

Mary Elizabeth Gehman (1943 -) Collection
ca. 1970 - 1991

MARY ELIZABETH GEHMAN

Collection: NAC 232-244; OV-002-003

Size: 14 cubic feet

Accession number: 91-003

Location: NCCROW, NAC 232-244; OV-002-003

SOURCE OF ACQUISITION:

Donation by Mary Elizabeth Gehman

RESTRICTIONS:

None

PROCESSOR:

Ann Douglas, Newcomb '91

Jennifer Brunig, Newcomb '94

Beth Dickerson

Sarah J. Griffin, Newcomb '93

ORGANIZATION AND ARRANGEMENT:

This collection is organized into the following series:

- 1) A complete collection of the Distaff newspaper as well as related correspondence
- 2) Government Documents
- 3) News Clippings
- 4) Times Picayune articles
- 5) Village Voice articles
- 6) Journals
- 7) Organizational Materials
- 8) Other Printed Materials (i.e., newsletters and pamphlets)
- 9) Miscellaneous Materials (including manuscript on New Orleans women in politics)
- 10) a Pre-Organized Box with material collected by both Mary Gehman and Tina Thurman-Schwartzwelder
- 11) Addendum--materials circa 1988-91 (including, however, a collection of clippings from the early 1980's)
- 12) four posters located in an oversized box.

This collection was received with no organizational arrangement with the exception of one box. The other boxes have not retained their original order; instead, materials were separated according to type of material and placed in the appropriate box. Most of the materials were placed in acid-free folders.

FINDING AIDS:

A complete inventory with series descriptions is available in the repository.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Mary Elizabeth Gehman was born in 1943 and raised in a small Mennonite community in Buck's County, Pennsylvania. Her religious heritage propelled her lifelong commitment to feminism. At the age of twenty-one, she had perceived the second-class status of women in the Mennonite Order and decided to leave the church. After graduation from Millersville State College with a B.A. degree in secondary education and German, she taught for a year in a junior high school.

The year 1967 brought her to New York City, to a new career as a social worker, and to the electric stirrings of the women's movement. The consciousness-raising sessions she attended began to plant the roots of her feminist activism, but the pinnacle of these early days was certainly the protests of the Miss America Pageant in 1968 and 1969, in which she participated along with Gloria Steinem, Robin Morgan, and Flo Kennedy.

In 1970 Mary Gehman moved to New Orleans. Although the feminist activism did not compare with that of New York City, Mary Gehman's energy did not dull throughout the decade with active involvement in the women's community locally as well as the National Organization for Women. Her career shifted from social work to journalism in the early seventies. With a Bachelor's degree in Journalism from Loyola University in 1972, she worked as a reporter for the Times-Picayune, but the sexism of the newspaper made her stint there a brief one. She found an outlet for her journalistic talents through her involvement with the Distaff, a women's newspaper. Because there existed no feminist newspaper in the South, Mary Gehman and a few others transformed the broadside of Barbara Scott's campaign for state representative into a monthly paper concerning feminist issues. Mary Gehman's energy as editor kept the paper in print for its tenure 1973-1982 (with the exception of July 1975-1979, when it was out of publication).

After the demise of the paper, Mary Gehman became a tour guide. Dismayed at the lack of information available on women in New Orleans, she researched the subject, and her efforts culminated in a book entitled Women in New Orleans, published in 1985. With the completion of her book, Mary Gehman turned her energies to pursuing a master's degree in English, which she received in 1988 from the University of New Orleans. She has taught Freshman Composition at Loyola University and is currently teaching Composition at Delgado Community College.

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

The Mary Gehman Collection consists primarily of materials spanning the years 1976-1986. Mary Gehman's intention was to collect materials published about women during the U. N. Decade for Women, but she expanded the project to include material from both earlier and later periods. The entire collection spans the years 1970-1991 and addresses both national and international issues. Although Ms. Gehman had hoped that the materials be organized by subject, the sheer bulk of the collection dictated that it be organized by type of material, with few subject headings.

Noteworthy in the collection are the following:

- a complete collection of Distaff, the first and only women's newspaper published in

New Orleans; government documents

- government documents, including publications from the national Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs and the Citizen's Advisory council on the Status of Women
- a large collection of Times-Picayune and Village Voice articles
- almost complete collections of the Atalanta, Communiqu'elles, and Generations journals
- a wealth of material from organizations such as the National Organization for Women, the National Abortion Rights Action League, and Planned Parenthood, organizations Mary Gehman has worked with for many years.

