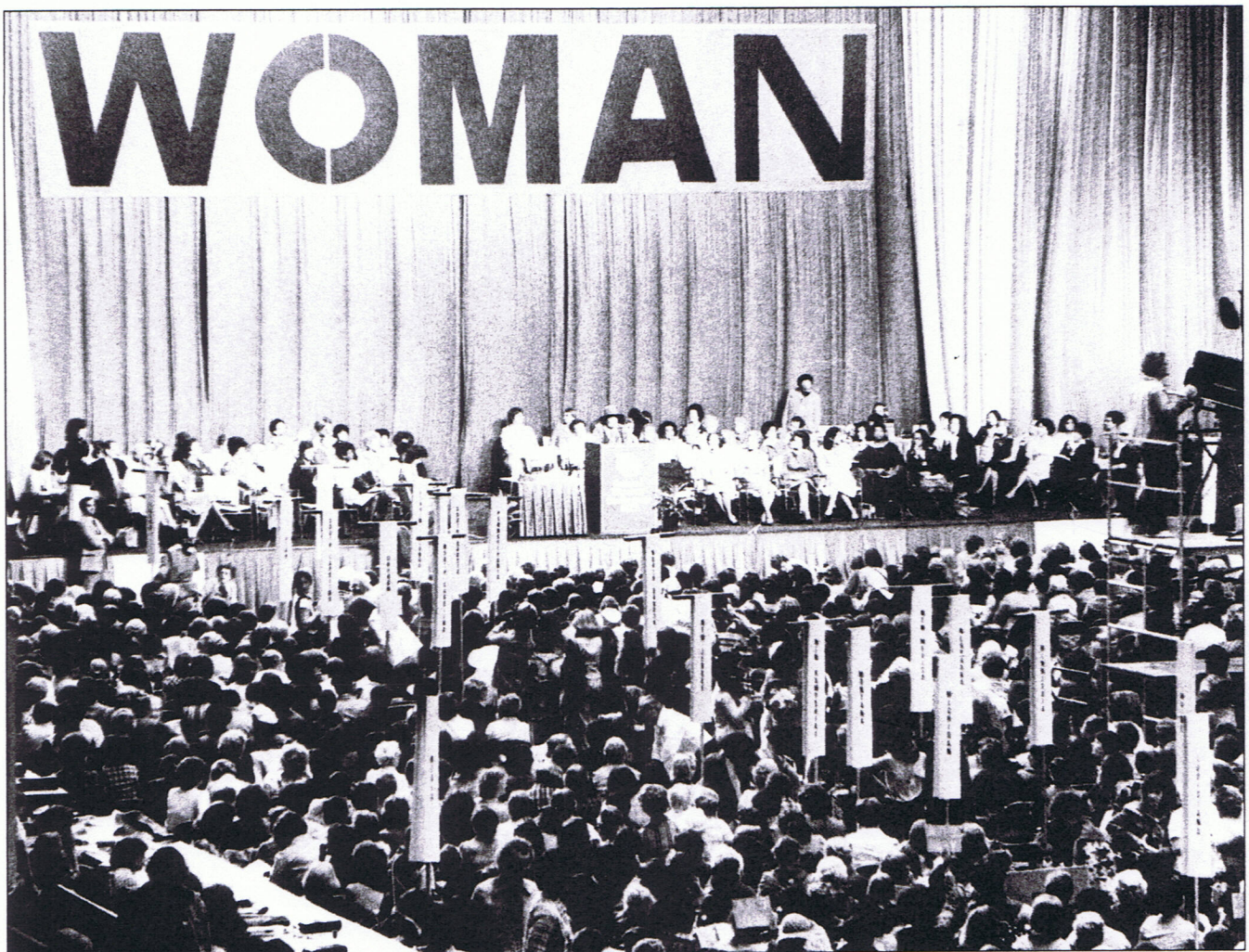


THE HOUSTON REVIEW

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UNIVERSITY *of* HOUSTON
CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY

The Series was questioned. Many wanted to know the sources for the "Texas Trailblazer Series." One critic actually described the profile as "fairy tales." How were we finding information that historians had not found? The answer was wonderful. One, we specifically searched for African American leaders, and, two, we began much of our research through oral histories. We then verified information through African American newspapers, obituaries, church and school histories, as well as traditional primary sources such as census records and land records. It has been a privilege to be a part of such trailblazing research and to be able to share this information with students. In a ten year period we published sixty-five profiles with photographs and compiled a book. *The Texas Trailblazer Series* is now on the shelves of libraries throughout Texas. By 2000, three editions had been published, incorporating the ever-growing collection of biographies. And, the research continues to date.

