decisions about acquisitions, they devise cataloguing and retrieval schemes, they operate on certain assumptions about what materials get priority when faced with limited resources. If they fail to deal forthrightly with women in history, those who rely on their

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<sup>12</sup>Joanna Schneider Zangrando, "Women in Archives: An Historians View of the Liberation of Clio," American Archivist 36 (April 1973): 207.

materials and assistance must suffer."<sup>13</sup> She suggested that archivists contribute to a women's history newsletter and cooperate in a national and systematic survey of sources for the study of women's past.

The archivists' perspective on the issue of women and archives was presented by Eva Moseley, curator of manuscripts at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Radcliffe College. Moseley asserted that "neglect of women has not only meant little or no space given to them in historical writings, but it also meant little or no space given to women's papers in manuscript repositories and little or no effort to acquire these materials."<sup>14</sup> She attributed the neglect to three factors: that women themselves often considered their papers trivial and treated them accordingly; that women are concealed behind the thoughts and accomplishments of men; and that historians and archivists have been biased in their determination of historical significance.<sup>15</sup> She proposed publication of unpublished documents, oral history projects, research and publications projects directed at women's records and "improved finding aids, not so much within repositories as among them."<sup>16</sup>

Miriam I. Crawford, curator of the Conwellana-Templana Collection at Temple University, echoed Zangrando and Moseley. She argued that providing access to sources on women through guides should be the first concern of archivists in established repositories. She also suggested that a page or section in the American Archivist should

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>14</sup>Moseley, "Women in Archives," 215.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 216.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 220.

be devoted to women's studies, and that archivists be encouraged to contribute to the women's history newsletter recommended by Zangrando. For Crawford, the archivist had a duty to increase awareness of the women's movement: "Both in the collecting and preservation of the original records of women's history...[and] drawing out the hidden information through inventories, special guides and union catalogues, we can use our awareness of the issues to increase public knowledge."<sup>17</sup> She believed her approach could "be stopped once equality is assured."<sup>18</sup>

Response to the suggestions of Zangrando, Moseley and Crawford have been varied. The most noteworthy activity which took place at this time was the search for sources pertaining to women's experience buried in established repositories. In the early 1970s in the United States there were four guides available to sources pertaining to women... Two of them outlined sources at Sophia Smith, one was for sources at the Library of Congress, and the third a compilation of sources entitled Archival and Manuscript Resources for the Study of Women's History: A Beginning by Andrea Hinding and Rosemary Richardson. By 1979, this "beginning" had become Women's History Sources : A Guide to Archives and Manuscript Collections in the United States.<sup>19</sup> This very important guide, the result of years of surveys, revealed that, instead of a dearth of sources pertaining to women, there actually existed an "abundance of riches." "If women have been excluded from written history" Hinding wrote, "as often

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<sup>17</sup>Miriam Crawford, "Women in Archives: Program for Action," American Archivist 36 (April 1973): 229.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 232.

<sup>19</sup>Andrea Hinding and Ames Sheldon Bower comps., Women's History Sources: A Guide to Archives and Manuscript Sources in the United States (New York: R.R. Bowler Company, 1979).

as has been observed, it's not because the primary sources to document their past did not exist."<sup>20</sup> It appeared that women's experience was not obscured through lack of sources. Rather historians, pretending to speak for all of society, had concentrated on the accomplishments of civilization from a male perspective, and therefore ignored sources pertaining to women's history.

A number of other organizations responded to concerns about sources for women's history. In 1972, the National Publications and Records Commission named a special advisory committee to make recommendations concerning the editing and publishing of papers on women. This committee recommended that the papers of ninety individual women and women's organizations be published, which eventually resulted in fifteen publications. In the same year, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women in the Archival Profession. This led to the organization of the Women's Caucus which served to raise women's issues in the Society and to scrutinize SAA policies and practices vis-a-vis women."<sup>21</sup> In 1973, an entire issue of Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives was dedicated to articles relating to sources pertaining to women. The papers of the "Women in Archives" conference were published in The American Archivist in 1973. In 1974, an internal review of records pertaining to women in the National Archives revealed that there were only two sizeable bodies bearing directly on women's experience, the records of the Women's Bureau and the Children's Bureau. As a result, a conference was organized in 1976 to share knowledge of private papers available throughout the United States.

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>21</sup>Michele F. Pacifico, "Founding Mothers: Women in the Society of American Archivists, 1936-1972," American Archivist 50 (Summer 1987): 389.

In Canada, feminist historian Veronica Strong-Boag first articulated criticism of traditional archives in 1978 in an article entitled "Raising Clio's Consciousness: Women's History and Archives in Canada." Strong-Boag argued that traditional archives had neglected sources pertaining to women's experience in Canada, a neglect, she wrote, "stemming in large part from time-worn classification systems which emphasize the activities of political, military, diplomatic and economic elites. Inevitably priority of recovery and classification is accorded the individuals and groups reaching top ranks. As a result women, who rarely appear among the powerful, are largely excluded."<sup>22</sup>

Strong-Boag proposed two general solutions: that existing holdings should be reappraised for their value for women's history and that acquisition of women's records should become a priority.<sup>23</sup> To accomplish the first goal, Strong-Boag argued, archivists should reexamine materials within their holding for the light they shed on women's history. Finding guides should be reexamined for "camouflaged" women buried behind the use of initials and married names. Additions to present collections should concentrate on oral history, visual materials and "vital and labour force statistics in a readily usable form."<sup>24</sup> She also emphasized the need to acquire sources which shed light on women other than those from the urban, white middle-class. Like Eva Moseley in the United States, Strong-Boag's main concern was to reveal materials that could reflect the more hidden lives of working class, rural, and minority women. Ultimately, Strong-Boag argued, traditional archives had to commit themselves fully to the task of assisting

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<sup>22</sup>Strong-Boag, "Raising Clio's Consciousness," 73.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 73.

Canadian women "to rediscover their own history."<sup>25</sup>

In fact, the Public Archives of Canada had already responded to these new historiographical currents by establishing an initiative to acquire women's records. While the Archives had been "collecting papers relating to women for decades (the National Council of Women first donated records in 1923)... a more systematic approach to acquisitions was developed in about 1972 when various archivists began contacting national women's organizations."<sup>26</sup> By 1975, this position was formalized with the appointment of an archivist to acquire records bearing on women and other neglected subject areas.<sup>27</sup> In a complementary effort, supported largely by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, several guides to the sources for women's history were published in the 1980s. This included a compilation of sources for all of Canada by Beth Light and Veronica Strong-Boag entitled True Daughters of the North: Research and Reference Bibliography of Canadian Women's History,<sup>28</sup> a two hundred page annotated bibliography of published primary and secondary sources on Canadian women's history. In addition, surveys of archival holdings in Canadian repositories were published in the Canadian Newsletter of Research on Women.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>26</sup>Letter to the author from Colleen Dempsey, Archivist, Manuscript Division, National Archives of Canada, May 19, 1994.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Beth Light and Veronica Strong-Boag, comps., True Daughters of the North: Research and Reference Bibliography of Canadian Women's History (Toronto: OISE Press, 1980).

<sup>29</sup>This newsletter has been continued as Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la recherche feministe.

## Rejection of Traditional Archives

Other women, primarily radical and lesbian feminist/activists, rejected reform as a solution to preserving women's records. These women felt that archives had a much larger role to play than simply furthering scholarly pursuits. For them, the establishment of an archival repository and the process of acquiring and preserving records created by women was a vital part of the feminist objective to change women's status. Therefore, they believed that women ought to control the process of preserving sources of women's history.

This rejection of traditional archives was very much in line with the political ideology of radical and lesbian feminism. Many believed that the patriarchal norm of male supremacy could only be destroyed with a radical restructuring of society. Separation from mainstream society offered a means of empowerment for those women whose needs were not being addressed by the feminist agenda of white, middle and upper class women.

The impulse towards separation is explained by Marilyn Frye in her article "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power." She writes that "women generally are not the people who do the redefining, and we cannot from our isolation and powerlessness simply commence saying different things than others say and make it stick. There is a humpty-dumpty problem in that."<sup>30</sup> Instead she proposed that separation allowed women to "draw new boundaries and create new roles and relationships."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power," in Feminist Philosophies: Problems, Theories and Applications, eds., Janet A. Kournay, James P. Sterba and Rosemarie Tong (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992), 295.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

For women who felt excluded by traditional archives as well as by liberal feminist efforts to reform traditional archives, the solution to the problem was found in the establishment of independent women-centered archives. Radical feminists were not content to reform society. Instead, they erected a counterculture which was run according to feminist principles. They opened feminist restaurants, bookstores, publishing houses, record companies, cooperative art galleries, health centers, abortion counselling services, credit unions, day-care centers and furniture moving companies.<sup>32</sup> In the same way, the establishment of feminist archives were part of women's assertion of a sense of independence and control.

This strategy also appealed to black women who "found themselves and [their] issues shunted to the side within the predominately white movement whose universalist claims about the nature of women's oppression denied the realities of racism."<sup>33</sup> In a similar vein, lesbian feminists, who were twice ignored by both the women's movement and the gay rights movement, began to see "separation as a political strategy--a temporary withdrawal from mainstream activism while they explored a lesbian identity and developed an approach to their issues that would guarantee that other activists finally paid attention."<sup>34</sup>

All these groups believed that the building and keeping of archives would form the foundation on which the women's movement, in all its various forms, would continue

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>33</sup>Sara M. Evans, Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America (New York: The Free Press (A Division of Macmillan, Inc.), 1989), 297.

<sup>34</sup>Flora Davis, Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in American since 1960 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 271.

to grow by serving as a source of inspiration for activists dedicated to changing the status of women. The very act and process of controlling acquisition and access to sources pertaining to women would be an invaluable means of empowerment, both symbolic and real.

### Lesbian and Gay Initiatives

The Archives is filled with voices announcing our autonomy and self-possession. The roots of the Archives lie in the silenced voices, the love letters destroyed, the profound changes, the diaries carefully edited, the pictures never taken, the euphemized distortions that patriarchy would let pass.

Joan Nestle, Lesbian Herstory Archives, 1979

A conspiracy of silence has robbed gay men and lesbians of their history. A sense of continuity which derives from the knowledge of a heritage is essential for the building of self-confidence in a community. It is a necessary tool in the struggle for social change.

The Canadian Gay Archives Statement of Purpose, 1975

Perhaps the most striking example of this archival counterculture is the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York. The Lesbian Herstory Archives began in 1974 out of the pantry of the Upper West Side Manhattan apartment of activists Deborah Edel and Joan Nestle. The idea for the Archives was an outgrowth of a lesbian conscious-raising group at the Gay Academic Union. Edel and Nestle and the three other founding members were concerned with "the failure of mainstream publishers, libraries, archives and research institutions to value lesbian culture."<sup>35</sup> Feeling that homophobia excluded lesbian experience from archival holdings, they believed that "the only way to ensure the

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<sup>35</sup>[Lesbian Herstory Archives], Lesbian Herstory Archives, (New York: Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation Inc., 1992).

preservation of lesbian culture and history was to establish an independent archives governed by lesbians."<sup>36</sup>

The organizers of the Lesbian Herstory Archives were and are committed to act independently from government control. As one spokesperson put it in 1992, "the Archives began with a steadfast commitment to be a grassroots organization, to rely upon community members to give individually."<sup>37</sup> The Archives is meant to be a resource center where activists, lesbians and other women can benefit from "living history."

