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What's So Special About Women's History; Next Steps facing Historians and Archivist Documenting Regional Women's History

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SAA 2005, New Orleans

Session: “Not Dead Yet”: Academic Trends in Women’s History and Archives

It has been suggested that women’s history and social history have achieved parity in the academy and the archives. Yet the question remains, have archivists adequately answered the call to document and contribute to history from below? Or do the documents for the study of race, class, and gender remain uncollected or, worse, hidden within our own repositories? The session will explore the role of the archive in the study of women and address specific issues concerning the documentation and study of women by region and sexual orientation.

What's So Special About Women's History? Next Steps facing Historians and Archivists Documenting Regional Women's Through Oral History Danelle Moon

Introduction:

In 1977 *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* devoted a special issue to women’s oral history. Oral Historian, Sherna Gluck openly challenged traditional historiography with her groundbreaking article “What’s So Special About Women’s History.” This pioneering effort resulted from the cross-pollination of academic and community feminist researchers interested in documenting the lives of women. For purposes of this session, I have borrowed Gluck’s title, because it captures the goals of this panel to address the state of the archives in collecting and documenting the diversity of women’s experience, and specifically the role of oral history in the archives.¹

This panel asks the question:

Have archivists answered the call to document gender, race, and class?

In this paper I will explore the role of oral history in documenting regional women’s experience in the South and West. Both regions have successfully used oral history to write women into history, and to capture the voices and experiences of women through a variety of regional oral history projects. Both historians and archivists

¹ Sherna Gluck, “What’s So Special About Women’s History,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2, no.2 (Summer 1977): 3-13; Sherna Gluck, “Women’s Oral History, The Second Decade,” *Frontiers* Vol 8, no. 1, “Special Issue: Women’s Oral History 2 (1983), 1-2. The series was republished in 2002. See Susan H. Armitage, Patricia Hart, and Karen Weathermon, *Women’s Oral History, The Frontier Reader* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

understand the importance of oral history in documenting experience, and it will become even more important in the digital age as a primary source. Therefore it is imperative that archivists, as primary stakeholders in creating or managing projects, and providing access, that we play a more active role in the academic discourse. There has been great productivity in creating oral histories, from trained oral historians, archivists, librarians, students, untrained researchers, and family members. In women's history, oral history has played a primary role in making women historically visible, and particularly women from the margins. Without oral history, the voices of working class, rural, poor, and ethnic women's history remains buried. Oral history is therefore one of the most important tools that we can use to capture regional experience.²

In order to understand regional, national, and international change, we need to have a better understanding of the significance of region and place, and how different groups influence and change regional identity. Historian, Richard Candida Smith writes that "oral history taps the voices that define personal and regional identity." By focusing on Southern and Western regional identity, I hope to demonstrate the importance of immigration in shaping community, regional and national identity, which directly impacts how historians and archivists approach oral history projects.³

In *Becoming Mexican American*, historian George Sanchez captures the essence of regional (cultural) identity and the diversity of immigrant experiences in the acculturation process and shows how the Mexican community maintained some of its cultural identity while adopting new traditions in America.⁴ The work of Sanchez and other Western and Southern scholars provides archivists with the opportunity to develop greater understanding of the importance of region and culture, and the value of preserving bottom-up history. In the first part of this paper, I will explore the meaning of regional identity and place specifically in context to Southern and Western history. These two regions have witnessed an explosion in bottom-up scholarship, which has largely been supported by oral history. Oral history and documentation projects will continue to serve

² Ellen D. Swain, "Oral History in the Archives: Its Documentary Role in the 21st Century," *American Archivist* 66 (Spring/Summer 2003), 142-149; Armitage, Susan H., Patricia Hart, Karen Weathermon, *Women's Oral History; The Frontiers Reader* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 61-65.

³ Richard Cándida Smith, "Analytic Strategies for Oral History Interviews," in *Handbook of Interview Research: Context & Methods*, ed., Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (Sage Publications, 2002).

⁴ George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American; Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 4-8.

an important role in making the invisible visible. In the past, historians used oral history as a means to fill-in the gaps, but today, oral historians are challenging this view and argue that it will become primary in the digital age.⁵

Gerda Lerner of the State of the Field

In 1999 the *Journal of Women's History*, launched a new series entitled "Women's History in the New Millennium." This series considered specific sub-fields within women's history, including topics on work, family, public & private, sexuality, labor, and globalization. In the concluding essay, Gerda Lerner in "U.S. Women's History, Past, Present, and Future," provides an interesting analysis of the state of scholarship." She reviewed 720 publications, which were printed under the "New Scholarship" section of the *Journal of American History*—150 books, 280 dissertations, 290 articles published between 1998-2000.⁶ Her survey included all listings under "Women's History," and she selected other relevant headings including Education, Gay and Lesbian, Intellectual, Cultural History, and Religion.⁷ She found a sharp generational shift in topics focused on culture, identity, and representation in contrast to the shortage of studies on women's social, political, and organizational history. At the same time, she found that the work of younger historians has "revitalized Southern and Western history, resulting in the reconstruction of "silenced voices of Native American, Asian, and Latina women." She concludes that there are many "blank spaces" periods, regions and groups that need to be documented and interpreted. She does not mention the role of oral history or the role of archivists in collecting materials, but ethnic women's history has

⁵ Ellen D. Swain, "Oral History in the Archives: Its Documentary Role in the 21st Century," *American Archivist* 66 (Spring/Summer 2003), 142-149.