My role in this project would not have been possible without the trailblazers who have guided me throughout my life: Adelaide Mandler Dugan, Horrocks Dugan Smith, Elise Le'Soir Morris, Mildred Brooks, and a long list of others, including my father, C. E. Smith, who is profiled in the *Texas Trailblazer Series*. Among the many who assisted are Thekla Scott Bryant, Houston's 97-year-old living encyclopedia of history, and Bernice McBeth, who has compiled the most about the history of African American Methodists in Texas.

The men and women who blazed trails during segregation sowed the seeds for the *Texas Trailblazer Series*. The faculty at Texas Southern University educated us when Rice University forbade African Americans to attend. Carter Wesley, C. A. Dupree, Hobart Taylor, and J. H. Johnson purchased Camp Robinsonwood to give African American Girl Scouts a camping experience in Houston when we were excluded from camping at nearby Agnes Arnold. The Houston Negro Hospital (now Riverside General) delivered thousands of babies when hospitals would not admit our African American mothers. The mothers of the Jack and Jill, Inc., an organization founded to provide social enrichment activities for youth, persuaded Houston's Alley Theater to hold a special performance for the organization during segregation. The *Houston Liberator* newspaper wrote positive stories about African American civic, social, and religious activities when *The Houston Post* completely ignored our communities. The Julia C. Heiser House offered a swimming pool and other recreational activities when other recreational centers were closed to African Americans. Harie Mae White integrated Houston's school board and endured unbearable hostility when she attended her first meeting in 1958. Community activist Nellie Joyce PUNCH keeps the spirit of Worldley High School alive and helped to coordinate its 75th Anniversary Celebration in 2002.

For those who are not aware that Texas African Americans have documented our history, I want to share a few sources that are not widely known. Perhaps the most valuable for Houston is *The Red Road of Houston*, compiled in 1915 by Emmert J. Scott. It is a compilation of achievements made during the first fifty years following the end of slavery. It contains the histories of Houston's most vital African American institutions: churches, schools, and civic

associations. J. Mason Brewer, a Texas folklorist and historian, taught at Huston-Tillotson College in Austin and authored books and short stories. George R. Woodfolk, Ph.D., authored the history of Prairie View A&M University. He was Dean of the history department at the University. Several Houston women have published histories. Thekla Scott Bryant documented her memories of Houston pioneer families. Hazel Hainsworth Young, co-founder of the Houston chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha, authored a history of the sorority. Likewise, Lullie Walker Harrison wrote a history of her sorority, Zeta Phi Beta.

Trinity United Methodist Church celebrates over 150 years of history. It began as an African mission of First Methodist Church of Houston and has produced numerous souvenir booklets about its history, including trailblazers such as founding pastor, Rev. Elias Dibble. Bernice McBeth has collected the history of this and other Methodist churches. Amoth Missionary Baptist Church was founded six months after slavery ended in Texas. Pioneer pastor Rev. Jack Yates has a high school in Houston named in his honor. Both churches have historical markers on their sites. More than thirty African American churches in Houston celebrate 100-plus years, and many have documented their histories in souvenir booklets. Most of these histories are unknown because of limited printing and lack of marketing. As Ralph Ellison wrote in his classic novel, *The Invisible Man*, the role of African Americans in American society has been mostly ignored and, therefore, thought non-existent.