Acquisition is based on the potential of the material "to give evidence of lesbian oppression as well as liberation."<sup>38</sup> For this reason, and because other cultural institutions have neglected lesbian material, the Archives acquires material that would not otherwise be collected by libraries and museums. This broad acquisition mandate is illustrated through a description of their holdings: "tens of thousands of books and periodicals; from medical texts to steamy 1950s pulp novels to short-lived Lesbian publications ... posters, T-shirts and jackets ... [r]hinestone pasties donated by a Lesbian stripper ... a team-autographed softball and lambda-emblazoned hard hat ... over two hundred large special collections from Lesbians who have donated letters, diaries and snapshots ... biographical files and clippings from local newspapers and flyers from community events."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>[Lesbian Herstory Archives], Background on the Lesbian Herstory Archives (New York: Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation Inc., 1992), 2. This idea is succinctly put by Polly Thistlewaite who writes: "Face it only lesbians can do this job the way it should be done." Polly Thistlewaite, "'To Tell the Truth' The Lesbian Herstory Archives: Chronicling a People and Fighting Invisibility Since 1974," Outweek, September 1989, 39.

<sup>37</sup>[Lesbian Herstory Archives], Background on the Lesbian Herstory Archives, 1.

<sup>38</sup>[Lesbian Herstory Archives], Lesbian Herstory Archives.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

In addition to this broad acquisition policy, the Archives, which sees itself constituting a "radical departure from conventional archiving practices,"<sup>40</sup> operates according to seven principles. The first principle rejects what they view as the exclusivity of access in policies of traditional archives. Instead, "All Lesbian women must have access to the archives; no credentials for usage or inclusion; race and class must be no barrier." The second principle relates to the accessibility of archives. They contend that "the archives should be housed within the community, not on an academic campus that is by definition closed to many women."<sup>41</sup> The third, fourth and fifth principles oppose the notion that archivists can remain objective and uninvolved in the community in which they serve. They operate according to the principles that "the archives should be involved in the political struggles of the Lesbian people," and that "the community should share in the work of the archives," and that "funding is sought from within the community the archives serves, rather than from outside sources." The sixth principle rejects the elitism of traditional archives which acquire only the papers of the famous and powerful. Instead they state that "the archives will collect the prints of all our lives, not just preserve the records of the famous or the published." The seventh and last principle rejects the elitist education of archivists for traditional archives: they insist instead that "archival skills should be taught, one generation of Lesbians to another, breaking the elitism of traditional archives."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>[Lesbian Herstory Archives], Background on the Lesbian Herstory Archives, 3.

<sup>41</sup>This ideas is echoed by Polly Thistlewaite who writes: "to affiliate Lesbian Herstory Archives with a public or academic institution would allow re-colonization of lesbian lives and history." Thistlewaite, "'To Tell the Truth'," 39.

<sup>42</sup>These principles are drawn from [Lesbian Herstory Archives], Background on the Lesbian Herstory Archives, 2.

Many of these characteristics identified for the Lesbian Herstory Archives are found in Canadian efforts to preserve lesbian records at the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives in Toronto. Similar to the beginnings of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives was started by Jearld Moldenhauer who was concerned with the records accumulating in the hall of Canadian journal The Body Politic. Moldenhauer recognized these records as "pieces of truth...pieces that gay people in the future might use to build a sense of their own identity."<sup>43</sup>

When Moldenhauer became too busy to take care of the records they were passed on to gay activist Ron Dayman, who was concerned with the preservation of both gay and lesbian history. Dayman was able to find secure space for the archives in the basement of a gay group house. In 1973, after completing the preliminary arrangement of the papers, Dayman, at a national gay conference in Quebec City, announced the opening of the Gay Liberation Movement Archives.

In 1974, the Archives (a two-drawer filing cabinet) was placed in a more permanent home in a space shared by The Body Politic and the Gay Alliance Toward Equality. In 1975, the Pink Triangle Press was incorporated as the corporate umbrella for The Body Politic and the Archives. By 1980, needing its independence for security<sup>44</sup> and other reasons, the Canadian Gay Archives was incorporated with its own Board of Directors and corporate officers.

From the beginning, the Archives was meant to be a national organization. As

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<sup>43</sup>Rick Bedout, "Stashing the Evidence," The Body Politic 55 (August 1979): 22.

<sup>44</sup>In 1977, during a police raid of the office of the The Body Politic, the Archives was ransacked. Because of this it was decided that separation from the paper would provide better security. In 1982, during another police raid, the Archives went untouched because it was independent from the paper.

early as 1974 a letter was sent to all gay and lesbian organizations asking for material. By material, the founders of the Archives meant private papers and organizational records as well as periodicals, newsletters, and books. Like the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the mandate of the Archives was much broader than that of traditional archives. It was meant to act as a "vital resource centre for the Gay Liberation Movement, a research library for gay and lesbian groups and individuals across the country and a source for the production of material for the education of society."<sup>45</sup>

Before its incorporation the Archives was run by a collective "made up of people who actually did the work."<sup>46</sup> However, when the Archives was incorporated in 1980, it set up a Board of Directors and a membership list. According to Fraser and Averill, "it was decided the Archives Collective would constitute the members of the corporation."<sup>47</sup> Other Board members came from the Pink Triangle Press... While the Archives Collective was entrusted to make all the administrative and policy decisions, the Board was given the final authority.

Like members of the collective running the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the members of the Canadian Gay Archives' Board believed it was important to remain active within the community it served. The Archives co-sponsored conferences in 1981 and 1982, and played "an active role in the Lesbian and Gay History Group of Toronto."<sup>48</sup> It was also responsible for "publishing an issue of the Lesbian and Gay History

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<sup>45</sup>Fraser and Averill, Organizing an Archives, 60.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 4.

Researchers Network Newsletter in 1981,"<sup>49</sup> and was mandated to produce or assist in the production of reference aids. By 1983, the Canadian Gay Archives had eight publications to its name, including bibliographies and other reference works.

As similar as the Canadian Gay Archives is to other Archives established in the separatist tradition of the 1970s, the Canadian Gay Archives is different in two important regards. Firstly, it was not founded as a women-centered archives, and secondly it did not reject traditional archives outright.

Even though gay men ran the Archives, they always aimed to acquire records of both lesbian and gay groups and individuals. In a letter to the author, Robert Champagne, a member of the Archives Collective admits that the holdings better represent gay men's experience, but he argues that "there are substantial women's holdings" as well.<sup>50</sup>

Evidence of the position of lesbians within the organization is revealed through the various name changes which the Archives has undergone since its inception. As noted above the first name given to the Archives (in 1973) was the Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives. In 1975, because this was found to be too cumbersome, it was changed to Canadian Gay Archives. Soon after this name was adopted, explain Fraser and Averill, "concern was expressed that the word "gay" in the title was unsatisfactory in indicating that women were involved in the organization and that we collected lesbian material."<sup>51</sup> In response members of the Archives collective decided to add the subtitle "For Lesbians and Gay Men" in "order to more fully express what the

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Letter to the author from Robert Champagne, Canadian Gay Archives, Nov. 14, 1993.

<sup>51</sup>Fraser and Averill, Organizing an Archives, 9.

Archives stood for."<sup>52</sup> In 1993, the subtitle was incorporated into its current name, The Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives.

Furthermore, although the Archives was committed to maintain its independence, the founding members expressed little outright rejection or hostility towards traditional archives. At the beginning, for example, records were arranged by subject by volunteers who believed this was the best way to ensure access and use. Later, once professional archivists like James Fraser and Harold Averill became involved, the Archives was organized and run along very similar lines to that of traditional archives.

### Grass-Roots Feminist Archives

At the same time as the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives took shape, a group of radical feminists in Toronto began to preserve the records of the grass-roots Canadian women's movement. Like the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives and the Lesbian Herstory Archives, which were started with the non-current records of a gay periodical, the Canadian Women's Movement Archives was begun in 1977 by activist Pat Lesley, who rescued the documents accumulated by the Toronto women's newspaper The Other Women. Lesley's motivation was the same as that of Moldenhauer and the founding members of the Lesbian Herstory Archives: a sense of exclusion from mainstream archives. In an interview in 1986, founding members of the collective which grew from Lesley's initial efforts stated that the Archives started because "it seemed the women's movement was generating a lot of material, and it wasn't being preserved anywhere. Some of us felt it was very important to preserve our history: that those records were the

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

history of the women's movement, and without them our history would be lost."<sup>53</sup>

The archives is collectively run by a board of directors of between four and eight women. Members include feminist academics, archivists, students and activists. They have acquired records of groups and individuals involved in the "second wave" of feminism. The primary focus of acquisition has been motivated by grass-roots feminism. For the collective, the problem with traditional archives is that, while they may acquire records of "institutional feminism," it is really the records of the small, grass-roots feminist organizations which require attention. The Canadian Women's Movement Archives's commitment to records created by grass-roots organizations is explicit in its acquisition mandate. According to the collective "While we collect the records of any women's group, we focus on the grassroots women's movement, as opposed to the institutional."<sup>54</sup> They define institutional to "mean that feminism which operated within traditional institutions (for example, in political parties, government, the churches, etc.) and calls for more opportunities for women within these institutions."<sup>55</sup> By grassroots they "mean that feminism which is community-based and emphasizes collective organizing and reaching out to the 'women on the street'".<sup>56</sup>

There are several reasons for this focus on grass-roots feminism. First, the members of the collective believe that because they are activists themselves they have a

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<sup>53</sup>Canadian Women's Movement Archives, "Interview: The Canadian Women's Movement Archives Collective," interview by Aisla Thompson, Women's Education/ Education des Femmes 5 (Winter 1986): 18.

<sup>54</sup>Anne Molgat, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives/Archives Canadiennes du Mouvement des Femmes," CCWH Newsletter/Bulletin du CCHF (Fall 1988): 2.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

closer association with grass-roots organizations. As they put it, "We appreciate the range of the women's movement in a way I think traditional archives couldn't."<sup>57</sup> Second, they believed that many of the ideas and initiatives taken by grass-roots groups influence activity within institutional feminism. Last, they have recognized that records generated by institutional feminism are more likely to be acquired by traditional archives. As Anne Molgat writes, "traditional archives, when they have records for the contemporary Canadian women's movement at all, more often than not, have the papers of women's caucuses of political parties, those of advisory councils, some of the larger women's organizations like the YWCA, the National Council of Women, etc."<sup>58</sup> The result of this greater availability of material, Molgat concludes, "has meant that when the sociologists, and the historians and the political scientists write about the women's movement, they write about institutional feminism (but fail to identify it as such) and we wind up with a kind of-sanitized-vision of the women's movement where there are few, if any, poor women, women of colour, disabled women, lesbians, native women, working-class women, etc."<sup>59</sup>

The women running the Archives also wanted to provide an alternative to those feminist organizations and individuals who wish to have their records preserved but are distrustful of traditional archives because of their affiliation with government. Many groups, they judged, "simply feel more comfortable about having [their records] with a

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<sup>57</sup>Canadian Women's Movement Archives, "Interview," 19.

