

# WOMEN at the CENTER

Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library

Issue 1, Spring 2001

## The Past Comes Alive at the Bingham Center

### Did You Know...

- Our award-winning Web site makes our resources accessible world-wide.
- We offer research grants that enable scholars to work with our collections.
- Anyone who presents a photo ID can use our collections.
- Many of our collections come as gifts from people just like you!

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Greetings! With this first issue of *Women at the Center* we introduce the collections of the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture. In this and future issues, we will attempt to convey some of the richness and diversity of the materials held in the Center and keep you informed of special events such as exhibits, lecture series, readings, and more. Our goal is to leave you curious, inspire you to visit our Web site, and encourage you to come see us in person (we're very hospitable!). And, although many of you know us already, we'll try to deepen your knowledge of our collecting themes, and delight you with the gems we discover and rediscover almost every day.

You'll become acquainted with "the unknown soldiers"--women who have labored and labor still in grassroots organizations fighting for women's rights, as well as with world-renowned feminists who have dedicated their lives to women's--to human--causes. We will share our enthusiasm for our collections of young girls' private writings (and perhaps encourage you to send us some of your own...); we will give you glimpses into women's everyday lives through our impressive prescriptive literature collection. And

perhaps the description of a feminist manuscript collection or of a series of Edwardian journals will inspire you to send us information about your own archives, or to contact us with questions about historical research into the lives of women.

We at the Sallie Bingham Center welcome your ideas for new directions for growth, and we want to hear your own stories. Joseph Mitchell, a *New Yorker* essayist and a keen observer of everyday life (and a North Carolina native), wrote very compassionately and beautifully of an eccentric, sometimes homeless raconteur by the name of Joe Gould. The fascinating Mr. Gould, who was forever composing his "Oral History of the World" and translating the *Odyssey* into the language of seagulls, was quoted by Mitchell as stating "What people say is history." If you think about it, Women's Studies is a relatively new field, and so many stories are as yet unsaid. There is so much history for us to record and make available to those who come after us. We hope this newsletter will motivate you to tell us your stories, and let us share ours with you.



Our intrepid mascot comes from a piece of advertising ephemera for a miracle product called *Electrozone*.

Cristina Favretto, Director

## Mary Lily Research Grants Awarded for 2001-2002

The Bingham Center is pleased to announce the winners of this year's Mary Lily Research Grants, which support the work of students, scholars, and independent researchers traveling to Durham to make use of the Bingham Center's holdings. From an exceptional group of applicants, this year's grants have been awarded to the following individuals:

**Janni Linda Aragon**, for her dissertation *Movement Into the Academy: Second Wave Feminism and Political Science*.

**Ruth L. Fairbanks**, for her dissertation *Pregnant Workers: Women's Jobs, Bodies, Welfare, and Equality, 1940-1993*.

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## Zillions of Zines: the Sarah Dyer Collection



In 1992  
Mike Gunderloy,  
then editor of  
**Factsheet Five**,  
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at least 10,000 zines  
being published in the  
U.S. alone.

In July of last year, the Bingham Center received a gift that could prove to be one of our most important 20<sup>th</sup> century collections. The Sarah Dyer Zine Collection came to us in seven unassuming boxes bursting with thousands of self-published works by women and girls. The publications are opinionated and sometimes unapologetically personal. They range from photocopy-collage to slick-looking glossies, and they express the incredible breadth of women's interests and talents, as well as the depth of their desire to communicate.

The word "zine" is derived from "fanzine," a term which originated with the science fiction fan magazines of the 1930s and '40s. Today, "zine" is used to describe a phenomenon of self-publishing that has produced some of the most creative and thoughtful writing there is. In the 1980s, fueled by the "do-it-yourself" aesthetic of punk and the availability of photocopy and computer technology, the zine world grew exponentially. In 1992 Mike Gunderloy, the creator and editor of *Factsheet Five*, which

listed and reviewed hundreds of zines in each issue, estimated there were at least ten thousand zines being published in the U.S.

Inspired by the zine revolution, but frustrated by her attempts to determine which zines were being produced specifically by women and girls, Sarah Dyer created the *Action Girl Newsletter*. She solicited sample copies of zines by placing small ads in as many zines as she could find. In exchange, the zines were reviewed in her newsletter, which was then distributed for a nominal fee. As the collection attests, the zines came flooding in.

Sarah Dyer is also the creator of *Action Girl Comics*, a comic anthology that she began in 1994 in order to showcase the work of women who were putting out their own comics. The Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture is actively collecting women's and girl's zines and comics. If you are a creator or a collector of zines or comics, and you'd like to find a permanent home for them, contact us!

## The Wild West Through a Girl's Eyes



A letter from the Tolles family correspondence shows the playful spirit of its author.

The Tolles family correspondence, a recent acquisition at the Bingham Center, presents a fresh perspective on both the joys and the sorrows of frontier life. From detailed descriptions of domestic responsibilities, to heart-felt expressions of grief at the loss of an infant child, these letters paint a vivid picture of the lives of girls and women in the "wild west." The following excerpt from a letter to Katie Tolles from her young sister Jennie, a newcomer to Austin, Texas, is dated 1878, and recounts a particularly brutal episode.