The trailblazers that guide me have taught me otherwise. They encouraged me to ask questions and they taught me to seek answers and to formulate opinions. My background in science taught me to formulate hypotheses. *The Texas Trailblazer Series* began with a question. How did ex-slaves survive physical and mental abuse, such as beatings, discrimination, and segregation, and who were the leaders in that struggle? We profiled sixty-five Texas leaders in the *Texas Trailblazer Series*, and we identified hundreds more. Among 254 Texas counties, there are numerous communities with a sizeable African American population that have schools named in honor of pioneer educators who taught hundreds of students. These were the trailblazers. Other trailblazers were pioneer pastors, business owners, and elected officials. The list is growing.

My motivation for researching, writing, and speaking about African American trailblazers clearly comes from community trailblazers and my ancestors. Were it not for their support and guidance during formative years, when I was openly called and treated like a nigger child in Houston, I would not have the self-confidence to undertake this research. Today I continue this work and broaden its audience in my work as archivist for the African American Studies Program at the University of Houston. In creating an archive, I preserve not only the stories of the trailblazers, but also the sources of their history, making them available for other students and scholars. The future is in mentoring young people to ask questions about their own communities so that they might continue to add to Texas history, and make it inclusive of everyone who made a contribution to the development of this great state.

The Women's Archive and Research Center at the University of Houston: A Resource from the Past for Research in the Future

by Sarah E. Fritzer

A group of university and community women combined efforts to found the Women's Archive and Research Center (WARC) as a unique resource for the city of Houston and for the University of Houston. The movement from idea to reality took several years, but the Women's Archive, supported by the Friends of Women's Studies and the Women's Studies Program of the University of Houston, is now housed in the department of Special Collections & Archives within the University of Houston Libraries. The WARC is available to students, researchers, and the general public as a resource for exploring the history of women in Houston. The story of the founding of the WARC shows how a group of women successfully created a new service in one of Houston's major universities.

The WARC story began with the inception of the Women's Studies program in the fall semester of 1991. Cynthia Freeland, a professor of Philosophy, became the first director of the Women's Studies program, which had been established "in response to vocal student demand and in recognition of broad faculty expertise." Recognizing the need to generate funding and to promote the Women's Studies program to ensure its success, Freeland and community volunteer Carey Sharr proposed forming a Friends group for the Program. Sharr had recently assumed a volunteer role at the University of Houston as the Friends Coordinator, working with various departments within the University to publicize programs and activities. A community volunteer named Houstonian, and former student of the University of Houston, Sharr would become a key supporter of the Friends of Women's Studies and the WARC.

In late 1992, Cynthia Freeland articulated the vision of the WARC by drafting a proposal for an archive and research center. The proposal outlined its vision and mission, how it would be directed, and possible models for its formation. The archive would provide a "focal point for the systematic collection of women's papers," and the research center would "provide for the active use, study, and dissemination of archival materials by visiting scholars." Together, the archive and research center would offer the community other resources, such as a lecture series, conferences, a speaker's bureau, facilitation of networking opportunities, and assistance with public histories.

The details of setting up a structure and process for the WARC would occupy the next two years. In the fall of 1993 the Board of the Friends of Women's Studies focused on the founding of the Women's Archive and Research Center as their top priority. The Board initially utilized the Banning Institute at Radcliffe as a possible model for the WARC. Cynthia Freeland had used this model in her 1992 proposal, and the Friends of Women's Studies had brought in Dr. Horrocks Tadd, Director of the Banning,



Left: Carey Sharr, Cynthia Freeland, and Horrocks Tadd, former Director of the Banning Institute. Photograph by Andrew Crawford.

consultation in early 1993. Although it was a powerful model, the Banning Institute enjoyed a heritage and resources totally different from the situation at the University of Houston. The Board investigated other research centers, based on issues such as funding, focus, structure, association with an archive, affiliation with a Women's Studies program, and importance of regional identity. Interest began to shift from the Banning model toward a "model II" research center focusing on particular areas, such as women in Texas politics, women in space, women in the professions, etc. The Lecture Series Committee of the Friends also saw this model in format as a good way to document the structure of a planned future series to the structure of the WARC.