<sup>58</sup>Molgat, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives," 2.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

group not unlike their own, with a group that shares frequently, their group's politics."<sup>60</sup>

Retaining control is extremely important to the Canadian Women's Movement Collective. When asked in an interview whether or not it would seek government funding the reply was: "Yes, we would welcome government funding, but only when the control remains with the feminist movement, with feminists. That's very important."<sup>61</sup>

Like other independent women-centered archives the Canadian Women's Movement Archives has a very broad definition of what an Archives is. For them it is a combined Resource Center-Museum-Library-Archives. They write of themselves: "The Canadian Women's Movement Archives are feminist activists creating an independent community based archives, research and resource centre."<sup>62</sup> As well as the papers of women's organizations which participate in the contemporary women's movement, the Archives also has the largest collection of periodicals from the Canadian women's movement... sound recordings, posters, buttons, shirts and photos, and artifacts like the "two brass" plaques that were on Henry Morgantaler's clinic in Toronto until they were defaced by protesters."<sup>63</sup> Margaret Fulford explains that they collect objects like those because "museums seldom collect them."<sup>64</sup>

The final characteristic which likens the Canadian Women's Movement Archives

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<sup>60</sup>Canadian Women's Movement Archives, "Interview," 23.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>[Canadian Women's Movement Archives], The Canadian Women's Movement Archives (Toronto: Canadian Women's Movement Archives, [199?]).

<sup>63</sup>Molgat, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives," 3.

<sup>64</sup>Margaret Fulford, "Banners, Briefs and By-Laws: The Records of the Canadian Women's Movement," Unpublished paper delivered at the conference of the Ontario Archives Association, May 10, 1991, 11.

to other independent women-centered archives founded at this time is its criticism of traditional archives. This feeling is articulated by Anne Molgat.

We believe that the collecting and preservation of [the women's movement] archival material is important and we believe that this is best done by feminists themselves. This in no way suggests that we reject the work of traditional archivists; we continue to learn from them as they, we hope, learn from us. Rather, we object to the way in which, for the most part, the women's movement has been portrayed in their archives, and we have taken it upon ourselves to provide a 'truer vision'.<sup>65</sup>

The Collective felt that traditional archives had acquired records of institutional feminism rather than material created by grass-roots feminism. It did not reject traditional archives but believed it could help to preserve a rounded picture of the women's movement.

The crux of the Canadian Women's Movement Archives' criticism of traditional archives was further elaborated by Molgat. She argued that efforts at objective archival decision-making were impossible and are only a reflection of the needs of those in power.

Archives are political entities and collecting and preserving archival material is a political act. Someone made the rules, decided what constituted "archival material" and how it should be organized. The same person, or one of his cronies, created archival terminology. Someone else decided what material should be gone after, whose papers should be accepted and whose refused, and how they should be kept.<sup>66</sup>

In effect, this criticism questions whether existing archival institutions can live up to standards, particularly with regard to appraisal, which serve all sectors of society.

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<sup>65</sup>Molgat, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives," 1.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

If the women's archives movement is to have an "age of aquarius," the period between the late 1960s and the early 1980s would be it. This stage in the movement is best characterized by activists and academics who, inspired by the "second wave" of feminism, became increasingly concerned about preservation of women's records. This stage also featured the first criticisms aimed at traditional archives. These challenges to tradition came primarily from feminist historians who had been influenced by shifts in the historical profession towards social history and their own gender-consciousness arising from a stronger, more influential women's movement. In their efforts to write the "new" women's history they began to ask different questions of the past which led to a need for different sources.

The archival community reacted mainly by providing more publicity about archival holdings bearing on the history of women. It became apparent, however, that while there was an "abundance of riches" for white, middle and upper class women, records on other races and classes and on sexual orientation were scant. Groups like lesbians, blacks and radical feminists responded to this situation by establishing their own archival institutions to gather their own histories.

This stage is also noteworthy for rejection of traditional archives and the establishment of separate repositories for the preservation of records created by and about women. Two distinct groups established archives at this time: lesbian feminists and radical feminists interested in the preservation of the grass-roots women's movement. Both have some or all of the following distinguishing characteristics. First, they were founded, for the most part, by intellectuals highly involved in social activism. Second, they were meant to be resource centers that would combine the preservation of archival sources with the preservation of library books and museum artifacts. Third, they were to

be independent, community based, grass-roots centers, organized by committee and run by consensus. Fourth, they were meant to be a source of empowerment and inspiration for those involved in their creation and maintenance. Last, they consciously rejected many of traditional archival methodologies and practices.

## Chapter Three

### CONTINUITY, CHALLENGE AND CHANGE, 1983-1994

The diversity of the women's movement led to three streams of activity in the third stage of the women's archives movement. In the first stream, lesbian and radical feminists carried on efforts begun in the second stage. In the second, women of color and other minority women's groups challenged the acquisition policies and practices of both traditional archives and women-centered archives. In the third, feminist scholars questioned the wisdom of separation as a strategy for achieving women's equality. They recognized that separation from mainstream society was a necessary stage in women's struggle for recognition, but, as the movement continued separation risked entrenching women's subordinate position. These scholars believed that the best approach to achieving women's equality in archives was to act as a bridge between women and women's organizations and traditional archives. Only in this way could women's records become integrated with the rest of society's documentary heritage.

#### Continuity of Separatism

In the 1970s, during the second stage of the women's archives movement, the establishment of separate and independent women-centered archives became a strategy used by marginalized women's groups such as lesbians, black women and radical feminists to gain control of their past. In the third stage, these groups continued to be convinced of the need to separate themselves from the archival mainstream in order to remain a vital part of the communities they believed they served.

The greatest success was experienced by the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New

York. In 1991, it purchased a new building with community-donated funding. As a publication of the Archives put it, "this permanent home will always be a testament to what the Lesbian community can achieve, and to the power of grass-roots organizing."<sup>1</sup> Pamphlets and newsletters show that the archives has remained committed to the principles on which it was organized in 1974. It continues to be a grass-roots organization, led by committee and staffed by volunteers. Members of the Archives hope that it "will also serve as a cultural center, providing performance and exhibit space, and eventually facilities for photography and film-making. More research accessibility, study groups, tours and video viewing can all become possible. It will also be a place for every lesbian to visit, to feel at home, to just browse, or work on her own project."<sup>2</sup>

In Canada the continued need for separate archives for lesbians is reflected in the growth of the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives in Toronto. In May 1992, it adopted a new constitution, which "outlined roles of the board, officers, committees and members."<sup>3</sup> In the same year, it moved to larger quarters to accommodate the tremendous growth of the collection.<sup>4</sup> A measure of this growth is the increase in the number of users of the Archives from 219 in 1985-1987 to over 500 from 1987 to the end of 1992.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>[Lesbian Herstory Archives], Background on the Lesbian Herstory Archives (New York: Lesbian Herstory Archives, [1992]), 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 3

<sup>3</sup>"Reorganizing and Renewal at the Canadian Gay Archives," Gay Archivist: Newsletter of the Canadian Gay Archives 10 (November 1992): 1.

<sup>4</sup>Rick James, "Rick James...at Large," Sightlines, 9 February 1993, 8.

<sup>5</sup>"Archival News", Gay Archivist: Newsletter of the Canadian Gay Archives 10 (November 1992): 2.

The continued need for separate archives in Canada is also reflected in the establishment of the Manitoba Gay/Lesbian Archives in 1988. Echoing the organizers of the Lesbian Herstory Archives fourteen years earlier, its founders argued that "the history of homosexual persons has not only been neglected, it has been systematically suppressed and destroyed."<sup>6</sup> They feel that although historians are beginning to rectify the situation "their efforts...have been hindered by lack of material."<sup>7</sup> The mandate of the Archives is to acquire records of gays and lesbians in order to ensure that their history is given "the serious consideration that it deserves."<sup>8</sup> Beyond that, the founders have recognized that the Archives is only one component of a "multi-faceted agency working to achieve the full acceptance of homosexually-oriented persons in Canadian society."<sup>9</sup> As with the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the Manitoba venture is seen as part of a larger struggle to bring about social change.

Radical feminists in the United States, like those at the Canadian Women's Movement Archives, have also adopted the separatist strategy as a means to preserve sources they feel are being destroyed through neglect. In 1990, members of the Redstockings Liberation Movement (veterans of the 1960s group) began the Women's Liberation Archives as "a resource and aid for a new radical women's liberation

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<sup>6</sup>[Manitoba Gay/Lesbian Archives], Manitoba Gay/Lesbian Archives (Winnipeg: Manitoba Gay/Lesbian Archives, [199?]).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>[Winnipeg Gay/Lesbian Resource Centre], Purpose and Objectives (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Gay/Lesbian Resource Centre, [199?]), 1.

organizing drive."<sup>10</sup> They saw the preservation of archives as a political tool for radical change toward women's equality, as well as a resource center for activists. They believed that "it's vital to the continuing advance of equality, justice and democracy that the materials and lessons of past efforts be easily accessible to draw from and build upon."<sup>11</sup>

The Archives' explicit purpose to provide the historical foundation for further feminist political action is reflected in its motto: "Building on what's been won by knowing what's been done."<sup>12</sup> Material in the archives--which includes pamphlets, broadsides, videotapes, audiotapes, posters, periodicals, and even photocopies of FBI and CIA documents retrieved through the Freedom of Information Act--is meant to provide evidence of efforts of the "rebirth years" of the 1960's and early 1970s of feminism.

The members of the Redstockings believe that the Archives should be a resource center for the new generation of feminists for "new understandings and improved strategies."<sup>13</sup> They envision that the Archives will provide a foundation for further feminist activity, which they feel is being threatened by a conservative backlash. In this way, the motivation for the archives is reminiscent of the situation in the 1930s when feminists like Schwimmer were concerned that feminists would suffer setbacks if they lost a sense of the struggle for equality. Jenny Brown, a member of the Redstockings, has written of the vital need for the preservation of women's documentary heritage to help

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<sup>10</sup>[Redstockings of the Liberation Movement], Radical Feminists Start Archives Project from a Press Release by the Archives for Action Project (Cambridge: New Liberation News Service, 1990).

<sup>11</sup>[Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement], Archives for Action (New York: Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, 1991), 1.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 2.

the movement to secure its positions before the reforms won in "the rebirth years are completely rolled back".<sup>14</sup> She hoped that the lessons learned from the past would help in the planning of the future direction for the movement. "We will not be able to rebuild a radical movement for women's liberation or the liberation of anyone else until we uncover the foundations of radical organizing in our own history and experience."<sup>15</sup>

The Lesbian Herstory Archives and The Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives, and the establishment of The Manitoba Gay and Lesbian Archives and the Redstockings Liberation Movement Archives all excluded themselves from mainstream archival contacts. These groups saw no hope of traditional archives meeting their needs, and they worked earnestly to make their own archival thrust serve larger ends of the social movements they were interested in cultivating.

