

WOMEN at the CENTER

Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library

Issue 2, Fall 2001

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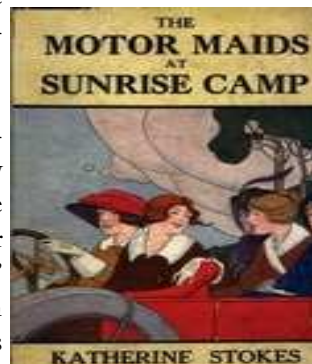
We love:

- The *BookWomen* newsletter published by the Minnesota Women's Press.
- Student visitors from the Duke Young Writers Camp.
- The women who organized Ladyfest Midwest Chicago.
- Having a creative outlet; making it a priority.
- All the women of Mr. Lady Records.

Beyond Nancy Drew: Girls' Literature Comes of Age

From the didactic (*A Very Odd Girl*) to the inspirational (*Girls Who Rocked the World*), the Bingham Center's collection of girls' literature represents the diverse body of literature written for young women in the United States and Great Britain since the middle of the nineteenth century. Once dismissed as popular, or even "throw-away" literature, these books have historically been weeded from most library collections, making them difficult to find—especially in academic libraries. Recent investigations into the representation of girlhood in literature have demonstrated the need for comprehensive research collections on the topic, and the Bingham Center hopes to provide such a resource to scholars.

An exhibit highlighting this collection titled "Beyond Nancy Drew: Girls' Literature in the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture" was on view from July through October in Duke University's Perkins Library. Quotes from the books illustrate how literature has attempted to mold girls into young ladies in styles ranging from the overt to the insidious.



Take for example the stringent advice of *White Gloves and Party Manners* -

Young ladies must learn how to be proper hostesses, but when you go to public places it is the gentleman who takes over.

compared to a more subtle aside in *Tomboy* -

Adrian was quite right. Somehow, somewhere, during the year she'd stopped being a tomboy. Not on purpose; it had simply happened. And suddenly she was glad!

Whether it has encouraged young women to be satisfied in the domestic sphere, pointed them towards "acceptable" professions outside the home, or, more recently, showed them that there are no limits to what they might achieve, girls' literature has been a powerful - and colorful - manifestation of societal values.

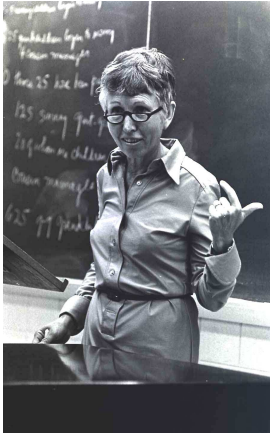
In addition to the exhibit, we have produced an annotated bibliography of selections from our girls' literature collection. It can be found by visiting our website at <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/women/>. It may remind you of a childhood favorite you had long forgotten.

Recent Visitors to the Bingham Center

We love having visitors at the Bingham Center - after all, that's why we're here! This summer was a surprisingly busy time. Scholars on summer break travel to Durham to do research in our collections, and groups like the Duke Young Writers Camp visit for inspiration and a sense of their own place in the history of women's private writing. A

number of our grant recipients have used their awards, and since September we have been getting requests from professors at Duke and other area universities to give presentations to their classes. We want to thank them all for visiting the Bingham Center, and for giving us an excuse to spend time with some of our favorite materials!

Celebrating a Southern Lady: Anne Firor Scott



“...Anne Scott helped to chart the roadmap that guided the re-visioning of the American past.”

- William Chafe,
Dean of Arts and
Sciences, Duke
University

On October 5, friends and colleagues of Anne Firor Scott gathered in the Rare Book Room of Perkins Library to help celebrate her 80th birthday. As a professor in the Department of History at Duke University for nearly four decades, Scott has brought history to life for hundreds, if not thousands, of undergraduates. As a historian, she has influenced generations of colleagues and championed women's history as a field of inquiry.

Professor Scott has been a prolific author and editor throughout her career. She is the author of *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics*, and *Making the Invisible Woman Visible*, to name only two of her major contributions to the literature of women's studies. She has also been a great advocate for the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library by encouraging the use of primary source materials in her classes.

