

WOMEN at the CENTER

Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture
Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library

Issue 11, Spring 2007

Minnie Bruce Pratt: the life s/he wrote

Minnie Bruce Pratt, noted writer, poet, activist, and scholar, has recently placed her papers at the Bingham Center. The contents of this collection extend beyond drafts of Pratt's writings and the files she has maintained. Indeed, Pratt's papers offer a comprehensive reflection of her life and work and include personal journals and detailed correspondence spanning more than thirty years, as well as extensive files relating to Pratt's activism, writing, and teaching.

Minnie Bruce Pratt is a native Southerner, born and raised in Alabama, where she attended a segregated high school. Pratt earned her B.A. at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, where she was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, and received her Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She belonged to the editorial group of *Feminary: A Feminist Journal for the South, Emphasizing Lesbian Visions*, which was published by a women's collective based in Durham and Chapel Hill, NC. Pratt has published five books of poetry as well as two



books of essays, *Rebellion: Essays 1980-1991* and *S/HE*. She is also a co-author of *Yours In Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* along with Elly Bulkin and Barbara Smith. Her writing, which examines issues of politics, gender, race, class, and sexuality, has earned numerous awards, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and

the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

Pratt is currently Professor of Women's Studies at Syracuse University and has also held teaching positions at the University of Maryland-College Park and Hamilton College, where she served as the Jane Watson Irwin Chair in Women's Studies. She was recently profiled in the January 2007 issue of *Curve* magazine as one of "Ten Powerful Lesbians in the South." Mandy Carter, another notable activist whose papers have recently been added to the Bingham Center, was also named in this feature. (Interview with Mandy Carter on page 2.)

Zine collections now searchable online

The Bingham Center's zine collections will now have a website of their own, increasing public access to these already-popular collections. The central feature of the website is a database that enables searching across six of our main collections by zine title, author, subject, and keyword. Approximately three-quarters of the Bingham Center's zines are currently included in the database, which will be updated periodically with new additions.

In 1995, Sarah Dyer, editor of *Action Girl Newsletter*, donated over 1,000 zines to the Bingham Center, establishing one of the first zine collections in the country dedicated to documenting the work of women and girl zine authors. Dyer has written an essay recounting the history of her "life in zines" exclusively for this site. Since that time, our collections have grown to over 4,000 zines and have attracted considerable scholarly and public interest.

<http://library.duke.edu/specialcollections/bingham/>

SALLIE BINGHAM CENTER
FOR WOMEN'S HISTORY AND CULTURE

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New Acquisitions and Additions

Miriam Slifkin

Chapel Hill activist Miriam Slifkin has donated her papers to the Bingham Center. Slifkin was one of the original founders of The Women's Center and Rape Crisis Center in Chapel Hill, and the local chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) during the 1970s. These papers include documentation of her work with many community organizations, and records from NC NOW, as well as autobiographical writings.

Lois Wright Richardson Davis Family Papers

Martha Hodes, a professor of history at New York University, recently published *The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century*, based on the life and letters of Eunice Connolly, found within the Davis family papers held by the Special Collections Library. Hodes has generously donated a set of letters relating to Davis's son, Charles Henry Richardson, which she received from family descendents in the course of her research.

Out in the South: an interview with Mandy Carter

A true multi-issue activist, Mandy Carter has devoted most of her life to social justice movements. In 1993, Mandy co-founded Durham-based Southerners On New Ground (SONG) to build allies in Dixie, connecting peoples of different races, classes, cultures, genders, and sexual identities.

Sallie Bingham Center: We have noticed that you claim the South in your description of yourself as an "out southern black lesbian social justice activist." Have you found that your "geographic identity" has been a factor in your advocacy work?

Mandy Carter: One of the reasons why I claim that identity is that my mother was born in Edenton, NC, so I do have that southern connection. This year I'm exploring my family history to discover how far back those roots go. I moved here in 1982, so I've lived in Durham for 25 years, and I feel that it's my home. I organize as a Southerner and it impacts what I do and how I do it. People do react when I say I'm southern, even more so when I add the word "lesbian." I think there is a perception about being an out black lesbian in the South, perhaps due to the history of the South with regard to the civil rights movement and struggles within our black community. I didn't even know there were black gays and lesbians in the early civil rights movement until I found out about black gay pacifist Bayard Rustin who coordinated the historic 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

SBC: What is it about Durham that makes it so appealing as a hub for activism?

MC: When I first moved here, I didn't know anything about Durham. It was just the city where I was moving to from San Francisco to work for the War Resisters League, but once I was here I learned what an amazing city it is. I think Duke University has a good deal to do with "Why Durham?" Lesbian author, activist, and SONG co-founder Mab Segrest went to Duke as an out white lesbian, and she stayed here. Steve Schewel, founder of the Durham-based *Independent* newspaper, also went to Duke and stayed here. Duke graduates who were activists in college stayed in Durham and kept their activism here, so that a progressive white community with a collective sense of social



Mandy Carter

justice and peace took hold and has been growing ever since. Prior to that, Durham already had strong roots in the civil rights movement. When I moved here I saw this amazing black community here, a peace & social justice movement, arts & culture, universities like NC Central and Duke, plus the LesBiGayTrans movement is just off the charts. I really didn't know how great Durham was before I moved here, and now I can't imagine living anywhere else.

SBC: What keeps you energized and inspired?

MC: Seeing so much change is so wonderful. Maybe it's because I'm in Durham, but you get to see the results of your work in a town like this. Certainly with the LesBiGayTrans movement, we have come so far since I moved to Durham. I also rely on the Quakers' underlying philosophy of justice for all to keep me active and always moving forward. And practically speaking, funders have understood the importance of funding social justice movements and groups like SONG. So that helps provide the financial stability for me to do my work.