Other archives which began in the 1970s, such as The Canadian Women's Movement Archives and the Bethune Museum and Archives, took a different route. Their new tactics will be discussed later in the chapter, as a reflection of one direction that the women's archives movement is taking in the 1990s.

### **Challenges: Charges of Racism and Elitism and the Search for Women's Voice**

In the early 1980s charges of racial exclusion levelled against traditional archives and women-centered archives became a major issue.<sup>16</sup> This issue of discrimination in

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<sup>14</sup>Jenny Brown, "Women for Peace or Women's Liberation? Signposts from the Feminist Archives," Vietnam Generation (Summer/Fall, 1989) as taken from Press Release of the Redstockings Liberation Archives, November 30, 1990.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>The issue of multiculturalism and traditional archives had been raised a decade earlier but the exclusion of women of colour from these considerations was not at issue then.

archival sources had its roots in arguments raised by women of colour and other minority women's groups within the feminist movement. As Flora Davis explains, "over the years, white women made too few efforts to build coalitions with women of color and to understand and address their issues. Thus, the second wave remained largely a white women's movement until the 1980s."<sup>17</sup> By then women of colour and working class activists began to challenge the women's movement for its elitism and racism. This criticism of the women's movement by women of colour and other minority groups naturally had implications for women's history. Like the feminist movement itself, feminist historians were accused of being preoccupied with the history of white, middle and upper class women. This was recognized by historians Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde as reflecting two important truths: that the predominant class and ethnicity of the practitioners who dominated the field in its early stages were white and middle to upper class and "the relative accessibility of sources" reflected their view of reality.<sup>18</sup>

Traditional archives, as well as women-centered archives had acquired few sources on women of colour and other minority women's groups. While Andrea Hindings' survey in the 1970s may have uncovered an "abundance of riches," the cache pertained mainly to the lives of white, middle-class women. The result of such an overrepresentation in the archives, explains Canadian historian Rosemary Gagan, is that "the voices of Susanna Moodie, Anna Jamieson and Catherine Parr Traill, well educated, literate and independent but pretentious and patronizing middle-class observers of the Upper Canadian scene, have

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<sup>17</sup>Flora Davis, Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 80.

<sup>18</sup>Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds., Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), xiii.

all too often spoken for the majority of nineteenth century female settlers whose lives were largely dictated by dependence and domesticity."<sup>19</sup>

In the case of minority women's experience, it was argued that it was not enough to glean information about them through sources written by white, middle and upper class women. It was also necessary to recover sources which depicted the lives of "rural women, working class women, religion and leisure of women other than middle-upper class."<sup>20</sup> As Iacovetta and Valverde note, "studying such fields involves tapping unconventional sources such as court records and department store floor plans."<sup>21</sup>

In addition to using unconventional sources which illuminated the minority women's experience, an increasingly powerful argument was being made for allowing the subjects to speak for themselves. Many of the same arguments were being put forth by historians about the bias of sources about women but generated by men. This issue was raised by writers of women's history, like Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, who, realized that in using traditional historical sources, she "had begun to see women not as they had experienced themselves, but as men depicted them."<sup>22</sup>

Instead, writers of women's history searched for new sources written by women in their own voice. As Strong-Boag and Fellman put it: "a new sensitivity, often feminist in inspiration, to the frequency with which women's lives and beliefs have been interpreted for them by men has led to a search for documents in which the historical

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<sup>19</sup>Gagan, "Putting Humpty Together Again," 279.

<sup>20</sup>Iacovetta and Valverde, Gender Conflicts, xvi.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct, 25.

subjects themselves describe their own experiences."<sup>23</sup> It was no longer enough to glean aspects of women's lives from sources written by men. To truly understand women's experience in the past, historians needed to hear women's stories in their own words.

This triggered an increasing emphasis on the importance of sources such as diaries, autobiographies and correspondence, in other words in the personal papers or private archives of women. Indeed, writes Ruth Roach Pierson, "this valorization of women's voice urged feminist historians in the direction of oral history as the methodology, next to autobiography, promising to bring the researcher closer to the reality of women's lives."<sup>24</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg writes that "these letters and diaries provide us with a unique opportunity to hear women's own words directly, not filtered through a male record. Male voices have so often drowned out or denied women's words and perceptions that the rediscovery of women's unique language must be our first priority-- and our first defense, as women scholars, against the undue influence of theories formed in ignorance of women's experiences."<sup>25</sup>

These challenges of elitism and racism have had a significant impact on the acquisition policies of women-centered archives as well as traditional archives. Some archives are increasingly sensitive to the exclusivity of their holdings. For example, in 1986, the Canadian Women's Movement Archives collective recognized that within the feminist movement there existed a hierarchy of available sources. Just as the collective

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<sup>23</sup>Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991), 8.

<sup>24</sup>Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice," in Writing Women's History: International Perspectives, eds. Offen, Pierson and Rendall, 90.

<sup>25</sup>Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct, 29.

felt that traditional archives had little contact with feminist organizations, the Canadian Women's Movement Archives recognized the difficulty of acquiring the records of the most marginalized groups in society--women of colour, lesbian groups, immigrant women's groups, francophone groups, women with disabilities and native women's groups. This view is echoed by Eva Moseley, the archivist at Schlesinger Library for the History of Women. In a letter to the author written in March 10, 1993 she writes: "The biggest lack in documenting women that we see is finding adequate sources of 'ordinary' women: workers, housewives, farmers and so on, and especially those who are not WASPS. For the Schlesinger Library there is also a need to acquire more papers of anti-feminists and 'right-wing' women in general."<sup>26</sup>

It should be noted that diaries, autobiographies, and correspondence tend to occur in the archives of the literate middle and upper classes. Therefore, it is significantly more difficult to find these kinds of documents for the groups of women who, it was felt, were not being represented in archival holdings.

### **Change: Integration with Traditional Archives**

A significant influence on activity taking place in the third stage of the women's archives movement in the 1980s and early 1990s is the ongoing theoretical debate within feminist scholarship around the issue of integration of women's history into the mainstream curriculum. There are those who argue that women's history "needs to

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<sup>26</sup>Letter to the author from Eva Moseley, Curator of manuscripts, The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library for the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College, 10 March 1992, 2.

become a strong and autonomous field in its own right,"<sup>27</sup> while others contest that the separation of women's history from mainstream accounts only perpetuates the failure to account for women's role in society.

Some of the arguments for integration have been influenced by a feminist interpretation of the philosophies of deconstruction and post-structuralism which emerged in the 1980s. Among other things deconstructionists argue for the breakdown of dichotomies. This argument has resonated with feminist historians who view the dichotomy of men and women as the root of their inequality in historical scholarship and in society in general. As Fox-Genovese writes, post-structuralism has led feminist historians "to question the validity of a wide variety of our inherited intellectual assumptions, notably the concept of rationality, the notion of a stable self and above all, the practice of 'dichotomous' thinking that informs the propensity to view the world in terms of such fixed oppositions as that between male and female."<sup>28</sup>

Like deconstructionist literary critics, feminist historians are deconstructing the historical subject "women" to examine the forces which have created it. In her article "Experience", Joan Wallach Scott describes this new approach to writing as based on the evaluation of "experience" not for "the reproduction and transmission of knowledge said to be arrived at through experience, but the analysis of the production of that knowledge itself."<sup>29</sup> She concludes that "such an analysis would constitute a genuinely

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<sup>27</sup>Offen, Pierson and Rendall, Writing Women's History: International Perspectives, xxxv.

<sup>28</sup>Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism (Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 146.

<sup>29</sup>Joan Wallach Scott, "Experience," in Feminists Theorize the Political, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York and London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc., 1992), 37.

nonfoundational history, one which retains its explanatory power and its interest in change but does not stand on or reproduce naturalized categories."<sup>30</sup> Through this kind of history, which puts into question all our 'truths' of the past and the way our society works, a radical rethinking of women's experience in the past (and in the future) becomes possible.

These ideas have formed the intellectual foundation for a recent alternative to women's history which is termed Gender Relations History. Iacovetta and Valverde define Gender Relations History as "a challenge both to women's history as first developed two decades ago and to traditional history which can now be seen as men's history, without an awareness of masculinity."<sup>31</sup> In the study of gender, historians would be sensitive to "the conflicts and tensions that characterized relations between men and women" and how "these tensions historically have resulted in various groups of women having different and, at times, conflicting gender experiences."<sup>32</sup>

The theoretical debate may be influencing the women's archives movement, as illustrated by the establishment of the Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association in 1989.

When faced with "the problem of women and women's organizations being underrepresented and difficult to locate in archival collections in Northern Alberta,"<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Iacovetta and Ververde, Gender Conflicts, xxi.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., xii-xiii.

<sup>33</sup>[Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association], Recovering Women's History (Edmonton: Women's Program and Resource Centre Faculty of Extension University of Alberta, 1990).

a group of Northern Albertans responded in a novel fashion. They did not form a separate repository to preserve women's records but instead established the Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association to act as a link between records creators and traditional archival repositories. The notable difference between this approach and earlier initiatives is that the preservation of records is viewed as an end in itself, in contrast to the motivation for women-centered archives where the establishment of the archives is a political act of rejection and independence from traditional archives.

The Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association is affiliated with the Women's Program and Resource Centre of Faculty of Extension and the Misener/Margrette Research Centre at the University of Alberta, where it has its office.<sup>34</sup> Less formally it is connected with archival institutions in Northern Alberta. Instead of concentrating on the acquisition and preservation of these archives in a separate repository, the Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association focuses its attention on the identification of sources pertaining to women's experience which are at risk, and provides advice on their deposit in an existing institution.

The Association has an Outreach Committee which "speaks to organizations and groups about the importance of preserving and donating women's papers to public archives,"<sup>35</sup> and a Consultation Committee which "visits and advises women who are considering donation of their papers."<sup>36</sup> In addition it conducts oral history programs, and in 1993 published a manual entitled What's Cooking in Women's History: An

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<sup>34</sup>[The Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association], The Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association (Edmonton: Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association, [1991]).

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

Introductory Guide to the Preservation of Archival Records About Women, which examines the exclusion of women from much written history and suggests new women-related initiatives for archives. Finally, much in the vein of Mary Beard vision thirty years earlier, the Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association co-sponsors academic courses with the University of Alberta's Women's Program.<sup>37</sup> They recognize, like Mary Beard, that discrimination in women's education is a major factor in the continued inferior status of women.

Other examples of this recent trend towards integration are developments at the Bethune Museum and Archives in Washington, D.C. In 1991, after considerable lobbying by archivist Bettye Collier-Thomas, the American government included the Archives in the National Park system as an historic site. While this may not indicate unequivocal support for the Archives, it does suggest that the government has recognized that the Archives preserves a significant aspect of American history and that it should be more fully integrated with other national heritage projects.<sup>38</sup> Funding for the Archives remains private.

Analysis of developments in the Canadian Women's Movement Archives, the last remaining Archives to be discussed in the third stage of the women's archives movement,

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<sup>37</sup>Discussion has begun about implementing a directed studies course at the University of Alberta's history department in cooperation with the Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association and public archives.