In addition to defining its structure, the Board addressed the

issues of content and the location of the archive. It initiated research on local women's groups regarding their materials and interest in donation and began discussions with the University Libraries about potential level of commitment and available space. In addition, it created a brochure and a directory of women's organizations and began designing potential modules and identifying sources of funding. At this time, the Board members had a variety of ideas regarding their vision for the WARC, two of which ultimately formed the basis for the design of the collection. The WARC would collect oral histories, and the archive collection would reflect the diversity of the city of Houston.

After nearly two years of work by the Friends of Women's Studies and the Women's Studies program, the Board sought collaboration with the University Libraries. In February 1991, Carey Sharr initiated a meeting between Robin Downes, then Director of Libraries, and the Board. While pointing out the need for space, personnel, and staff and budget lines, Downes affirmed the willingness of the Libraries to assist in the creation of the WARC. He subsequently requested budget lines for an archivist and an archival assistant, paving the way for integration of the WARC with the University Libraries.

A meeting in October 1995 brought together the leaders who would put the WARC in place: Elizabeth Gregory, who had succeeded Cynthia Freeland as Director of Women's Studies, met with representatives from the Libraries to clarify connections between the University Archives, the University Libraries, and the WARC. The Libraries' representatives at that time were Dana Brooks, Assistant Director of Libraries, who would be named the Libraries' first Dean in 1997; Pat Bozeman, Head, Special Collections & Archives, the department that would house and administer the WARC; and Andrea Kean Hough, Special Collections Librarian, who would assume the role of University Archivist on January 1, 1996.

This meeting clarified the issues of library space responsibility for the collection, and the collecting process. Whereas earlier meetings had assumed that the UH Library would not necessarily be the long-term or permanent location for the archive portion of the WARC, by this time the Friends of Women's Studies was no longer looking at other spaces and wanted to use UH library space on condition that the material would be "accessible." The decision about responsibility for the collection and the collecting process provided for a shared process between the University Libraries, the Board of the Friends of Women's Studies, and the Women's Studies program. In consultation with the Board of the Friends and other Women's Studies constituencies, the Archivist would decide what collections would be accepted. The University Archivist would oversee the Women's Archive and, together with the University Archivist, the WARC would form a unit within the Department of Special Collections & Archives of the University of Houston Libraries. This positioned the Women's Archive within the policies and procedures of the University of Houston and the University Libraries while the Friends of Women's Studies continued to provide funding for the processing of collections.

By January 1996, the processes that formed the Women's Archive were in place and the Library was preparing to receive collections. At a meeting with the Board of the Friends of Women's Studies, Andrea Kean Hough, then University Archivist, urged the Board to develop a collection development policy and to identify organizations with which to begin working toward the acquisition of records. The Library was in the process of renaming space and hiring staff for the Women's Archive, and Hough proposed hiring history interns to assist in the processing of the collections. Hough also anticipated the development of future resources, such as a website, online finding aids, online cataloging of collections, and announcements of new collections as appropriate.

The Friends of Women's Studies developed a collection policy focused on the papers of Houston area women's organizations. The acquisition of the papers of the Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC) in June 1996 marked the beginning of the Women's Archive. Other early collections included materials from local activist Marjorie Randal relating to the 1977 International Women's Year Conference; the papers of Nikki Van Hightower, a local professional company; the papers of Nikki Van Hightower, and the records of Top Ladies of Distinction. The Marjorie Randal International Women's Year collection and the Van Hightower papers would be the first collections to be processed. In September 1996, renovation of the space for the Women's Archive was completed and over a hundred guests attended the inauguration of the new facilities on the seventh floor of the MLD, Anderson building at the University of Houston-Central Campus.

The collections now cover a wide variety of women's organizations including cultural development and social action groups, philanthropic and professional associations, and sports and garden clubs. Since 1996, almost two dozen collections have been brought in, the majority of which have been quickly processed. In addition, the WARC initiated an active oral history program that augments the papers in the archive with narratives by women active in the community and in the organizations whose papers are collected in the archive. In addition, the Women's Archive functions as an active community resource. Groups continually add to their collections, and donors use their processed collections to locate information about their own history. Local organizations consult the papers of similar groups for ideas and insights.

