

WOMEN at the CENTER

Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture
David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University

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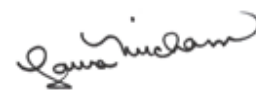
A Letter from Director Laura Micham

During these challenging and disorienting times in which we have all seen dramatic changes to our lives, we want to send you well wishes and let you know how the Sallie Bingham Center is continuing its work during the COVID-19 shut down. We spent the week of March 16 scanning hundreds of pages of collection material to support students, faculty, and researchers who would be impacted by Duke's closure. The Rubenstein Library, where the Bingham Center is located, officially closed on March 20. During the intervening weeks we've been learning how to run a special collections library distributed across many households, without access to physical materials. Despite these challenges, we have maintained close connections through video conferencing and other technologies.

Some of the projects we've been working on include supporting students and faculty in classes recently shifted to an online

environment; creating and updating collection descriptions; completing our travel grant program selection process (see p. 3); fielding remote reference requests; preparing an exhibition commemorating the centenary of American women's suffrage (see the back page); and posting a series on our Twitter feed (@binghamctr) honoring the critical work being done right now to support vulnerable populations by activists and organizations whose records are preserved in the Bingham Center.

I'm proud of all of contributions made and services provided by the creative and dedicated Bingham Center staff and interns during this precarious time. We thank you for your continued support and wish you health and safety.



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Profiles in Research: In Search of Their Anti-Racist Lineage

Contributed by Amanda Mixon, PhD Candidate, Comparative Literature, University of California, Irvine.

With the assistance of a Mary Lily Travel Grant, I visited the Sallie Bingham Center in the summer of 2018 to carry out research for my dissertation, which analyzes how a group of white southern lesbian writers theorize whiteness and practice anti-racist activism. The project is as much invested in tracing friendships and influences as it is in elaborating a single individual's political thought. Therefore, when perusing the papers of Dorothy Allison (1949-), Minnie Bruce Pratt (1946-), and

Mab Segrest (1949-), I was especially interested in how the holdings might give voice to these women's relationships with each other and the two other figures in my study, Rita Mae Brown (1944-) and Lillian Smith (1897-1966).[i]

I knew that Smith, arguably the most outspoken white southern critic of Jim Crow segregation, had a profound impact on Pratt and Segrest. Her lifelong partnership with Paula Snelling (1899-1985) and searing critiques of white supremacy offered Pratt and Segrest a foundation from which to learn and build. However, when

(Continued on page 2)

**Collections
Highlight**



Kate Millett Correspondence Now Open to Research

In January 2020, the Kate Millett correspondence series was opened to the public. Millett's letters cover her work as a feminist writer and activist, and include many pieces of correspondence with other prominent activists, such as Phyllis Chesler, Cynthia McAdams, Yoko Ono, Alix Kates Shulman, and Gloria Steinem. There are a few letters from Pauli Murray, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Toni Morrison praising Millett for her book, *Sexual Politics* (1970). The series also includes personal letters about Millett's involuntary commitment to psychiatric wards, the development of her sexual identity, her experiences teaching, and her relationships with friends and family. (Photograph by Cynthia McAdams, 1979, Kate Millett papers)

Profiles in Research *continued from page 1*

scanning Pratt's papers, I was surprised to find an unpublished stage play that Segrest wrote about the couple in the late eighties. There, Segrest prioritizes Snelling's experience, allowing her to criticize Smith for closeting their same-sex relationship. As Segrest told me in person, this centering is an ode to the significant amount of unrecognized work that Snelling contributed to Smith's career and their collaborative projects. But what I found most compelling was Segrest's creative license with the couple's relationship: that is, no primary or secondary sources confirm the dynamic that Segrest depicts. As such, the untitled play is not only an example of how we represent historical figures in order to do them jus-

tice, but also an account of what those figures emotionally do for us. In their published nonfiction, both Segrest and Pratt express a yearning for a Smith not bound by the closet's silence. In the play, Snelling becomes the voice of that desire. She asks: what would it have meant—for Smith's own career and life, for Snelling, and for the countless women inspired by their work—if Smith had claimed a lesbian identity?

[i] Rita Mae Brown is author of the 1973 lesbian coming of age novel *Rubyfruit Jungle*. Lillian Smith was a white civil rights activist, known for her 1944 novel *Strange Fruit*, which featured an interracial couple.

“Listening to sounds larger than our own heartbeat”

A CONFERENCE ON LILLIAN SMITH



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM
OCTOBER 7-9, 1994

FEATURED GUESTS

Michelle Cliff is the Allen K. Smith Professor of English Language and Literature at Trinity College in Connecticut. She is the editor of *The Winner Names the Age: A Collection of Writings by Lillian Smith*. She is a poet and novelist whose most recent book is *Free Enterprise*.

Blanche Wiesen Cook is professor of History and Women's Studies at John Jay College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. She is the author of *Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. 1: 1884-1933*, *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution*, and *The Declassified Eisenhower*.