<sup>38</sup>In response to a question by the author as to changes in governmental attitudes towards the Archives since its affiliation with the National Park Service, Susan McElrath, archivist replied: "I believe the Park Service's attitude has altered. The Park Service wasn't interested in acquiring the site when the Bethune's Executive Director first approached it with the idea. The Executive Director, Dr. Bettye Collier-Thomas, combatted this indifference with extensive lobbying of local legislators and the general public. This campaign eventually forced the Park Service to modify its position." Letter to the author from Susan McElrath, Archivist, Bethune Museum and Archives Inc., June 9 1994.

can also serve as a kind of summary of the diverse influences and trends which are simultaneously ensuring and hindering the preservation of women's documentary heritage. As the Canadian Women's Movement Archives faced increasing use and fewer resources, the collective decided they could no longer support the growing collection. Nancy Adamson, one of the founding members, makes it clear that the decision to wind up the archives affairs was made for purely financial reasons. The Archives could not be sustained by its members.<sup>39</sup> "The collective decided that the [Archives] needed a stable home where it would be maintained, made accessible to researchers and continue to grow."<sup>40</sup> Eventually, after negotiating with several different women's groups and universities, the collective decided that the Morriset Library at the University of Ottawa had the most to offer the collection.<sup>41</sup>

There are perhaps other deeper reasons for this trend to reintegrate preservation of women's records in existing institutions. Firstly, the attitudes of archivists in established institutions is changing. Feminists and women's groups feel more comfortable about being treated from a feminist perspective. To an extent there has been a "feministization"--a term coined to mean an increase in the number of archivists who are feminists and concern themselves with feminist issues--in traditional archives.

Secondly, the increase in the number of women who hold positions in organizations of all kinds has increased substantially in the past decade. As this happens, traditional archives will automatically catch documentary evidence of women's activities

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<sup>39</sup>Letter to author from Nancy Adamson, Office of Co-ordinator for the Status of Women, April 12, 1993.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

in their net, and the raison d'être of separate institutions for women's records will eventually lose force. However for groups like lesbians, blacks and radical feminists who feel estranged from societal structures the problem remains. For them separate archives are vital for providing the space to re-define what is significant and what has permanent archival value.

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The third stage is characterized by three distinct trends: the establishment of independent women-centered archives by Lesbians and radical feminists; the criticism by women of colour and other minority women's groups of bias towards white, middle and upper class women's records in traditional archives and women-centered archives; and movement towards accomplishing the task within existing repositories in the archival system.

## Chapter Four

### "WOMEN'S RECORDS" AND APPRAISAL FOR ACQUISITION: THEORY, METHOD AND PRACTICE

The history of the women's archives movement adds a new perspective to archivists' understanding of North American success in meeting the responsibility to appraise and preserve a documentary heritage which represents all spheres of human activity. If women, who since the early twentieth century have been the majority of the North American population, are systematically underrepresented in the Canadian and American documentary heritage there is something fundamentally wrong with appraisal for acquisition theory, methods, and practice. This chapter will examine the theory, methodology and practice of appraisal for acquisition to determine what aspects of this realm of archival activity affect the preservation of records bearing on women's experience.

#### Appraisal for Acquisition: Theory

The history of the women's archives movement raises several important questions about the theory of appraisal for acquisition. The first is whether archival theory has an implicit bias towards records created by men. When one examines the archival canon for answers to this question there appears, at first glance, to be a dearth of literature about the subject. Sir Hilary Jenkinson's influential A Manual for Archives Administration published in 1922 and reprinted in 1960, offers no direct comments on appraisal for acquisition; he only addresses the question of appraisal for selection from among the documents of a fonds. T.R. Schellenberg, the father of archival theory in the United

States, is equally silent on the theory of appraisal for acquisition. Despite this, it is possible to devise an indirect theory of appraisal for acquisition from the seldom articulated, but well-understood goal of most archivists.

The goal of appraisal is to acquire records from both the public and private sphere. That is, archivists are to acquire records that have been produced by public bodies as well as those that have been created by non-public persons or bodies who are acting in their own right. Archivists acquire these records because records creators from the private sphere are for the most part incapable of preserving their own records on a long term basis or in making them accessible for cultural purposes to the public.

The second aspect of this goal is that the sum of these records should serve as the documentary heritage of a country, from which memory of its past can be assessed. In other words, the overall archival task is to provide reliable records from which memory of past actions and events can be constructed, for whatever purposes. In this sense, the total holdings of archival institutions act as the fundamental source of knowledge about the past actions of juridical and natural persons.

A third aspect of this goal, which has been expressed by various archivists since the last century, is the view that archival institutions should collectively amass holdings which reflect or represent all realms of human activity. For example, Douglas Brymner, the first Dominion archivist aimed "at the establishment of a great storehouse of the history of the colony and colonists in their political, ecclesiastical, individual, domestic, in a word in every aspect of their lives;"<sup>1</sup> Sir Hilary Jenkinson argued that archivists

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<sup>1</sup>as quoted in W.I. Smith, "'Total Archives': The Canadian Experience," Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique 51 (1986): 325.

should be "all things to all archives"<sup>2</sup>; W.I. Smith has spoken of the Public Archives of Canada's preservation of records bearing on "all subjects of human endeavour"<sup>3</sup>; and members of the Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association maintain that "the purpose of archival institutions is to maintain a representative, easily accessible and permanent record of our society in all its richness and diversity."<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, provenance is accepted widely as the cardinal archival principle from which appraisal for acquisition must proceed. The principle of provenance recognizes that all of the records of organizations and individuals form a coherent whole which explains the functions and activities of the creator. Archival acquisition proceeding on the basis of provenance recognizes the integrity of the whole of the documents of any given records creator, and strives to preserve them in a manner which accurately reflects the way the persons functioned and carried out their activities, so that anyone referring to the records for any purpose may be assured of their reliability as evidence (as much as possible) of actions and transactions.

In sum, in any given setting the objective of archivists in appraisal for acquisition is to select and preserve a balanced documentary heritage consisting of the bodies of records, produced by both public and private persons and representing all realms of human activity, such that the memory of society can be reconstructed, understood, considered, and reconsidered as needs be.

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<sup>2</sup>Hilary Jenkinson, A Manual of Archives Administration, Including the Problems of War Archives and Archives Making (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), 107.

<sup>3</sup>W.I. Smith, "'Total Archives': The Canadian Experience," 342.

<sup>4</sup>Olenka Melnyk, What's Cooking in Women's History: An Introductory Guide to Preserving Archival Records About Women (Edmonton: Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association, 1993), 9.

Theoretically, these objectives do not exclude the records bearing on women's experience or reveal a gender bias. But as the history of the women's archives movement has shown, many people judge that archival institutions have failed to live up to that goal. It is asserted that public records are favoured over private, and that, for instance, the spheres of politics and economics have been documented at the expense of other areas of human activity. While in theory the goal of archivists is evenhanded towards men's and women's records, problems occur in devising a reliable and effective method of realizing this goal.

### Methods of Acquisition

The most common methodological approach used by archivists to achieve the theoretical goal of appraisal for acquisition is the acquisition policy. This policy is used to define the realm in which an archival institution is going to act with regard to appraisal for acquisition of records from the private sphere.

Like the writing on theory for appraisal for acquisition, literature on how this policy is established "is among the skimpiest areas within archival writing."<sup>5</sup> The most substantial effort to establish guidelines is Mary Lynn McCree's article "Good Sense and Good Judgement: Defining Collection and Collecting" which was first published in 1975 and later reprinted in 1984 as part of the chapter on Archival Acquisition in A Modern Archives Reader. Guidelines have also been recently published by the Canadian Council of Archives.

The ideal methodological approach to devising an acquisition policy follows four

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<sup>5</sup>Larry Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and A Case Study," American Archivist 50 (1987): 15.

principles: provenance, territoriality, complementarity and cooperative/networking. The first, provenance, is the overarching concept and principle of all archival work. It stipulates that acquisition proceed on the basis of identifying records creators that fit into the policy of any given institution. The second implies that the acquisition policy should establish strict geographical parameters within which it will conduct the analysis and acquisition of records. The third dictates that a repository should "acquire only those organic groups of records for which the repository itself or other institutions in the area have supporting sources, primary and secondary."<sup>6</sup> Usually this translates into a policy of acquiring records complementary to the records of the sponsoring body for which an archival institution has responsibility. Therefore, for instance, a university archives might acquire records of the university administration, professors at the university, student and alumni organizations, and the records of other persons or organizations closely associated with the university because those records complement the university's records. The fourth maintains that each archival institution is part of a larger network or system whose total holdings aim to achieve the theoretical goal of a representative documentary heritage. It requires that cooperation be the foundation of any acquisition policy.

A more recent and better developed methodology than acquisition policies is documentation strategy. One of its first proponents, Helen Samuels, an archivist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology takes the view that "archivists are challenged to select a lasting record but they lack techniques to support this decision making."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Victoria Blinkhorn, "The Records of Visual Artists: Appraising for Acquisition and Selection" (Masters of Archival Studies thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988), 116.

<sup>7</sup>Helen Samuels, "Who Controls the Past?," American Archivist 49 (Spring 1986): 2.

"Documentation strategies", she writes, "are proposed to respond to these problems."<sup>8</sup>

Although there has been considerable discussion of just what documentation strategy is, the recently published glossary of the Society of American Archivists defines it as follows:

an on-going, analytic, cooperative approach designed, promoted, and implemented by creators, administrators (including archivists), and users to ensure the archival retention of appropriate documentation in some area of human endeavor through the application of archival techniques, the creation of institutional archives and redefined acquisition policies, and the development of sufficient resources. The key elements in this approach are an analysis of the universe to be documented, an understanding of the inherent documentary problems, and the formulation of a plan to assure the adequate documentation of an issue, activity or geographic area.<sup>9</sup>

In general the strategy consists of four central activities. The first is choosing and defining the topic to be documented. This process begins with a "champion, a prime mover, who has a special stake, in documenting a particular issue, activity, or area."<sup>10</sup> The second is the selection of advisors to represent the interests of the creators and users of the documentation to be preserved and a site where the strategy planning can take place. The third activity involves a detailed investigation of the topic to be documented. This begins with an analysis of the history and scope of a topic so that the purpose of the strategy and the issues to be documented can be defined, and is followed by an analysis of available sources of information so that an adequate record can be gathered for each issue. Instead of surveying available material, advisors attempt to discern "not what does

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Lewis J. Bellardo and Lynn Lady Bellardo, comps., A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1992), 12.

<sup>10</sup>Philip N. Alexander and Helen Samuels, "The Roots of 128: A Hypothetical Documentation Strategy," American Archivist 50 (Fall 1987): 524.

exist" but "what should exist". In some instances where gaps are identified in the documentation Samuels advocates that archivists "intervene in the records creating process and assure the creation and retention of required information."<sup>11</sup> The fourth activity is the selection and placement of the documentation. Ideally, "documentation strategies should build upon the ongoing archival responsibility of an institution for its own records."<sup>12</sup> The chosen institution must commit space, equipment and a certain amount of funding, but outside supplementary support from industry, the federal government, or other sources will be required. Samuels suggests that archivists lobby the governments to use regulatory and tax policies to create incentives for private corporate bodies to retain their records and make them available to researchers."<sup>13</sup>

In reality, the history of the women's archives movement has shown, two approaches have been taken to preserve records created by women: women-centered archives and preferential acquisition policies, such as the one established at the National Archives of Canada. How well do these approaches follow sound archival theory and methodology?