David Ferriero, Rita DiGiullonardo Holloway University Librarian and Vice Provost for Library Affairs, introduced two of Professor Scott's former students to the gathering of colleagues and friends. Kathy Crutcher (class of 2000) and John Holland (class of 1980) both

spoke eloquently about the impact her teaching had on their lives - not just by opening their eyes to history, but by teaching them to think critically and independently.

Exhibit cases in the Biddle Room were filled with materials from Scott's personal papers, which are housed in the Special Collections Library. From her early correspondence with her father John William Firor, to her recent writings and lectures, her passion for history and the research process is apparent everywhere in the collection.

Commemorating the occasion, Duke University Libraries and the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture have produced a chapbook of Scott's 1979 essay "Self-Portraits: Three Women" featuring letterpress printed handmade paper covers. In his introduction to the essay, Professor William Chafe, Dean of Arts and Sciences at Duke, writes that "every person hopes to have a career that makes a difference in the lives and horizons of those around them. Few are able to succeed in that ambition. Anne Firor Scott has done so with grace and insight."

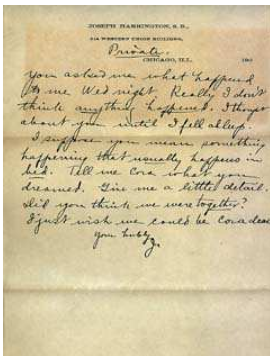
The Very Intimate Nurse and Engineer

The Cora and Joseph Harrington letters are some of the most revealing documents in the Bingham Center's collections. Cora was raised in the rural Midwest and trained as a nurse before marrying Joseph, a very successful mechanical engineer in Chicago. The bulk of the correspondence was written between 1904 and 1906, while the couple were still newly married. These letters contain expressions of love and desire that are remarkably frank for the time and provide a glimpse of the most private aspects of married life at the turn of the century.

Cora and Joseph were often separated; he traveled a great deal on business, while she "vacationed" out west for her tuberculosis. ("Remember, no one here knows I ever had

the TB!") Cora's letters describe her struggles to gain weight, "female troubles," and her frustration with doctors. Joseph's letters reveal an adoring and sometimes jealous husband. He goes so far as to devise a system for their letter writing, appending a private page to the rest of the letter so that it alone may be destroyed after reading. Few of these private pages survive, among them a surprisingly explicit, even graphic, love letter from Joseph to his wife.

This is a rich source for those interested in married life, women's health, women in the nursing profession, and sexuality in the early part of the 20th century. It has also proved to be very popular when we present staged readings from our collections!



This page, marked "Private," is a racy postscript to an otherwise routine letter from Joseph Harrington to his wife Cora.

Ladyfest Midwest Chicago: You Are Making History!

When we received the Sarah Dyer Zine Collection last year, we knew it was an enormously important resource for the study of feminism at the end of the 20th century. Zines capture the personal feelings, political opinions, and artistic expressions of their authors in a unique way. Women still keep journals and write letters to express their thoughts privately, but zines communicate their ideas publicly - uncensored and uninhibited by the publishing establishment.

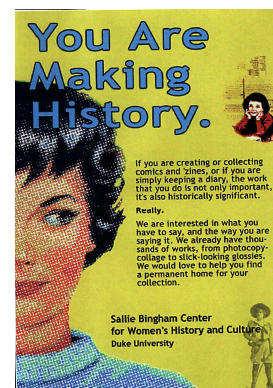
Finding ways to build on this collection has been a challenge, however. Zines are elusive, ephemeral, and firmly entrenched underground. In the Summer 1995 issue of *Serials Review*, Michael Basinski, assistant curator of the Poetry and Rare Book Collection at SUNY-Buffalo, advocated involvement with underground and alternative communities as the best way to collect zines: "It is a world of personalities that must be engaged with a handshake and a conversation rather than a check and an order form."

On August 19th, hundreds of women (and men, and transgendered folks) gathered in Chi-

cago for a festival of third-wave feminist music, art, and activism called Ladyfest Midwest - and the Bingham Center was there. Our mission was to meet women who write and publish their own zines and to publicize the Dyer Collection. We set up our table and hung our poster in the lobby of the Congress Theater, and the response was overwhelming.