The archivist and author has participated in public events, such as the 1999 Women United Conference in Houston, providing best practices for women interested in maintaining their own histories or preserving the papers of their organizations. The Women's Archive also ensures visibility for Women's Studies and for the collections by displays, such as an exhibit for Table Talk, the annual fundraiser of the Friends of Women's Studies, and a semi-permanent display at the University Library.

The WARC is actively engaged in carrying out its two-fold goal: the acquisition, processing, and maintenance of records of women's organizations; and the use of these collections by researchers. With careful processing acquisitions and a growing set of collections, the Women's Archive offers an invaluable resource for scholars exploring twentieth century women's history, particularly, the history of women in Houston. Graduate students

use the collections for thesis and dissertation work, and Women's Studies courses have taken advantage of the archivist's expertise and the Women's Archive collections to introduce students to archival research. In support of its goal to encourage research, the WARC offers scholarships for students and fellowships for Women's Studies graduate students and faculty.

In the nine years since Carey Sharr and Cynthia Freeland initiated the Friends of Women's Studies and first proposed the mission and vision of the WARC, many of their ideas have come to fruition. The product of a unique collaboration between the university and the community, the WARC continues an active involvement with the community while preserving the records of Houston history for students and scholars.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cynthia Freeland, "An Overview of the Proposed Women's Archive and Research Center (WARC) at the University of Houston DRAFT, November 8, 1992."
- 2 Carey Sharr, letter to interested parties, 1992, Unprocessed Records of Friends of Women's Studies, Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.
- 3 Freeland, 1.
- 4 "New Community Outreach Board Formed," *Newspaper: A Newsletter of the Women's Studies Program of the University of Houston* (Fall 1993): 3.
- 5 Carey Sharr, generic letter, Fall 1994, Unprocessed Records of Friends of Women's Studies, Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.
- 6 Freeland, 3.
- 7 Meeting, Outreach Board WARC Committee, Informal Minutes of Meeting November 29, 1993, Unprocessed Records of Friends of Women's Studies, Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.
- 8 Community Outreach Board Committee Minutes, December 6, 1993, Unprocessed Records of Friends of Women's Studies, Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.
- 9 Informal Minutes, 1-2.
- 10 UH Women's Studies Committee, Outreach Board 1993-1994: WARC Visions, Unprocessed Records of Friends of Women's Studies, Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.
- 11 Carey Sharr, letter to Robin Downes, January 30, 1994, Unprocessed Records of Friends of Women's Studies, Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries; Robin Downes, letter to Carey Sharr, February 18, 1994, Unprocessed Records of Friends of Women's Studies, Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.
- 12 Memorandum of Agreement Regarding the Women's Archives, Archivist's Files, Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.
- 13 Talk to Women's Studies Board by Andrea Kean Hough, Archivist's Files, Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.

University of Houston Libraries Women's Archive and Research Center Archival Collections

PROCESSED

Brigitt's Place
Church Women United in Houston Records
Dahby Tucker and Lady Myers Texas Council on Family Violence Collection
Carolyn Earh Papers
Federation of Houston Professional Women
Greater Houston Women's Foundation
Hazdwitch Records
Hispanic Women in Leadership
Houston Area Women's Center: Epkenwera, Photographs, Records
HAWC Council for Abused Women/Family Violence Program Records
Houston Women's Caucus for Art
Marjorie Randal National Women's Conference Collection
River Oaks Blossom Club
Top Ladies of Distinction
Stewart Josephine Harris Papers
Van Hightower [Nikki] Papers
Women in the Visual and Literary Arts
Women's Fund for Health, Education, and Research (HER)

Women's Studies and Resource Service Records

IN PROCESS

Friends of Women's Studies

OTHER COLLECTIONS (Unprocessed)
River Oaks Business Women's Exchange Club (ROBWECC)
Women in Action

To view finding aids for many processed collections, visit the website
http://info.lib.uh.edu/sa/collections/links/ria_women.html

For more about the Women's Archive and Research Center, visit the website
<http://www.lib.uh.edu/WS/WARC.pdf> HTML