But the primary strengths of the collection are the small press journals and the breadth of subject matter Mary Gehman covered. As it documents the progress and pitfalls of the U. N. Decade for Women, this collection should be a valuable resource for researchers of the 1970's women's movement.

Carton 8 of 14 **Journals, 1970-1990, A - Ge** **NAC-238**

The journals are arranged alphabetically, with Atalanta through Generations in this box. This series contains numerous small press journals. Of note are almost complete collections of Atalanta, the journal of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (1981-1991); Communiqu'elles, a bi-monthly Canadian journal begun in 1974 and published in Quebec (1981-1989); and Generations, the journal of the Southeast Women's Employment Coalition-- a multi-state organization working to achieve job equity and economic opportunity for women (1981-1990).

Carton 9 of 14 **Journals, 1970-1990, Gu - Z** **NAC-239**

This box contains small press journals, from The Guardian to ZPG National Reporter.

Carton 10 of 14 **Organizational Materials, 1975-1990** **NAC-240**

This material is alphabetized by organization and contains items such as letters, newsletters, and press releases. Of note are extensive materials from the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and National Organization for Women (NOW), as well as smaller organizations such as Catholics for a Free Choice and Greenham Women Against Cruise Missiles.

Carton 11 of 14 **Published Materials, 1979-1991** **NAC-241**

Newsletters:

Publications such as the Memphis State Center for Research on Women newsletter (1986-1990), the Southern Feminist Library and Archives newsletter (1983-1986), and the Telewoman Newsletter (1981-1982), a Bay Area women's newsletter.

Pamphlets:

Arranged in subject order, a few of the headings are ERA, Health Issues, Sexual Harassment.

Bibliographies:

Abortion, AIDS, Child Abuse, among others. Most are not dated.

Information Packets:

the Nairobi Conference for Women in 1985, biographical material on the singer Holly Near.

Irregular Publications: Essays published by small presses.

Catalogs:

Almost complete collections of Helaine Victoria Press (1980-1990) and Ladyslipper (1981-1991).

Carton 12 of 14 **Miscellaneous Materials, 1979-1991** **NAC-242**

Miscellaneous materials include notices, advertisements, fliers, and the like. This category also includes a manuscript written by a one-time student of Gehman, Jo Ann Canaday. The manuscript, entitled "A Study of Five Politically Active New Orleans Women's Organizations--Do they have any political 'clout'?" includes interviews with women from the following local organizations (among others): NOW, League of Women Voters, Women's Political Caucus, YWCA Rape Crisis Center, Women Against Crime. A list of the

Mary Elizabeth Gehman (1943 -) Collection

Gehman, Mary Elizabeth (1943 -)
Collection c. 1970 - 1991
14 boxes ; 14 cubic feet

Accession Number: 91-003

Location: Newcomb Archives - Newcomb College Center for Research on Women (NCCROW)

Source of Acquisition: Donation of Mary Elizabeth Gehman

Restrictions: None

Organization and Arrangement: This collection is organized into the following eleven series - a complete collection of the Distaff newspaper as well as related correspondence, Government Documents, News Clippings, Times Picayune articles, Village Voice articles, Journals, Organizational Materials, other Printed Material (i.e. newsletters and pamphlets), Miscellaneous Materials (i.e. notices and letters), a pre - organized box with material collected by both Mary Gehman and Tina Thurman - Schwartzwelder, and four posters located in an over - sized box.

Notes: This collection was received with no organizational arrangement with the exception of one box. The other boxes have not retained their original order. Instead materials were separated according to type of material and placed in the appropriate box. Due to deterioration, most of the materials were placed in acid - free folders.

Finding Aids: A complete inventory, with series descriptions, is available in the repository.

Biographical Note

Mary Elizabeth Gehman was born in 1943 and raised in a small Mennonite community in Buck's County, PA. This experience contributed greatly to her later involvement in feminism, for within the Order women's role was confined primarily to the home; women could not hold positions of leadership within the Church. Mary Gehman questioned Church teaching and the roles assigned to men and women, eventually making the painful decision at age 21 to leave the Order permanently.

After graduating from Millersville State College with a Secondary Education degree and a major in German, she taught in a junior high school for a year. In 1967, she moved to New York and became a social worker. It was in New York that she first heard of feminism and became active in the movement. She began attending the first consciousness - raising groups, but the turning point in her commitment to feminism occurred when she attended the Miss America protests of 1968 and 1969, along with Gloria Steinem, Robin Morgan, and Flo Kennedy.