Any attempt to answer this question must begin with a discussion of the fundamental problem inherent to both approaches-- acquisition is not based on the principle of provenance. Instead, acquisition is based on the principle of pertinence. That is, records are acquired because they are about the subject "women".

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<sup>11</sup>Samuels, "Who Controls the Past?," 14.

<sup>12</sup>Tbid., 15.

<sup>13</sup>Helen Samuels, "Documenting Modern Chemistry: The Historical Task of the Archivist," Unpublished paper delivered at the Documentation Strategy Seminar at the conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, May 22, 1991, 97.

This kind of pertinence-based acquisition in thematic archives and preferential acquisition policies is problematic for two reasons. First, archivists operating from the premise of subject will inevitably see records in terms of the information they contain rather than as evidence of a particular activity of a records creator. This leads to difficulties because information about women can legitimately be found in the records of any person or organization. For example, information about women is available in the records of a female architect. However, these records are also about architecture (and myriad other subjects). Should a women-centered archives acquire these records simply because they were created by a women? Or alternatively, should a thematic architectural archives acquire these archives simply because they were created by an architect? The answer to both questions is no. The records should remain in the archives of the architectural firm for which they were created to give evidence of its activities, or if no such archives exists they should be acquired by the local archives in whose geographical limits the firm is located. This is the proper provenancial approach to acquisition.

The second problem with pertinence-based acquisition is that it breaks the principles of cooperation and networking. For example, in an archival system which includes thematic archives as well as traditional archives, where would the records created by a women's committee in a labour union be preserved? Traditional archives might have the records of the labour union, and would view these records as part of the existing fonds. Many women-centered archival repositories, because of pertinence-based acquisition, might also argue that these records contain important information about women and labour. If they were acquired by a women-centered archives the records would have to be pulled from their creating office, which would destroy original order as well as the interrelationships with other records of the union. In addition, this

approach to acquisition presupposes that the women in the committee identify more strongly with their gender than with the issues being raised in the labour union. As Margaret Fulford notes, this is often not the case. She found in a survey for a guide to women's records in Canada that there are some women's committees within unions who "do not think of their records as being distinct from the records of the union as a whole."<sup>14</sup>

In general what must be emphasized is that women are not a subject to be found in records. They are records creators in all realms of human activity. Acquisition must proceed by acquiring the archives of creators which act in a particular sphere. Archivists must think in terms of evidence of activity or function rather than subject. An important aspect of women's activity for example, would be the women's movement. To ensure that records are preserved from the movement archivists would identify women's organizations and loosely knit (and often marginalized) groups that create records from which evidence of the women's movement can be drawn. In other words, the archivists must base acquisition decisions on the range of records creators which give evidence of human activity, not by searching for records which contain subjects which they believe need documenting.

The same analysis of the effectiveness and theoretical and methodological soundness should be applied to documentation strategy. In some senses documentation strategy has had a positive influence on the preservation and acquisition of records created by women and women's organizations. It draws attention to the serious deficiency in the archival process of preserving the documentary heritage in general and the need for

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<sup>14</sup>Fulford, "Banners, Briefs and By-Laws," 9.

cooperation, increased communications, and the development of a national system of acquisition. While records bearing on women's experience have not been formally addressed in this criticism, it has opened up the discussion of improving and coordinating strategies so that the records of women's experience and those of other marginalized groups would be acquired.

By emphasizing the active role the archivist must play in forming the documentary heritage as well as the importance of analysis, the documentation strategy establishes a model whereby the records of women's organizations would be analyzed and organizations contacted, which is an important step in acquiring their records. With its emphasis on analysis of society and historical research, the strategy encourages archivists to see society in holistic terms and to acknowledge the web-like interdependence of the parts. In this kind of model the activities of women would be far more likely to be acknowledged and noted.

The positive aspects of documentation strategy, however, must be weighed against its faults. The main criticism of the documentation strategy is its reliance on the prime mover to base decisions of what has archival value on historiographical trends. The problem with this approach, as applied to the question of records bearing on women, is that if the "prime mover" does not choose subjects, issues or activities which include women, women's records risk being ignored as they have been in the past. Similarly, problems arise if women's activities are chosen as an issue to be documented. Women are active in too many spheres of human activity to be covered adequately by a pertinence based approach like documentation strategy. In essence, documentation strategy is based on a subject approach to acquisition which by definition is based on a subjective idea of what is important. In this approach to acquisition subjects which are not chosen will be

left out.

A better method for improving documentation strategy which has been discussed recently by documentation strategists and others, is to identify functional activities which have been neglected rather than subjects/topics/issues. In this way provenance becomes the governing principle because records would be evaluated according to the functional activities which they carry out rather than as containers of information. This approach would work well for women-centered archives and preferential acquisition policies as well.

As it is, however, documentation strategy is at best a partial and temporary corrective. It rightly identifies gaps in the documentary heritage, but the proposed methodology of how these gaps are to be filled is faulty. Any methodology which gears itself toward issues or subjects, rather than identifying records creators from all spheres of human activity, only serves to side step the problem of inadequate acquisition strategies within traditional archives. In the words of Susan Hart, the documentation strategy is "a response to perceived lack of documentation in specific subject areas, rather than a proactive means of ensuring that a full range of our documentary heritage is preserved."<sup>15</sup>

In addition documentation strategy encourages records creators to create records for actions and transactions which did not take place. The argument against this approach stipulates that this would preserve an unrealistic and fabricated image of our society. The rule is that the needs of the moment produce the record; archivists should do nothing to

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<sup>15</sup>Susan Hart, "An Active Approach to Preserving Non-Government Archives," Unpublished paper presented at the conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Banff, Alberta, 23-25, May 1991, 6.

interrupt this naturalness of records creation. Archivists can properly give advice to records creators about record keeping so that actions and transactions are well documented but they should never intervene to such an extent that records are created for the sake of historical documentation.

Archivists should however consider the necessity of creating oral history or taking photographs for those areas of society which function without creating a documentary residue. Diane Beattie, in her study of the informational needs of historians researching women, argues that "textual records tend to emphasize the most literate elements or the elite in society"<sup>16</sup>, and concluded that to overcome this bias archivists must "accept oral records as their legitimate preserve" or else face "detrimental effects on the history of women and non-elites."<sup>17</sup> While the preservation of oral history tapes is not strictly archival, the people who tell their stories and those who record them reveal an integral aspect of human experience, for which we would otherwise have no evidence in our holdings.

An eloquent argument for the broadening of the definition of an archival source is made by Hermann Kahn in a paper presented at a conference of the Society of American Archivists in 1975. While he does not explicitly refer to the creation of records, his argument springs from ideas similar to those of Samuels and Beattie. He argues that what we retain in our archives is not acquired for purely evidential value. It is acquired for the cultural, symbolic and other intangible values it will have for future

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<sup>16</sup>Diane Beattie, "The Informational Needs of Historians Researching Women: An Archival User Study" (Masters of Archival Studies thesis, The University of British Columbia, 1987), 36-37.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

users. He writes:

In my own lifetime, I have gradually been forced by experience to acknowledge that if the archivist is going to be of maximum use to society, the word "archives" must be broadened to include any unique record of pertinence or thought, regardless of its origins, provenance or physical characteristics. In other words, reluctantly and uncomfortably one has been forced to accept the fact that if archivists are not to wither on the vine they must learn to embrace all unique materials which contain a valuable record of human experience, even though such materials are not the by-product of organized institutional activities.<sup>18</sup>

By cautiously advocating the preservation of "unique materials" Kahn addresses the contentious archival issue of what to do with ephemeral material which does not fit into traditional definitions of archives and is often not preserved anywhere. He argues that it is precisely this material which contains a valuable record of human experience that is often unavailable in more traditional sources.

In his concern for the preservation of "unique materials", by which he seems to mean rare and at risk, he echoes many of the arguments made by women-centered archives for the preservation of any kind of material which will give evidence of women's history, whether or not it falls into the definition of an archival record. For example, the Lesbian Herstory Archives acquires anything that will "give evidence of lesbian oppression as well as liberation."<sup>19</sup> This broad definition allows that such artifacts as buttons worn at rallies be preserved by the Archives for their symbolic meaning to lesbians, a meaning that no documentary record could achieve.

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<sup>18</sup>Hermann Kahn, "The First Generation: The Autodidact," American Archivist 38 (April 1974): 150. This article is part of a three part survey entitled "Documenting American Cultures Through Three Generations: Change and Continuity".

<sup>19</sup>[Lesbian Herstory Archives], Lesbian Herstory Archives.

## The Practice of Acquisition

The previous sections have demonstrated that archival theory does not necessarily discriminate against the acquisition of women's records. The analysis of methodology in the second section revealed that in principle an acquisition policy which is based on provenance, that is part of a network of institutions geared towards shared responsibility, and based on territorial and complementary principles, need not ignore women's organizations or women in various spheres of activity. Yet the history and development of the women-centered archives, and other efforts aimed at the acquisition and preservation of women's records, reveals a different story. First, methodologies which are practised by women-centered archives do not always follow the principles discussed in the previous section. Second, the rise of women-centered archives strongly suggests that archival institutions were not in fact preserving an adequate record of women's experience in the eyes of figures in the women's movement. What aspects of archival practice gave room for and apparent reason for the rise of women-centered archives? And what can archivists learn from this history to bridge the gap between theory and reality?

In the previous section, it was shown that it is possible for women-centered archives to develop acquisition policies which operate according to the principle of territoriality. In practice this has not been the case. Many women-centered archives, for example, define their territory as international or national in scope. The primary problem with this kind of policy is that records of women are wrenched from their original context, often destroying interrelationships with records creators around them. Another consideration is the loss of these records for the country or region of origin. Archives are meant to serve those in the community of origin so that they may better understand

their history. International and even national acquisition policies often destroy this potentiality.

This practice of international or national territorial scope also runs against the principle of cooperation/networking. For example, the Canadian Women's Movement Archives may wish to acquire the records of Betty Baxter, a New Democratic Party candidate for the 1993 election, because of her campaign which centered on women's issues. The Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives might be interested because of her sexual orientation. However, the Vancouver City Archives might argue that Baxter's records are better preserved by the City in which she ran her campaign. This conflict of interest inevitably will lead to competition between institutions.

From an archival point of view, the practice of defining international acquisition policies breaks down the archival system which operates according to national boundaries. However, while this may be an issue for archivists, feminists could see it differently because the women's movement does not necessarily operate according to national borders. In fact, most feminists believe that the struggle for women's equality is an international movement. This perhaps explains the propensity of women-centered archives to devise policies which are international in scope.