Wilma Dykeman is an accomplished writer of fiction, nonfiction and biography. She is the author of 16 books, including *The Tall Woman* and *Prophet of Plenty: A Biography of Dr. W.D. Weatherford*.

Margaret Rose Gladney is assistant professor of American Studies at the University of Alabama and the editor of *How Am I to Be Heard? Letters of Lillian Smith*.

Minnie Bruce Pratt's collection of poems, *Crime Against Nature*, was the Lamont Poetry Selection in 1989. Other books include *Rebellion: Essays 1980-1991* and *We Say We Love Each Other*.

Dori Sanders is a peach farmer and writer. Her novels are *Her Own Place* and *Clover*.

Mab Segrest is an activist and essayist. She is the author of *Memoir of a Race Traitor* and *My Mama's Dead Squirrel: Lesbian Essays on Southern Culture*.

“Listening to Sounds Larger Than Our Own Heartbeat”: A Conference on Lillian Smith” brochure listing talks by both Mab Segrest and Minnie Bruce Pratt. Georgetown University, October 7-9, 1994. From the Mab Segrest Papers, Box 63.

Featured on the Devil's Tale Blog: blogs.library.duke.edu/rubenstein

Mary Lily Research Grant Recipients 2020-2021

We are pleased to announce the recipients of this year's Mary Lily Research Grants. These grants support the work of students, scholars, and independent researchers who will travel to Durham to use the Bingham Center's rich collections. We gratefully acknowledge our faculty reader, Seth Le Jacq, Thompson Writing Program, who offered valuable insights during the selection process. Due to widespread travel restrictions, the timeframe for using this grant support has been extended to December 2021.

Dena Aufseeser, Faculty, Dept. of Geography and Environmental Systems, University of Maryland, "Family Labor, Care, and Deservingness in the US"

Elvis Bakaitis, Adjunct Reference Librarian, The Graduate Center, CUNY, "The Queer Legacy of Dyke Zines" (see illustrations on right)

Sarah Heying, Ph.D. candidate, University of Mississippi, "An examination of the relationship between reproductive politics and southern lesbian literature since 1970"

Emily Larned, Faculty, Art and Art History, University of Connecticut, "The Efemmera Reissue Project"

Susan Sepulveda, Ph.D. candidate, Dept. of Gender and Women's Studies, University of Arizona, "Travesando Chicana punk:" examining Chicana punk identity formations through the production of cultural texts

Tiana Wilson, Ph.D. candidate, University of Texas at Austin, "No Freedom Without All of Us: Recovering the Lasting Legacy of the Third World Women's Alliance"



"Celebrate Everyday Heroes" and comic panel about suffragists from the "Homos in Herstory" zine by Elvis Bakaitis

Harry H. Harkins Jr. T'73 Research Grants

These travel grants for researchers using gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender history collections are named in honor of Harry H. Harkins, Jr. T'73 for his generous support of this program and ongoing support of LGBT history and sexuality studies collections in the Duke University Libraries. This program is separately funded from the Mary Lily Grants.

Caitlyn Parker, Ph.D. candidate, American Studies, Purdue University, Lesbians politically organizing against the carceral state from 1970-2000

Amanda Stafford, Ph.D. candidate, School of History, University of Leeds, "The Radical Press and the New Left in Georgia, 1968-1976"

Collections Highlight



Serena K. Dandridge: Scientific Illustrator, Suffragist, and Shepherd

This past fall we received a reference question inquiring about Serena K. Dandridge (aka "Miss Violet") and her suffrage activism in the U.S. in the early 1900s. The question came from the Smithsonian Institution where Dandridge had been employed as a scientific illustrator. We were intrigued to learn more about this fascinating woman through the Dandridge Family Papers. Her letters document her involvement with the West Virginia Suffrage Association and her later life on her family's farm called Rosebrake in West Virginia, raising sheep. The papers also tell the story of her inpatient residence at a psychiatric hospital in Maryland, offering a unique perspective on treatment of women with mental illness during that time.


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Women's Work in the Time of Pandemic



Fabric badge from the Lisa
Unger Baskin Collection

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as in public health crises throughout history, women do essential work. Currently one in three jobs held by women has been designated as essential, and women of color are more likely to be doing essential jobs than anyone else.

During the 1918 flu pandemic, a worker shortage necessitated that women take jobs outside the home in unprecedented numbers. As women filled workplace roles previously held by men, they also began to demand equal pay for their work. Gaining greater economic power and participating in more community decision-making, women increasingly advocated for their rights including the right to vote. Unable to deny the critical roles women played in American society, politicians and others soon argued that they be afforded the right to vote.

One hundred years later we are preparing an exhibition to commemorate the ratification, in August 1920, of the 19th amendment granting many American women the right to vote. "Beyond Supply & Demand: Duke Economics Students Present 100 Years of American Women's Suffrage" will highlight a range of materials from the Rubenstein Library selected by undergraduate students in the Fall 2019 course "Women in the Economy" who were tasked with "going beyond simple tools of supply and demand" to explore original, archival materials to curate an exhibit examining the complexities and strategies of the American women's suffrage movement.