Mary Gehman left New York in 1970 and came to New Orleans, where she has remained. She became involved in the women's community in New Orleans and continued her involvement with organizations such as the National Organization for Women. She received a Bachelor's degree in Journalism from Loyola University in 1972 and did a brief stint as a reporter for the Times Picayune, leaving because of the sexism she encountered. But Mary Gehman found an outlet for her journalistic talents through her involvement with the Distaff newspaper, which began as a broadside of Barbara Scott's campaign for State Representative. Mary Gehman and other women involved in the Scott campaign decided to start a women's newspaper in New Orleans, since there was no such paper anywhere in the South. Due to Mary Gehman's consistent, unflagging energy and devotion as editor of the newspaper, it stayed in publication, with the exception of July 1975 - 1979, until its demise in 1982.

After the demise of the paper, Mary Gehman became a tour guide, and was dismayed at the lack of information available on women in New Orleans. She researched the subject, and her efforts culminated in a book, Women in New Orleans, published in 1985. With the completion of her book, Mary Gehman turned her energies to pursuing a Master's degree in English, which she received in 1988 from the University of New Orleans. She taught Freshman Composition at Loyola University during 1989 - 1990, and is currently teaching Composition at Delgado Community College.

Scope and Content

The Mary Gehman Collection consists primarily of material spanning the years 1976 - 1986. Mary Gehman's intention was to collect material published about women during the U.N. Decade for Women, but she expanded the project and included material from both earlier and later periods. The entire collection spans the years 1970 - 1991. The Collection addresses both national and international issues. Though Ms. Gehman wanted the material organized by subject, the breadth of the Collection dictated that I organize by type of material, with a few subject headings.

Of note within the Collection is a complete collection of Distaff, the first and only women's newspaper published in New Orleans; Government Documents, including publications from the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs and the Citizen's Advisory Council on the Status of Women; a large collection of Times Picayune and Village Voice articles; almost complete collections of the Atalanta, Communiqu'elles, and Generations journals; and a wealth of material from organizations such as the National Organization for Women, the National Abortion Rights Action League, and Planned Parenthood, organizations Mary Gehman has been involved with for many years. But the primary strengths of the Collection are the small press journals and the breadth of subject matter Mary Gehman covered. This Collection documents the progress and pitfalls of the U.N. Decade for Women, and should be a valuable resource for researchers in Women's Studies.

Series

I. Distaff Materials

- A. Distaff newspaper collection (1973 - 1982)
- B. Related correspondence (1973 - 1987)

II. Government Documents (1970 - 1988)

III. News Clippings (1976 - 1991)

IV. Times Picayune articles (three boxes) (1976 - 1991)

V. Village Voice (two boxes) (1978 - 1991)

VI. Journals (two boxes) (1970 - 1991)

VII. Organizational Materials (1975 - 1991)

VIII. Published Material (1979 - 1991)

- A. Newsletters
- B. Pamphlets
- C. Bibliographies
- D. Information Packets
- E. Irregular Publications
- F. Catalogs

IX. Miscellaneous Materials (1979 - 1991)

- A. Notices/Advertisements
- B. Requests for Funds/Membership
- C. Letters
- D. Miscellaneous

X. Pre - organized Box (1979 - 1981, 1986)

XI. Posters

Series Description

1. Distaff Materials:

One box

A. Distaff Correspondence spans the years 1973 - 1987, though the newspaper ceased publication in 1982. The correspondence section contains materials such as letters, press releases, and submissions for publication, and is organized accordingly.

B. A complete collection of the Distaff newspaper (1973 - 1982) is contained in this box. This paper was published monthly until July 1975, and was restarted in November 1979. The paper began as a broadside for Barbara Scott's failed campaign for State Representative. Barbara Scott wanted to start a New Orleans newspaper, and her supporters, including Mary Gehman, began the monthly publication in 1983. The first and only newspaper in New Orleans dealt with pressing issues such as abortion and labor organizing.

2. Government Documents:

1970 - 1988, One box

Of note in this box are publications from the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, with material addressing issues such as education, employment, and the ERA; the U.S. Department of Labor; the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs; the Citizen's Advisory Council on the Status of Women; the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, containing information on social security and medicare. The material is arranged alphabetically by organization.