Any assessment of women-centered archives must be conscious that women-centered archives are tools of the women's movement, responding to its needs and political rhythms. It is also important to recognize that the women's movement is fluid and changes constantly according to the political ebbs and flows of the society in which it operates. Recognizing this, women-centered archives should be assessed for their long and short term value to the women's movement. They then can be assessed in terms of their conflict and/or contribution to the archival system in any given country.

In the short term, women-centered archives and preferential acquisition policies will ensure the preservation of at least some records created by women or women's organizations which would otherwise not be preserved. As long as existing institutions fail to preserve these kinds of records, women-centered archives will presumably thrive. Women-centered archives and other activities aimed at the preservation of records bearing on women's experience arose out of a concern expressed by activists engaged in the feminist movement for a place in which the movement's memory, history and culture would be preserved. Women-centered archives became the focal point for the movement's historical consciousness. Through the preservation of women's documentary heritage, women-centered archives provide a foundation for knowledge and for the building of courage and pride in women's struggle for equality with men. This is indisputably important.

These types of acquisition policies may, however, become unnecessary in the long term, for they are only a partial corrective and not a final resolution to the problem of the unequal balance between men's and women's records in our holdings. Segregating records created by women from those of men excludes the former from mainstream perceptions of Canadian and American history and identity. Women-centered archives, as some feminists have already noted, will become unnecessary and perhaps even a hindrance once women achieve equal status with men in various spheres. Integration of women-centered archives with mainstream repositories will also rely on changes in appraisal for acquisition practices within traditional archives.

The women's archives movement reveals that traditional archives have been incapable of coping with the records of social action movements which do not fall neatly into the patterns established by the status quo. As we have learned from the experiences

of those documenting women's activities, there are a number of factors why this might be true, such as negative cultural attitudes towards women and inadequate acquisition strategies within traditional archives.

Sexism has affected the acquisition of records bearing on women's experience in many ways. First, the societal attitude which devalues records created by women has been internalized by women, and for this reason much of what is created is destroyed voluntarily. According to Eva Moseley, many women "considered their papers trivia and treated them accordingly."<sup>20</sup> The problem still exists today. Anne Molgat writes: "...we hear stories day after day from individuals and groups who have just thrown out their records because they didn't think they were important."<sup>21</sup>

This devaluing of records created by women is exacerbated in the case of women from the working and lower classes. For middle and upper class women "writing for private consumption has been one of the few socially accepted outlets for self-expression and creative writing for women."<sup>22</sup> Consequently, records that have been acquired by archives usually document the activities of middle and upper class women. But poor and working class women who have little leisure time have left little documentary residue of their lives, except in organizations with which they have interacted. The objective in this realm ought to be to preserve records of these organizations and reveal how they reflect women's experience.

Second, a number of characteristics of women's organizations make acquiring

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<sup>20</sup>Moseley, "Women in Archives," 215.

<sup>21</sup>Molgat, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives/Archives Canadiennes du Mouvement des Femmes," 3.

<sup>22</sup>Melnyk, What's Cooking in Women's History?, 11.

their records particularly difficult.<sup>23</sup> One problem is that in many cases the actions and transactions of women and women's organizations do not create a residual physical record. In women's organizations communication is often carried out orally, in person or over the phone.<sup>24</sup> Another problem is records keeping systems which are for the most part very disorganized. Margaret Fulford notes: "Many women's groups are run by collectives; this feminist, non-hierarchical way of doing things may mean ad hoc filing systems, full of inconsistencies."<sup>25</sup> Equally problematic is the phenomenal growth rate of women's organizations which has made it more difficult to keep up with activities in this area. According to Margaret Fulford, "in British Columbia there were 12 women's organizations in 1971, 24 in 1972, and 100 in 1974."<sup>26</sup> In 1991 there are over 500 women's organizations in British Columbia.<sup>27</sup> Coping with so many organizations is made even more difficult by the rate at which they disband. In 1989, Karen Dubinsky of the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (and historian) wrote: "The number of community-based feminist organizations and newspapers which have folded over the past years is indeed cause for serious concern."<sup>28</sup> A final factor affecting acquisition is the instability of many of these organizations, which means that the records very often have

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<sup>23</sup>It should be noted that several of the characteristics of women's organizations which make acquisition difficult are common to other marginalized groups.

<sup>24</sup>Moseley, "Women in Archives," 219.

<sup>25</sup>Fulford, "Banners, Briefs and By-Laws, The Records of the Canadian Women's Movement," 12.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Karen Dubinsky, "Looking Forward Reaching Backward: The Canadian Women's Movement Archives," Fireweed 29 (Summer 1989): 120.

no permanent home. They are often shuttled from one home to the other as leadership changes hands. For example, one American women's club "carries a locked, four-drawer, filing cabinet of club "records" along with the rest of its presidential baggage. The cabinet, which requires two men [sic] to move it, has gone from chief official to chief official for years. No one knows what is inside, because no one has the key."<sup>29</sup>

The necessity for women-centered archives and other efforts to preserve women's records reveals a lack of coordination and planning among mainstream archives for the acquisition of private records at the national level. In the United States public archives have not generally accepted responsibility for the preservation of private archival material. Instead, this material has been preserved by a wide range of institutions such as historical societies, libraries, museums, research institutions and private foundations. While these institutions rescued many valuable records, no generally accepted principles have guided their method and their practice of acquisition of private archives. The result has been the haphazard preservation of private records based on perceptions of their informational and historical values.

This tradition was established in the late eighteenth century when members of the American revolutionary generation were "motivated...by a sense that they had just made history...[and] turned in their later years to establishing historical societies that would in the words of one of them 'preserve the manuscripts of the present day to the remotest ages of posterity.'"<sup>30</sup> For these early pioneers of the American archival movement, "the

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<sup>29</sup>Darlene Roth, "Pandora's New Box: A Look at the Records of Women's Voluntary Associations," Georgia Archive 7 (1979): 38.

<sup>30</sup>James O'Toole, Understanding Archives and Manuscripts (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990), 31.

distinction they made between historical work generally and archival work in particular was neither sharp nor significant, since both the preservation of documentary materials and their use in research and writing were viewed as parts of the whole."<sup>31</sup> Ever since, there has been close connection between historiography and preservation of private archives.

Beginning in the 1920s, some archivists began to question whether this uncontrolled activity had yielded a sufficient American documentary heritage. The State archivist of Virginia Charles E. Lee summarized, the matter in 1972:

The situation of our historical records of private origin is ...alarming. The Library of Congress, despite its acquisition of many nationally important manuscripts and its notable listings of those in other depositories in the NUCMC, like the National Archives, has neither the mandate nor the means for mounting a truly national program for private historical records. Again, the situation varies from State to State, but it is safe to say that no adequate job is being done within the confines of any one of them....In all honesty we do not even know what the actual situation is with regard to the records of our nation's past. We do know that it comes close to being a national disaster.<sup>32</sup>

It is clear from this statement that acquisition of private records in the United States was not being accomplished in any systematic or coordinated manner.

In the absence of coordination among institutions preserving archives, a growing contingent of archivists has assumed it is the profession's responsibility to plan acquisition strategy. The main proponent of this movement is F. Gerald Ham who argues that "despite the protest of some archivists, the archival community must take

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>32</sup>Statement presented to the Advisory Panel on Research and Publication, Heritage Committee, American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, printed in Charles E. Lee, "President's Page: The Proposed National Historic Records Program," American Archivist 35 (July/October 1972): 372-373.

responsibility for fashioning from the new world of recorded information a manageable historical record for the future."<sup>33</sup>

In Canada, government involvement in the preservation of private records has been slightly better. In the first place there has been commitment on the part of the government to the preservation of private records. In 1982 the mandate of the then-named Public Archives of Canada embodied this commitment: "The mission of the Public Archives of Canada is the systematic preservation of government and private records of Canadian national significance to facilitate the effective and efficient operation of the Government of Canada; historical research in all aspects of the Canadian experience; the protection of rights, and the enhancement of a sense of national identity based on archives as the collective memory of the nation."<sup>34</sup>

While this mandate advocates systematic preservation, there is nothing within the mandate which refers to how this should be accomplished. In the private sphere, the National Archives has experienced great difficulty defining more precisely what is nationally significant and therefore within its mandate, and has not yet, therefore, worked out a consistent methodology to make decisions on what is nationally significant.

There have been other suggestions for the development of national acquisition strategies in Canada. In 1967, for example the Systematic National Acquisition Program (S.N.A.P.) was developed as "an orderly, rational and equitable planning for the future

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<sup>33</sup>F.Gerald Ham, Selection and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993), 3.

<sup>34</sup>National Archives of Canada, Strategic Approaches of the Public Archives of Canada, 1982-1987 [Ottawa, 1982), 21.

destination of papers."<sup>35</sup> What this policy should look like was not addressed. The matter was taken up again in 1975, when T.H.B. Symons in a report entitled To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies recommended "the creation of a national network of regional archives, which would in many cases be located within the local university and be administered by it."<sup>36</sup> This suggestion was, however rejected in 1980 by Ian Wilson in The Report To The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada by the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives. Wilson suggested instead that the provinces establish a "coordinated network to establish common priorities and to develop services, facilities and programs to benefit all",<sup>37</sup> with the Public (now National) Archives of Canada providing "gentle" leadership through "an Extension branch to administer consulting services, information services, technical facilities and a grant program for the benefit of the entire archival system."<sup>38</sup> By 1985, efforts at national planning culminated in the birth of the Canadian Council of Archives.<sup>39</sup> At present, part of its mandate is the coordination of acquisition. While the Canadian Council of Archives has published a very useful Guidelines for Developing an Acquisition Policy, little has been done to formally implement a national policy which

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<sup>35</sup>Robert S. Gordon, "The Protocol of S.N.A.P.: Demarcation of Acquisition Fields," The Canadian Archivist/ L'Archiviste Canadien 2 (1973): 49.

<sup>36</sup>Symons Report, reprinted in Gordon Dodd, ed., "Canadian Archives: Reports and Responses," Archivaria 11 (Winter 1980-81): 3.

<sup>37</sup>Report to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada by the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives (Ottawa: The Information Division of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1980), 69.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>39</sup>Terry Eastwood, "Attempts at National Planning for Archives in Canada: 1972-1982," The Public Historian 8 (Summer 1986): 88.

coordinates all activity in Canada.

In short, both Canada and the United States lack a solid and systematic plan to ensure the preservation of private records from all spheres of human activity. Without clear and comprehensive acquisition strategies, records created by women and other less powerful groups in North American society will remain underrepresented.

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The history and development of the women's archives movement reveals a disjuncture between archival theory and method on the one and practice on the other. Although archival theory and methodology do not specifically discriminate against records created by women, a number of circumstances have converged to produce a biased record of Canadian and American society:

Sexism within the profession as well as the lack of a coordinated system of acquisition at the national level have forced individuals and organizations concerned with the preservation of records bearing on women's experience to devise methods of their own. These methods, because of a lack of understanding of archival theory have ignored the principles of provenance, complementarity, territoriality and cooperation. Because of this, method becomes clouded and distorted by the subject approach to acquisition.