From the first person we met to the last, everyone we talked to said how glad they were that someone was "taking this stuff seriously." We were asked by one of the organizers to participate in a workshop on zines, and the room was filled to capacity. Affirmations of our work came from graduate students, high school punks, and yes, even from a couple of librarians who had traveled from Seattle for the festival.

Ladyfest Midwest was an excellent opportunity for outreach in a venue where many librarians would fear to tread. We returned to Durham with a box of materials to add to the collection and a renewed commitment to documenting this facet of contemporary culture.



Our Ladyfest poster attracted a good deal of attention.

Augmenting our zine collection was going to be a challenge. In an effort to preserve this fugitive literature, we decided to go straight to the source.

Mary Lily Research Grants

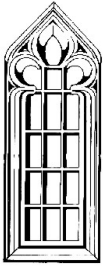
The application deadline is fast approaching for the next cycle of Mary Lily Research Grants. These grants provide funds for researchers whose work would benefit from access to the archival and rare printed collections at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture. Applications must be postmarked on or before January 15, 2002.

The Bingham Center documents the public and private lives of women through a wide variety of published and unpublished sources. Collections of personal papers, family papers, and organizational records complement print sources such as books and periodicals. Particular strengths of the CWHC are feminism and radical feminism in the U.S., women's prescriptive literature from the

19th and 20th centuries, girls' literature, artists' books by women, and the history and culture of women in the South. Also, a number of prominent women writers have placed their personal and professional papers at Duke. Topics of successful grant proposals have ranged from the boundaries between rudeness and gentility in the pre-Civil War South to the poetics of cyberpunk author Kathy Acker.

Information on our grant program, including the grant application form, can be found on our website at <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/specoll/grants.html>; or feel free to contact Amy Leigh, Archivist, via email at CWHC@duke.edu, or by phone at (919) 660-5967.





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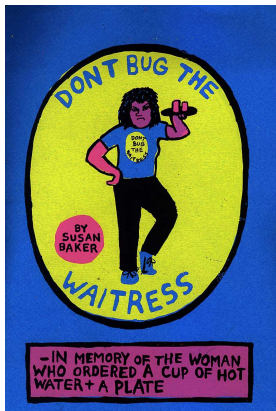
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We're On the Web!
[http://
scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/](http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/)

Celebrating a Southern Lady

In honor of Professor Anne Firor Scott's 80th birthday, Duke University Libraries has produced a chapbook of one of her essays (see article on page 2). If you would like to receive a copy of this commemorative reprinting of "Self-Portraits: Three Women," contact the Bingham Center.

A Commitment to Creative Expression: Artists' Books by Women



Don't Bug the Waitress by Susan Baker is just one of our many artists' books by women.

The Bingham Center's commitment to documenting the lives of women encompasses not only their private, professional, and political lives, but their creative lives as well. Our growing collection of artists' books by women shows how women are using the book as an art object in order to address issues relating to gender. Whether self-published or issued by small presses, this artistic form unites the ancient crafts of paper-making, typography, and book-binding with each artist's unique sensibility and artistic vision.

The formats of these books vary widely with some being merely photocopied ruminations on the author's/artist's concerns or obsessions while others are intricately crafted and playfully deconstructed versions of the traditional codex book format. Often words or story lines are neglected to emphasize tactile, sculptural, or

purely visual qualities. Karen Stahlecker's *Old Growth Altar*, as its name suggests, opens into a free standing altar-shaped shadow box filled with natural objects such as ferns and pinecones. *Don't Bug the Waitress*, by Susan Baker, consists of cartoon-like vignettes of problem customers and wait staff camaraderie. By engaging with the book as a concept and stretching the boundaries of traditional narrative, women are telling their stories in fresh and inventive new ways.

The Bingham Center continues to build on its artists' books collection and is planning an exhibit of these works in the lobby of Perkins Library for the Fall of 2002. Look for details about the exhibit and related events on our website or here in the newsletter in the spring.