3. News Clippings :

1976 - 1990, One box

This box contains mainstream press clippings, such as Time and Parade Magazine, as well as small press journal articles, such as Radical America and The Militant. It is organized alphabetically.

4. Times Picayune articles span the years 1976 - 1991 and are contained in three boxes. The first box contains the years 1976 - 1982; the second contains 1982 - 1985; the third contains 1985 - 1991. The articles are separated into different file folders by year. For the year 1985, I sorted most of the clippings by subject. The headings I used were Abortion and Birth Control, the Arts, Commentary, Consumer Issues/Finance, Crime/Violence by/against Women, Domestic Issues, Employment/Business, Ethics, Gender Issues, Health, Images of Women, Individual Women, International Women, Literature/Book Reviews,

Miscellaneous, Politics, Sexuality, the Status of Women, and Women's Sports.

5. Village Voice:

1978 - 1984, 1985 - 1991, Two boxes

The Village Voice contains articles about diverse women's issues such as abortion, birth control, violence against women, and sexuality. But one of the paper's strengths is its book/film review section, and many of the articles contained in these boxes are reviews of feminists texts, female authors, and female directors. The articles are separated into file folders by year.

6. Journals:

1970 - 1990, Two Boxes

The journals are arranged alphabetically, with Atalanta through Generations contained in the first box, and the Guardian through ZPG National Reporter contained in the second box. This series contains numerous small press journals; of note are almost complete collections of Atalanta, the journal of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (1981 - 1991); Communiqu'elles, a bi-monthly Canadian journal begun in 1974 and published in Quebec (1981 -1989); and Generations, the journal of the Southeast Women's Employment Coalition--a multi-state organization working to achieve job equity and economic opportunity for women (1981 - 1990).

7. Organizational Materials:

1975 - 1990, One box

The material contained in this series is arranged alphabetically by organization, containing items such as letters, newsletters, and press releases. Of note are extensive materials from the National Abortion Rights Action League and National Organization for Women, as well as smaller organizations such as Catholics for a Free Choice and Greenham Women Against Cruise Missiles.

8. Published Material:

1979 - 1991, One box

A. Contained in the newsletter section are publications such as the Memphis State Center for Research on Women newsletter (1986 - 1990), the Southern Feminist Library and Archives newsletter (1983 - 1986), and the Telewoman Newsletter (1981 - 1982), a Bay Area women's newsletter.

B. The pamphlets are arranged in subject order, and a few of the headings are the ERA, Health Issues, and Sexual Harassment.

C. The collection contains several bibliographies, including ones on Abortion, AIDS, and Child Abuse, most of which are not dated.

D. The Information Packet section includes material on the Nairobi Conference for Women of 1985 and biographical material on the singer Holly Near.

E. Included in the Irregular publications section are essays published by small presses.

F. Of note in the catalogs section are almost complete collections of Helaine Victoria Press Catalog (1980 - 1990) and Ladyslipper Catalog (1981 - 1991).

9. Miscellaneous Materials:

1979 - 1991, One box

See Series

10. Pre - organized Box:

1979 - 1981, Mary Gehman

1986, Tina Thurman - Schwartzwelder

This is the first box Mary Gehman donated to the Women's Center, and she tried to arrange it in subject order. Her section consists primarily of loose Times Picayune news clippings, arranged under similar headings to the ones I used in the 1985 Times Picayune articles. Tina Thurman - Schwartzwelder originally got Mary Gehman involved in organizing her collection, and as Ms. Thurman - Schwartzwelder was doing some news clipping herself, they put some of their material together. Ms. Thurman - Schwartzwelder's articles are pasted on white paper.

11. Posters:

The four posters are located in an over - sized box in the Archives. The first poster is an announcement for a symposium sponsored by the Yale Journal of Law and Feminism, entitled "Feminism in the 90's : Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice" (1991). The second poster promotes the ERA, and was designed by Helaine Victoria Press in 1985. The third poster is an Anti - Apartheid poster, and the fourth is an Equal Employment Opportunity poster, published in 1982 by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

This series is only a sketch of the contents of the box; it does not include every item. But the series does illustrate how I will organize the collection, and it shows the range of materials contained in the collection. The Times Picayune and Village Voice articles are the only clippings that I will be organizing by subject; the others will simply be organized chronologically. I have not decided what subject headings I will use for the Village Voice articles, but I have finalized file headings for the Times Picayune. These are:

Domestic Issues (including marriage,
family, and childrearing)

Individual Women

Employment/Business

Abortion, Birth Control, and Fertility

Financial Issues

Sexuality

Health Issues

Crime/Violence by/against Women

Gender Issues

Commentary

International Women

Politics

Images of Women

Literature

Art

Status of Women

Ethics

Anne Douglas

Mary Gehman Collection

After almost six weeks of working on the Mary Gehman Collection, I have gone through seven boxes- placing the materials in separate acid-free folders based on types of material. Some of these materials include news clippings, journals, newsletters, pamphlets, and assorted letters and notices. This initial stage of the project has given me a better understanding of what the collection consists of and also suggestions for how to organize it.