Other factors outside of the archivists' control have also influenced the inadequate representation of women in traditional archives. Societal attitudes which devalue records created by women, the difficult nature of keeping track of and acquiring those records created by women's organizations as well as the political agenda of the feminist movement all mitigate against finding a solution. These factors point to the need for new

strategies which should be taken up by traditional archives to ensure the better acquisition of records bearing on women's experience.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The history of the women's archives movement reveals that women-centered archives have an important role to play in the preservation of records bearing on women's experience. They are closest to the records creators, and can therefore make connections and preserve materials which archivists in established repositories may be unable to do. Recognizing this, it is suggested that archivists consider the following recommendations to ensure the continued preservation and accessibility of records bearing on women's experience.

First, that the archival community involve women-centered archives and other organizations dedicated to the preservation of records bearing on women's experience in the planning of national strategies to preserve a documentary heritage which includes women's experience. As we have seen, in both Canada and the United States all previous attempts at national planning have been unsuccessful. Documentation strategy drew attention to gaps in archival holdings, but the strategy proved to be only a temporary and partial corrective to a faulty system. Instead of plugging holes, a whole new system must be devised. This new system would recognize that the efforts of individual archivists are part of a larger national system whose total holdings comprise the diversity of human activity. In this system, efforts by women-centered archives and others dedicated to the preservation of records bearing on women's experience would be included.

The second recommendation is closely related to the first. Archivists must respect the needs of activists within the movement to keep their own records. Instead of ignoring these archives, established repositories must accept their place in the archival system. In this sense, archivists must work with women-centered archives, providing consultation and

other forms of outreach. Ultimately, a society selects what is important to it. Activists and scholars within the women's movement have recognized the importance of preserving their records. Archivists must encourage and facilitate them in their efforts. For similar reasons it is recommended that information about strategy and policies discussed above be communicated to women's organizations and groups so that they can better insure preservation of a record of their activities.

The third recommendation suggests that acquisition policies be revised to take account of records created by women and women's organizations. This is not to suggest that women become a subject for acquisition. Women are not a subject. They are records creators in all realms of human activity. Rather, acquisition policies should be based on a thorough understanding of women and women's organizations as records creators in order to acquire their records. Archivists must become familiar with the kinds of records women and women's organizations create to understand the documentary residue of their actions and transactions. This approach to acquisition is similar to that expressed by Jian Liu for the acquisition of records from ethnic groups. She writes that "more conscious efforts on the part of archivists will definitely promote the acquisition of archival records from all ethnic groups. Moreover, ethnic communities may well need special efforts of understanding. They may feel remote from existing archival [in]stitutions, or think they only serve the mainstream culture. Archivists need to reach out and understand potential donors and their immediate environment, and work from there."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jian Liu, "The Potential for Acquisition of Ethnic Archives: A Case Study of Five Chinese Organizations in Vancouver, B.C." (Master's of Archival Studies thesis, University of British Columbia, 1993), 105.

A fourth recommendation involves the improvement of description and indexing practices used in established repositories. Although access to records created by women has not been the focus of this study the perceived lack of sources pertaining to women in established repositories is due partly to descriptive and indexing practices which do not reflect women's activities. As Mary Kinnear and Vera Fast note:

The old classifications and old questions no longer suffice if we wish to discover social structures and the experience of other groups in society besides the male elites. New categories must be offered, new questions asked, realistically related to the experience of newly examined groups.<sup>2</sup>

Women's reality, for different historical reasons, has been different from men's. This reality must be recognized in archival descriptions and indexing.

Guides such as Hinding and Bower's Women's History Sources: A Guide to Archives and Manuscript Sources in the United States and more recently Margaret Fulford's The Canadian Women's Movement, 1960-1990: A Guide to Archival Resources/Le Mouvement Canadien des Femmes, 1960-1990: guide des ressources archivistique have proven that there are a greater number of records pertaining to women than originally thought, but access to these records remains poor. A 1985 survey of members of the Canadian Committee on Women's History found that two-thirds of the respondents to the survey "had found existing finding aids to be poor or fair at best."<sup>3</sup>

A number of factors limit access to women's records. Firstly women's papers are often buried in family collections or among their husband's papers. As editors of the guide to women's records at the National Archives note: "As interest in women's history

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<sup>2</sup>Mary Kinnear and Vera Fast, comps., Planting the Garden: An Annotated Archival Bibliography of the History of Women in Manitoba (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1987), xv.

<sup>3</sup>Melnyk, What's Cooking in Women's History?, 12.

increased, the National Archives was from time to time, and with reason criticized for having buried women's papers in the collections of their husbands or other male relations."<sup>4</sup> At Queen's University Archives for example, the papers of Flora MacDonald Denison, a Canadian radical suffragist, are located among the papers of her son. The description in the guide reads: "Denison, Merrill, 1893-1975...correspondence, regarding his works and research...Includes papers of his mother, Flora MacDonald Denison, and his wife Muriel Denison."<sup>5</sup> In this case, the papers of Flora Denison should be described separately and their physical removal from those of her son should be considered.

A related problem to accessing women's records is name indexing practices which do not indicate name changes.<sup>6</sup> These problems related to indexing have been resolved in a number of ways by women-centered Archives and thematic guides to women's records. At the Lesbian Herstory Archives for example, women's records are listed under the author's first name to deemphasize the patriarchal lineage.<sup>7</sup> Other solutions include listing maiden names and avoiding the use of initials with a women's married name.

A related problem is inadequate or non-existent subject headings for activities and subjects which have historically been performed or dominated by women. Mary Kinnear and Vera Fast's guide to women's records in Manitoba "subverts hierarchical precedence

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<sup>4</sup>Joanna Dean and David Fraser, comps., Women's Archives Guide: Manuscript Sources for the History of Women (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1991), 1.

<sup>5</sup>Anne MacDermaid and George F. Henderson, comp., A Guide to the Holdings of Queen's University Archives (Kingston: Queen's University, 1986), 69.

<sup>6</sup>For example, at this time no provision for maiden names has been made in the British Columbia Archival Union List Project, a prototype of automated descriptions.

<sup>7</sup>Lucinda R. Zoe, "How to Use the Archives from a Distance," Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter 14 (June 1993), 8.

by making a convincing argument for non-traditional classification or description. Their bibliography arranged reference in three general categories uniquely suited to the experiences of women."<sup>8</sup> More efforts should be made by archivists to acknowledge the different roles and activities women have performed, and include these as subject headings in indexes and other major access points.

An important issue to consider when providing access to women's records is sexist language. Andrea Hinding and Ames Bower, in their work for the guide to women's history sources in North America, found that "primary sources contain language that contemporary society considers sexist, racist, or condescending, but that earlier generations found acceptable."<sup>9</sup> To solve this dilemma, Hinding and Bower avoided or eliminated the use of such language where possible, but "in some cases use of it was necessary for historical accuracy."<sup>10</sup> It is clear that the words for proper names and official titles should not be altered, but in indexes and in text rich fields, or data elements such as the Administrative History or Biographical Note, from which index terms are drawn, archivists should be conscious of sexism implicit in some words and avoid them. Whether or not replacement words should be gender-neutral or new ones altogether is still a matter of much debate.<sup>11</sup>

Guides to women's records remain a crucial solution to improving access to

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<sup>8</sup>Larade and Pelletier, "Mediating in a Neutral Environment," 106.

<sup>9</sup>Hinding and Bower, comps., Women's History Sources, x.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>For a preliminary discussion of the fundamental issues involved in changing descriptive practices to reflect women's reality see Sharon P. Larade and Johanne M. Pelletier, "Mediating in a Neutral Environment: Gender-Inclusiveness or Neutral Language in Archival Descriptions," Archivaria 35 (Spring, 1993): 99-109.

women's records. Unlike other areas of intellectual access, the publication of guides has improved considerably in recent years. In 1987, Beattie noted "there were only five guides published in Canada specially on women's history sources, three of which focus on institutions in Ontario. British Columbia and Alberta are the only other provinces which have guides to their holdings on women."<sup>12</sup> Since then three major guides to women's records have been published: a guide to sources in Manitoba, the National Archives, and an inter-institutional guide to sources relating to the women's movement.

In sum, archivists can make two improvements to their descriptive practices to improve access to women's records. Holdings and their descriptions which obscure the existence of records generated by women in the fonds of husbands and other male relatives, colleagues, and the like need to be re-evaluated in order to reveal the existence of records created by women. Indexing practices should be revised to reflect women's reality. For example maiden names should be indexed, initials with married names should be avoided, subject headings should be based on a thesaurus which reflects the historical reality of women's activities and experience,<sup>13</sup> and a policy and authority file for language should be used in indexes and descriptions based on concrete and conscious decisions of what to do about words which exclude or deny women's participation or experience.

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<sup>12</sup>Diane Beattie, "Informational Need of Historians Researching Women: An Archival User Study" (Masters of Archival Studies thesis, University of British Columbia, 1987), 49.

<sup>13</sup>Recommended is the Canadian Women's Indexing Group/Le Groupe d'analyse de documents feministes canadiens, Canadian Feminist Thesaurus/Le Thesaurus feministe du Canada (Toronto: OISE Press, 1990).

Keeping archives is an act of self-definition. Archives become the embodiment of a society's (or group's) mythology. This impulse, which is expressed by most western civilizations, is amply demonstrated by early colonists in Canada and the United States, who, struck by the need to build a common identity and a sense of unity, formed historical societies and rallied for the establishment of National Archives. These historically-conscious colonists argued that the archives would be a place where the fledgling country could document the successes and achievements of those who lived there.

The establishment of archival repositories and acquisition of sources about women's experience has followed this practice. Women-centered archives and other efforts of the women's archives movement were motivated by the women's movement and its mandate to change the status of contemporary women. They believed that the preservation of records created by women and women's organizations was essential to this goal. Women-centered archives were not established simply because general archival repositories had failed them. They were and continue to be symbols of feminist power and resistance to patriarchal values.

It is probable, given this political and ideological motive for the preservation of women's records, that women-centered archives are a necessary but intermediary stage in the feminist movement's struggle for women's equality. The necessity of separate archives will eventually give way to integration with established repositories once equality has been achieved. Only then will records created by women and women's organizations be acquired by established repositories as naturally as those created by men.

Evidence already exists of trend towards a reevaluation of the impulse towards separation. Some feminists argue that while separation was a useful strategy for the

second wave of feminism, at this stage of the women's movement it only further marginalizes women from mainstream society. An excellent example of this trend towards integration is the approach of Northern Alberta Women's Archives Association which was discussed in Chapter Three. Essentially, the need for women-centered archives and other proactive means of ensuring a record of women's experience is preserved will diminish as the women's movement achieves equal status for women in all spheres of human activity.

The mandate of archivists is to ensure the preservation of a collective memory that represents all spheres of society. To misrepresent the contribution of more than half the Canadian and American populations through inadequate acquisition or descriptive practices is a falsification of the society archivists are meant to serve. Without the equal representation of women's contribution to Canadian or American society, the collective memory is ill-served, and ultimately and most importantly, archives become a distortion of reality which only serves to inhibit understanding of how society changes.

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### **University of Waterloo**

Lady Aberdeen Collection, Master Files, Special Collections, Library, University of Waterloo