Journal of Western Archives

Volume 5 | Issue 1 Article 3

2014

Review of Perspectives on Women's Archives

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Recommended Citation
Stringfellow, Julia (2014) "Review of Perspectives on Women's Archives," *Journal of Western Archives*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 3.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol5/iss1/3

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Review of *Perspectives on Women's Archives*

Edited by Tanya Zanish-Belcher with Anke Voss. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2013. 488pp. Softcover. $69.95. ISBN 1-931666-47-4

Archivists and historians often take for granted the existence and strengths of women's archives and collections on women's history. We forget they haven't always been present in the documentation of history. Learning how women's archives and collections evolved over the last part of the twentieth century, how they continue to grow, and their future is shared in this brilliant collection of essays edited by Tanya Zanish-Belcher with Anke Voss. The book not only provides insight into the history of women's collections, but also inspires the reader to research each of the authors of the eighteen essays and learn of their involvement in the creation and growth of women's archives.

Zanish-Belcher and Voss are highly qualified to serve as the volume's editors. The former is the Director of Special Collections and University Archivist at Wake Forest University. She was previously the Curator for the Archives of Women in Science and Engineering at the Iowa State University Library and was promoted to Head of the Special Collections Department and University Archives at Iowa State. She has written several articles on women's archives and collections and is an active member of the Midwest Archives Conference and the Society of American Archivists, including being elected as a Fellow, serving on Council, and chairing several committees, including as co-chair of the Women's Collections Roundtable. Two of her previously published essays, as well as a new one, appear in this volume. Voss serves as the Director of Archives at the Champaign County Historical Archives, the Urbana Free Library and was formerly an archivist at Illinois Wesleyan University. She has also written several articles on women's collections and is active in both the Midwest Archives Conference and the Society of American Archivists, having served as the co-chair of the Women's Collections Roundtable.

The editors have collaborated previously on projects and publications on women's archives and collections, and the success and ease of this collaborative team is evident throughout the book with its layout and content. The introduction sets the stage for the essays that follow it and describes the rise and need to document women's history and growth since the 1970s. The essays are divided into four sections and are titled "Reclaiming Our Past," "Locating Women in the Archives," "Documenting Women's Experiences," and "Conclusion." The introduction explores the early rise of women's archives. The major themes are also explained: needing a total fusion of the history of women's experiences for archivists, greater diversity in the collecting and scholarship of women's history, and the impact on women of the

creation of women's archives and collections. Collaboration among women's history scholars, librarians, and archivists; the accessibility of women's archives and the challenges that presents particularly with ever-changing technology; and the rise of community archives are also themes explored.

The eight essays of the first section begin with one by historian Gerda Lerner in 1975 when scholarship on women's history was just beginning. The second essay focuses on historian Mary Ritter Beard and her work to establish a World Center for Women's Archives, followed by her work with the women's collections at Radcliffe College and Smith College. The third essay explores collecting of materials on African American women, an often underrepresented group in women's collections and the creation of the Black Women in the Middle West Project. The fourth essay is a follow -up to the previous one, emphasizing the importance of collecting this history of black women. The fifth essay looks at the creation and success of the Women's History Sources Survey conducted in the 1970s at the University of Minnesota. The final essay in the first section explores "new women's history," meaning the histories of all women and their activities and relationships, specifically the ones not previously covered by historians.

The second section begins with an essay exploring the status of women's archives in 2000, how far they have come, and how they will continue to grow and be an important part of the historical record. The eighth essay explores personal archives and the woman's recorded role in family history. The ninth essay looks at the history of women's religious communities, their importance to the women involved and to history, the collections grown out of these communities, and their users. The tenth essay looks at lesbian and gay archives, the establishment of the Lesbian History Archives in 1973, support for these collections and the progress made in the last thirty years, and the issues of privacy and confidentiality with these collections. The final essay in this section discusses the collections documenting human reproduction, the growth of scholarship in the last fifty years on this subject specifically on women's experiences, and the challenges of archivists in acquiring and providing access to these collections.

The third section begins with an essay on case studies of two women's archives, the Archives of Women in Science and Engineering at Iowa State University and the Iowa Women's Archives at the University of Iowa, and the challenges of building their collections. The thirteenth essay looks at the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and building an archives and collections of African American women at a HBCU. The fourteenth essay explores the work the Library of Congress has done in acquiring and building women's collections through online tools, the *American Women* Resource Guide, discussion groups, and symposiums. The fifteenth essay explores regional collections and the term "wave" to express prior contributions by women, and the acquisition and growth of women's collections at the San José State University Special Collections and Archives and at the Feminist Capital of the country, Santa Clara County. The final essay explores the use of zines in documenting women's history.

The final section begins with an essay by Gerda Lerner written fifty years after her earlier essay in this book, reflecting on the journey that women's history has made and its growth, exploring how historians have sought the documentation of women in history and how women's history has influenced holistic studies. The final essay is a review of the essays that precede it and revisits the major themes outlined in the book's introduction. The future of women's archives and collections is discussed and we are reminded that archivists need to continue to collect and describe women's collections and archives and provide access to them. The volume concludes with biographies of each of the authors, a welcome sight for the reader curious about the authors' backgrounds and wishing to read more of their publications. As with any collection of essays, an Index is a necessity and the thorough one provided compliments the work.

It is evident that the editors took much care and time in selecting the essays that represent different perspectives on women's archives. All the essays are strongly written with no weak or confusing parts or interludes. The writing is clear and provides even more curiosity and interest on a topic that was fascinating to begin with. As the reader goes from essay to essay, continuity is evident through the authors' references to other writers in this volume. For articles that were previously published, their full citation information is provided at the conclusion of the chapter. The essays that saw their debut with this book fit in well with the previously published essays, there are no awkward transitions.

There is only one flaw. The QR code on the back of the book didn't work! Despite scanning it, excited to see if it would lead to similar resources, an error message on the iPhone appeared instead. Given the great usability of QR codes to provide additional information, hopefully this will be resolved.

As the archives profession continues to evolve and we strive to show the world why archives are important and should remain open and receive funding to accomplish this, the book is a very good example of the progress archivists have made in regards to women's collections. It not only allows newer archivists to see the journey that archives history has made in the last fifty years, but it also serves as a reminder to more experienced archivists that in accomplishing this, the profession can accomplish other significant milestones.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and learned much regarding women's history and archives. From the introduction to the last page of the authors' biographies I felt a powerful rah-rah enthusiasm of "We can do it!" and "Look at what women have accomplished!" It made me proud to be an archivist and want to continue improving in this field and contributing more to the world as part of this profession. From reading this book, I realized as a woman archivist in her thirties that women need to know of those who have come before them and made things possible that we today take for granted, including women's collections that are accessible to the public and repositories that specialize in women's history. Those women archivists, historians, and feminists that worked and succeeded in establishing and strengthening women's collections and archives brought women's history out into the

open and made the world realize that women's history is an integral part of the overall historical record. The themes throughout this book are essential to continue building women's collection and archives: collaboration, accessibility, and the growth and support of the community archives.

The editors state that this volume is meant to be the beginning of a collection of scholarship on women's archives and collections rather than a definite work. Let's hope that their desire to have other books follow this one comes to fruition.

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