My plan at this time is to group the contents together based on type of material, and to place these contents in chronological order by year. I have decided not to retain the original box contents- instead placing related materials in separate boxes. I feel that it is not necessary to retain the original order because the materials were not organized in any particular manner.

I have been organizing Box #4 in the collection in order to estimate the time needed to completely organize one box. In addition, I have made decisions regarding file headings for the collection. The major headings I have at this time are **News Clippings, Journal Clippings, Journals, Organizational Materials, Miscellaneous Pamphlets, Requests for Funds/Membership, Distaff Material, Catalogs, Notices and Advertisements, and Miscellaneous.** In addition there are materials which do not fit these categories, but which I do not wish to place in a miscellaneous file. I have not decided what to do with them yet. I am not through with this box yet, but I estimate that it will take me between 2 1/2 to 3 weeks to entirely complete one box. Organizing the Times Picayune articles has been the most time consuming aspect of this project.

Series of Box # 4

I. News Clippings

- A. Times Picayune c. 1984- 1986
- B. Village Voice c. 1984 - 1986
- C. Time c. 1984 - 1986
- D. Parade Magazine c. 1984 - 1986
- E. TV Focus c. 1984 - 1986
- F. New York Times c. 1984 - 1986

II. Journal Clippings

- A. Unitarian Universalist World Journal
- B. Dialogue
- C. Northern Neighbors

III. Journals

- A. Atalanta 1985 - 1986
- B. Communiqu'elles 1985 - 1986
- C. Generations 1985 - 1986

IV. Organizational Materials

- A. National Organization for Women
- B. National Abortion Rights Action League
- C. American Civil Liberties Union
- D. League of Women Voters
- E. Catholics for a Free Choice
- F. Center for Research on Women - Memphis State
- G. Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights
- H. Greenham Women Against Cruise Missiles
- I. Planned Parenthood
- J. 80% Majority Campaign

V. Miscellaneous Pamphlets

VI. Distaff Material

VII. Teaching Women's Studies: A Selected Bibliography

VIII. Nairobi Conference Packet

IX. Catalogs

- A. Helaine Victoria Press
- B. In Harmony

X. Notices/Advertisements

XI. Government Documents on Women in the Work Force

XII. Miscellaneous

Mary Elizabeth Gehman Collection

Carton 15 of 15

Addendum

NAB-057

This carton is located in the NAB section of the archives due to lack of space. It consists entirely of mailings and clippings. The material is divided into a series of section folders:

Education--The American Indian College Fund and Others:

Information from the American Indian College Fund and the Women's Resource and Research Center of Washington State University.

Distaff:

Contains notes, correspondence, press releases, and other non-printed material. Clippings from magazines and newspapers pertaining to women, newspaper printing privileges and statements, fliers from various women's and minority coalitions. Also contains Distaff publication schedules, story lists, and notes from Mary Gehman on prospective stories and events. There are also some small publications on women's publishing and minimum wage laws.

Employment:

Various publications and brochures on women's employment and employment rights. Material from the U.S. Department of Labor, Working Women, and the Southeast Women's Employment Coalition.

Personal Notes of Mary Gehman:

Notes made by Mary Gehman concerning stories and ideas for the Distaff; also includes correspondence with members of her staff. There are also many slips of paper with names and phone numbers on them.

Distaff Correspondence:

More article ideas, statements, and publication schedules. Originals of copies in Folder two.

Clippings--Village Voice:

Copies of articles from the Village Voice, 1981-92. All concern women's interests and issues. These clippings were not arranged by subject matter. They cover various topics, ranging from abortion to famous women.

Clippings--Times-Picayune and others:

Copies of articles from The Times-Picayune, The States-Item, Daily World, Orlando Times, and other newspapers. Articles provided ideas for Distaff stories and are concerned with women's health, fashion, finances, marital problems, and other issues. They range from the years 1980 to 1993.