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Past Forward: The Reclamation of the Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame Collection

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Up-and-Comers: News for Student Archivists—Justin Seidler, Assistant Editor

Please submit “Up-and-Comers” items to Justin Seidler at justinseidler@gmail.com.

SAA Student Chapter at the University of Wisconsin–Madison

By Laura Farley, University of Wisconsin–Madison

The SAA Student Chapter at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW–Madison) was very active in the fall 2012 semester. In October, it held the first annual Fall Archives Symposium, hosting archivists from Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin, and maintained an active Archives Month blog. Chapter members are currently volunteering at Circus World in Baraboo, Wisconsin, processing collections for retired UW–Madison faculty and preparing their materials for transfer to the University Archives and the Radical Oral History Program. Look for the UW–Madison SAA Student Chapter booth at MAC 2013—the chapter will be selling t-shirts and homemade jewelry! Three members will also lead a session on podcasting in the archives, and several members will present posters.

Study-Abroad Opportunities at the University of Southern Mississippi

The University of Southern Mississippi’s School of Library and Information Science is pleased to announce that a new elective has been approved for the graduate certificate in archives and special collections. LIS 580: British Studies is part of a study-abroad course based in London and Edinburgh. Required courses for the certificate are on-line, except for the archival practicum, which can be done at an approved archives or special collection near the student. For more information, see <http://www.usm.edu/library-information-science/british-studies>, or contact Teresa.Welsh@usm.edu.

Past Forward: The Reclamation of the Michigan Women’s Historical Center and Hall of Fame Media Collection

By Elyssa Bisoski, Loyola University–Chicago; Kelly Kietur, Jennifer Patchett, Natasha Rogers,
Elizabeth Thornburg, Wayne State University

Introduction

The Michigan Women’s Studies Association (MWSA) formed on the campus of Michigan State University in 1973 as an academic professional organization aimed at addressing the lack of women’s history in the educational curriculum. In 1987, the organization expanded its mission and created the Michigan Women’s Historical Center and Hall of Fame (MWHOF), the first museum dedicated to preserving the history of the women of one state, commemorating women in Michigan and honoring those who have made extraordinary contributions in their respective fields.

In early 2012, Sandy Soifer, the MWHOF’s director, and Emily Fijol, the assistant director, identified an audiovisual collection containing content of enduring historical value as inaccessible to both staff and the public due to the dated format of the media. As a result, interviews with historically significant women from Michigan were frozen in time. However, through a series of chance meetings and a desire to digitize, preserve, and increase the accessibility of such a rich collection, a project and partnership were born.

In a collaborative effort, three distinct entities—the MWHOF; Allied Vaughn, a media solutions provider in Livonia; and a team of five interns—worked together to digitize, preserve, and increase the accessibility of the collection. The MWHOF had an extensive collection of over 400 titles, including 8-tracks; audio cassettes; reel-to-reel audio and film; Betacam, U-matic, and VHS tapes; 3½-inch floppies; and Zip disks spanning nearly 30 years of Michigan and national history.

Getting the Archival Gloves Dirty

The project began in the summer of 2012 with the initial review and inventory of the collection. Employees of Allied Vaughn, with the assistance of the first intern, Kelly Kietur, began transferring each item to DVD or CD. Due to the age of the materials, moisture had collected on many of the U-matic tapes, prohibiting their migration. To combat this issue, the team used an industry technique known as “baking” in which a tape is heated in a dehydrator to remove the moisture long enough to extract the content and transfer it to a surrogate.

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For the second phase, three new interns, Natasha Rogers, Elyssa Bisoski, and Jennifer Patchett, organized the collection by dividing the materials into series according to original format and then arranging the items chronologically within each series. As the MWHOF did not have a standard format for finding aids, the interns created one derived from examples of similar collections at other museums and using information provided by the MWHOF regarding rights, access, use, and reproduction.

The next stage of the project consisted of a more comprehensive review of the contents. Rogers, Bisoski, and Patchett began this process, which was completed by the final intern, Elizabeth Thornburg, in the early months of 2013.