SBC: Why did you decide to give your papers to the Bingham Center? What do you hope your legacy will be?

MC: Sallie Bingham herself is the main reason I chose the Bingham Center. About 13 years ago when SONG was coming into being here in Durham, another SONG co-founder Pam McMicheal from Louisville, Kentucky, arranged for us to meet at The Hopscotch House, a Louisville retreat space established by Sallie Bingham who said "creativity demands that women be allowed to retreat, at times, from their world and obligations." When I attended the Center's last symposium in 2005, I met Sallie Bingham and thanked her for letting us use the Hopscotch House 13 years ago, because without those initial meetings SONG might never have existed. And with Durham being my home and also home to the Bingham Center, it just made sense. As for my legacy, I'd like to serve as a source of information and inspiration for other lesbians of color and social justice activists in the future. I don't know where I'd be without my own role models and people I admire.

2007-2008 Mary Lily Research Grants awarded

The Bingham Center is pleased to announce the recipients of this year's Mary Lily Research Grants. The grants support the work of students, scholars, and independent researchers who will travel to Durham from all over the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain to make use of the Bingham Center's rich collections.

David Brown, Lecturer, School of Arts, Histories, and Cultures, Manchester University, U.K., for work on a book on working class, non-slaveholding whites in the antebellum American South.

Lindsey Churchill, Dept. of History, Florida State University, for work on her dissertation on gender and the connection between Latin American and U.S. leftist revolutionary groups.

Jason Demers, Programme in English, York University, Canada, for work on his dissertation on Kathy Acker and French Post-Structuralist Theory and American Postmodernist writing.

LaShawn Harris, Dept. of History, Howard University, for work on an article about the political and social activism of Mittie Maude Lena Gordon during the 1930s.

Karissa Haugeberg, Dept. of History, University of Iowa, for work on her dissertation on women in the anti-abortion movement in the U.S. from 1970-2000.

Tameka Hobbes, Valentine Richmond History Center, Virginia, for research for a permanent museum exhibition on the city of Richmond.

Heather Murray, Lecturer, Dept. of History, University of Ottawa, Canada, for work on a book on the relationships between gay men and lesbians and their parents in the U.S. in the post-WWII period.

Renée Sentilles, Associate Professor, Dept. of History, Case Western Reserve University, for work on a book on the cultural depiction of American tomboys, 1830-1920.

David Valone, Assistant Professor, Dept. of History, Quinnipiac University, for work on an article on the intersection between population control and women's health movements from the 1960s-1990s.

<http://library.duke.edu/specialcollections/ingham/grants/>

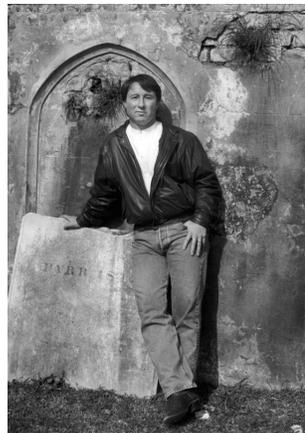
LGBT history: past, present, and future

On Saturday April 14th, historian James Sears gave a talk on the history of the Mattachine Society in the Rare Book Room. An interactive display of materials from our collections related to the history of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities was also on display that afternoon.

The Mattachine Society, active during the 1950s and 1960s, was one of the earliest gay organizations in the United States. Award-winning author James Sears gave an overview of his six year research and writing project covering gay activism across three generations (1900s-1960s). Sears's personal papers are housed at Duke University.

The Duke University Libraries has a history of building collections to support sexuality studies, including the history of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. The open house displayed a broad range of

collections, from early texts on "sexual perversion" to pre-Stonewall pulp fiction and contemporary zines by queer youth. These resources are being used actively by faculty and students. This event was offered in conjunction with Duke alumni weekend.



James Sears
Photo by Robert Giard

Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles And the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation by James T. Sears
Harrington Park Press, 2006

New Acquisitions and Additions

Carolina Wren Press

A recent addition to the records of the press is comprised of book covers and book cover proofs, and edited copies and proofs of writings by and correspondence concerning the work of Carolina Wren authors and poets. Also included are business records of the Carolina Wren Press, board meeting records, advertising and publicity.

Catherine Nicholson

Writer, scholar, activist, and founding editor of the longest running lesbian feminist literary journal, *Sinister Wisdom*, Nicholson has made a significant addition to her papers consisting of 15 linear feet of photographs, writings, ephemera, correspondence and other materials. Some of her correspondents include Adrienne Rich, Michelle Cliff, Marilyn Frye, and Julia Penelope. Penelope's papers are also held by the Bingham Center.



**Sallie Bingham Center for
Women's History and Culture**

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Save the date: Our third symposium takes shape



Common Woman Chorus will perform at the event

Mark your calendar!

October 26 27, 2007

Rare Book Room, Perkins Library
Duke University West Campus

The Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture will host its 3rd biennial symposium this fall. This year's theme is women and artistic expression. We are interested in exploring the ways in which women have expressed themselves through three centuries and many art forms. By means of exhibits, performances, workshops, and other sessions, and from the perspective of students, faculty, staff, scholars, and, of course, artists, we will consider domestic, visual, literary, and performing arts.

The event will take place on Friday, October 26, and Saturday, October 27. We plan to kick off the symposium with an opening performance on Friday evening, followed by workshops, panels, films screenings, artist demonstrations and other activities, as well as a closing performance on Saturday. Our opening performance will be given by the Common Woman Chorus, a local group that performs empowering music highlighting the diversity and strength of women's everyday lives and experiences. The Chorus's records are held by the Bingham Center.

Please mark your calendars and look for more information in the coming months!