Yesterday there was a man murdered right down town just a littel (sic) ways from the office,

he was an alderman, a Mr Markley. He was killed by Alderman Wall. They are trying to have a big market built in the 6<sup>th</sup> ward. Mr Wall didn't like it because Mr (Markley) didn't vote the same as he did. So Mr Wall drew out a great long Bowie knife from his waistband and stabbed him twice through the heart. Mr Markley dropped right down dead on the sidewalk. They sent right off for his wife and... she came right down there where he was laying a-bleeding. Oh it is terrible, he leaves a poor wife and two little children. Their (sic) are just such things a-going on here all the time. It is the worst place we have ever got into. You can't express your opinions but what you are in danger of your lives.

## Processing the Kate Millet Collection by Rod Clare

Among the manuscript collections in the Bingham Center lie over seventy boxes of the Kate Millett Papers. That may seem like a lot, but when the boxes contain the documents of one of America's foremost feminists, you wish there were more.

Although Millett's feminist stirrings began when she was a child in Minnesota, Barnard College in New York City was the place where she engrossed herself in feminist theory and activism. Her English doctoral dissertation, *Sexual Politics*, deconstructed the sexism of male authors like Henry Miller and quickly became a manifesto of the feminist movement in the 1970s. In New York she engaged in a whirlwind of organizing and lecturing, delved into new avenues of feminism, came out as a lesbian, divorced, and devoted herself to her art.

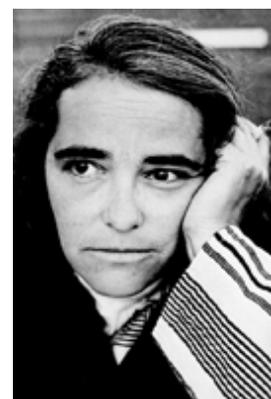
Over the years, Millett's writings became less academic, but no less feminist or intellectual. The works range from those that are deeply personal to those that encompass the wider gender community. From writing about the heartache of unrequited love and the outreach of global sisterhood, to documenting her bout with depression and the fate of political prison-

ers, Millett's books reveal her devotion to women and the search for herself.

Processing the papers of such a prodigious feminist, activist, and intellectual is in itself a prodigious task. A chronological approach, while simplest to do, would be least helpful to the user with a collection of this size, and therefore I chose a thematic arrangement. Millett's correspondence with other feminists, fans, and friends became a category. The papers concerning the creation and maintenance of her art farm colony for women in upstate New York formed another useful section. The various book manuscripts begged for their own grouping. Photographs and audio recordings are held in an A/V segment.

Sometimes, though, things don't fall neatly into place. These exceptions are best treated individually, using logic and common sense as guides. The processing is labor intensive. However, knowing that hundreds of scholars and laypersons will use the Kate Millett Papers makes the work both a great learning experience and a great pleasure.

Rod Clare is a graduate student in history at Duke University. He works in the technical services department of Duke's Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library.



Kate Millett  
Photo by Cynthia MacAdams

## Research Grants Awarded (cont'd)

**Judith E. Harper**, for her book *An Encyclopedia of Women During the Civil War*.

**Carla Harryman**, for an article on the concept of "failure" and the shift from "nihilism" to "myth" in Kathy Acker's poetics.

**Anne K. Huebel**, for her dissertation *More Than an Individual: British Thoughts on Motherhood from 1830 to World War I*.

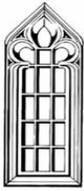
**Karen Leroux**, for her dissertation *Servants of Democracy: Women's Work in U.S. Public Education, 1866-1902*.

**Jennifer Meares**, for her dissertation on the changing boundaries of rudeness and gentility in Hancock County, Georgia, from the advent of the cotton gin in 1793 to the Civil War.

**Dr. Linda Veltze**, for her work on the relationship between the slave-owning family of Rev. Richard W. Barber (of Wilkes, NC) and the slave Judith Barber, and how their descendents interpret and embody this history.

Congratulations to all our grant winners!

Information on the Mary Lily Research Grant program can be found on our Web site at: <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/specoll/grants.html>



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Women's History and Culture

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*Women are at the Center.*

## My, How We've Grown!

In 1988, the Women's Studies Archivist position was created in order to coordinate the acquisition, cataloguing, reference, and outreach activities related to the Special Collections Library's holdings on women and gender. This position was permanently endowed in 1993. In 1996 a second position, Women's Studies Reference Archivist, was created to help meet the increasing reference and outreach demands on the Center.

## *A Woman's Place Celebrates Domestic Culture*

The study of domestic culture, and of the prescriptive literature that informs that culture, has become steadily more popular in the past twenty years. Books like philosopher-turned-domestic-scientist Cheryl Mendelson's *Home Comforts* are bestsellers, and there is no need to describe the popularity of domestic goddess Martha Stewart. In other words: housekeeping is back, big time, both in the home and in the academy. Unfortunately, there was a time when this sphere of knowledge was not valued by scholars, and many libraries purged their collections of material they thought was trivial.

The Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture has been collecting examples of this domestic literature for many years and is in the process of building one of the finest prescriptive literature collections in the country. Thanks also to the efforts of the John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising, and Marketing History, the

Duke Libraries own one of the most extensive collections documenting our changing views of domestic life, including how those household dreams have been manufactured, sold, and purchased by the American public.

These fascinating materials were highlighted in the exhibit "A Woman's Place: Evolutions and Revolutions from Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart," which was on view in Perkins Library from September to October 2000. Exhibit cases representing the various rooms of a house were filled with materials dating from the mid-19th century through the present day, illustrating the ongoing practice of making our home lives more pleasant and livable. In conjunction with the exhibit, a series of panel discussions and an evening of staged readings performed by Duke students, faculty and staff celebrated domestic culture.