Finally, the contents of each recording were digitized and the total collection stored on a one-terabyte drive to serve as a backup to the entire collection. The MWHOF hopes to eventually launch the project on-line, thereby ensuring accessibility. On-line archives are an increasingly important aspect of women's history as they democratize access to collections, making them accessible to both nonscholars and academics who previously ignored women's history.¹

Personal Reflections

Kelly Kietur found that working with the MWHOF collection helped her appreciate the contributions of a number of Michigan women she had previously known little about, such as Mildred Jeffrey, who was involved with the labor and civil rights movements. The Wayne State University Libraries, where Kietur is currently employed, has the Mildred Jeffrey Collection of Peace and Conflict Resolution. Because of her work, Kietur now recognizes the significance of that collection and its namesake.

Elyssa Bisoski, while listening to an interview of social worker Elmina Lucke, learned that Lucke was the first person to attend college from the small town of Carleton, Michigan, which also happens to be Bisoski's hometown. Bisoski found herself drawn to Lucke's story because of that simple connection. As Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen note in their book *The Presence of the Past*, people feel more connected to the past when they can make a personal connection, and they seek out historical stories that they can associate to themes in their own lives.² Local, personal stories are exactly the type of history that many people find the most interesting, which will help draw researchers to the collection and to the MWHOF.

Natasha Rogers appreciates the collection for its overall content, which includes documentation of key historical moments such as the struggle for woman suffrage, the civil rights movement, and women entering the workforce. Rogers's highlights of the collection are oral histories of women who had served in World War II as members of the navy's Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) and the Women's Army Corps (WAC). The recordings tell fascinating stories of individual women, describe women's struggles, and create a record of how women's history has been recognized, studied, and remembered over the past 30 years.

Elizabeth Thornburg found the process of listening to the voices of the past and preparing the finding aids for the audio collection to be nothing less than an honor. Listening to these voices reminded her that she benefits from the many strides that have been made in the recent past in the education of women. Her favorite pieces of the collection are an interview with children's author and illustrator Marguerite De Angeli and speeches from various AAUW conferences. Elizabeth believes that preserving interviews like these will strengthen the bonds between the past and present for generations to come.

Jennifer Patchett, who is an artist as well as an M.L.I.S. student, regards archival science as an extension of the creative process. Living in Detroit has instilled within her a profound interest in the history of this region, and she finds it imperative to preserve the documents detailing the journey that brought women to where they are today. As Marilyn French wrote in her eminent work, *The War Against Women*, "Considering the power and solidarity of the forces arranged against them, feminists' success in improving women's lot in so brief a time is dazzling."³ This project confirmed Patchett's belief in preserving women's history for future generations so they may continue the progress of the women who came before them.

Final Thoughts

One important inquiry for any project is the simple question, "Why?" Why is this project significant, and what is its value to society? Gerda Lerner, the pioneering women's historian and activist, notes that history without women is simply incorrect. Women have always been a part of society, and so they have always been a part of history.⁴ The MWHOF is part of a growing movement of museums and archives collecting women's history to help right the historical record.⁵ The practical lessons of processing and digitizing a collection will be useful as the interns work

toward the next stage of their careers, but the knowledge that they gave voice to a once silent legacy will last forever.

Notes

1. Kären Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher, "Raising the Archival Consciousness: How Women's Archives Challenge Traditional Approaches to Collecting and Use, Or, What's in a Name?," *Library Trends* 56:2 (fall 2007): 355.
2. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 89–107.
3. Marilyn French, *The War Against Women* (New York: Summit Books, 1992), 11.
4. Catharine R. Stimpson, "Gerda Lerner on the Future of Our Past," interview, *Ms.* (September 1981), 94, 95.
5. Kären M. Mason, "Fostering Diversity in Archival Collections," *Collection Management* 27:2 (2003): 23–31, 25.

Mixed Media

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2. "Strangers with Candy," *Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0194624/> (5 February 2013).
3. "Mystery Science Theater 3000," *Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094517/> (6 February 2013).
4. *Everything Is Terrible*, <http://www.everythingisterrible.com/> (6 February 2013).
5. Jessamyn Neuhaus, "'Shake This Square World and Blast Off for Kicksville': Teaching History with Post-WWII Prescriptive Classroom Films," *The History Teacher*, November 2010.
6. "IU Digital Collections Search," *Indiana University Libraries Film Archive*, [http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/dcs/?f\[source\]\[\]=Indiana+University+Libraries+Film+Archive](http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/dcs/?f[source][]=Indiana+University+Libraries+Film+Archive) (6 February 2013).
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