⁶ Gerda Lerner, "U.S. Women's History," *Journal of Women's History*, 1-3. Cited from the web version at: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journals_of_womens_history/v016/16.4lerner01.html, 5/14/2005. Lerner had tracked the scholarship in the profession since 1969 and most recently with this study. From 1970-1975, only twenty-one books were published in Women's History. From 1975-1980, another 36 books were published mostly generated by the second wave feminism. By 1987 feminist scholarship exploded—312 dissertations focused on a wider array of topics in women's history, from labor, work, education, cultural topics, social history, religion, medicine, suffrage, modern feminism and women's organizations. At the same time, African American scholars and gay and lesbian scholars began to challenge the assumptions of "woman/women" and sexual identity. The birth of Gender History further disrupted traditional frameworks, as did post-modernism and cultural studies. Many scholars abandoned social history "to focus on representation, the media, and popular culture

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

been dependent on the oral history.⁸ As Lerner so keenly notes, there are many blanks yet to be filled-in and “...it is an enormous challenge to fill in and make the invisible visible.”⁹ With this framework in mind, I think that there is tremendous vitality in the profession, and both historians and archivists are meeting the challenges to document the voiceless and under-represented; and as Lerner rightfully notes, the revitalization of Southern and Western history are examples of this success.

Regional History and Identity

Or the

The Changing Face of Regional Identity

The movement of foreign and native groups from one region to another adds new layers to the social, political, cultural and economic landscape. Historians agree that the constant influx of new groups of people plays a central role in how we define regional identity and place, and should inform how we approach documentation projects. While there are significant differences between Southern and Western identity, both regions share similarities in the migration patterns of foreign and native-born Americans; and the entrance of new groups presents various challenges to the social, political and economic structure. The Sun Belt has become home to thousands of retirees, immigrants, and affluent Americans looking to escape the rat race. While the population in the West, and especially California, has communities representing nearly every country in the world. These population changes directly impact how we will document future communities and Archivists need to be aware of these changes in order to document regional history.

Southern Identity—Peculiar Institution?

Southern identity has been marked by slavery. From the “Peculiar Institution” to

⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁹ Ibid., 11-12; Susan Armitage speaking on the women’s oral history, makes a similar observation that there is much work to be done to fill the gaps. See Susan H. Armitage, Patricia Hart, and Karen Weathermon, *Women’s Oral History, The Frontiers Reader* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002), especially “Reflections on Women’s Oral History: An Exchange,” between Armitage and Sherna Gluck., 75-86.

Jim Crow and Civil Rights, Southern regional identity has been largely shaped by the white elite. As noted by historian Catherine Clinton the South launched its spiritual restoration after the Civil War by eulogizing the plantation legend through films like *Gone With The Wind*. Clinton believes that the myth of the belle and mammy continue to influence how we view southern women today. The selling of plantation history is alive and well today, but the growing body of Southern women's history reveals some movement away from the white/black dichotomy of Southern identity based on these gross stereotypes.¹⁰

In 2001 Converse College (South Carolina) held the symposium *Southern Women at the Millennium; A Historical Perspective*, where eight women's scholars were invited to present on different topics of southern women's history, including economics, politics, civil rights, education, agriculture, literature, and religion. (Published in 2003) The published conference papers demonstrate the profound diversity of southern women's experiences, and dramatic transformation that Southern life has taken over the course of the last century. A primary feature of this conference was to project the future of southern women over the next century. The collection of essays provides a glimpse into the diversity of southern women's experiences, while providing new paradigms for historical inquiry.¹¹

One of the recurring themes in this series relates to the flattening lines of regional identity created by economic and political globalization. Historian Jacqueline Jones presents one of the most provocative essays entitled "Spheres of Economic Activity among Southern Women in the Twentieth Century." Jones provides important insight to the challenges that will soon face scholars. She writes, "...women's economic activities have ranged widely and over many different themes." She asks an important question: How then to predict women's economic activities in the 21st century? She concludes that predicting the future is risky business, but she suggests that women's economic success

¹⁰ Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited: Women, War & The Plantation Legend* (Abbeville Press, 1995), 191-212.

¹¹ Melissa Walker, Jeanette R. Dunn, and Joe P. Dunn, Editors. *Southern Women at the Millennium; A Historical Perspective* (University of Missouri Press, 2003). The participants included: Jacqueline Jones, Sara Wilkerson-Freeman, Barbara A. Woods, Amy Thompson Candles, Melissa Walker, Anne Goodwyn Jones, Nancy A. Hardesty, and Carol K. Bleser.

will continue to be marked by location, whether rural or urban, that in the South ethnicity, race, and class will continue to shape experience and culture. Education will also continue to play a primary role in advancing economic opportunities, but women will continue to struggle to balance paid and unpaid labor. In the end, Jones argues that globalization will “...flatten historical differences by region.” And the economic lives of women “...will be shaped by two seemingly contradictory forces: a lessening of historic regional distinctiveness, on the one hand, and heightened significance of place, on the other.”¹²

[answer to vitality regional collections—place may replace regional identity—how is this different???—Las Vegas identity vs. New York, place identity with large place?]

This flattening of regional distinction will not have an immediate impact on economic differentials between rural and urban women’s standing, nor does she think that the economic disparities facing rural women will change any time soon. She succeeds in connecting the regional activities of laboring women to national and international politics, she shows how women have used labor organizations and informal organizations, like non-profits and churches to fight for economic advancement. The activities of these women represents a subset of experiences of laboring women across the country, but within the context of she calls a “...peculiar force of...racial ideologies that shaped class and gender relations.” Before 1950 Southern women disproportionately combined fieldwork and household labor to survive. By the 1960s racial classifications of women’s work receded, and in 2000 class rather than race seems to be the dividing factor, though ethnic diversity has created a new source of power to protest economic disparities. In the largest Southern cities, women have made some inroads into professional track careers, but many of the best paying position have gone to “well-educated outsiders” from the nation and world. In fact by the late 1990s, internal migration to the South was larger than any other region, bringing a whole new set of labor problems connected to global economics. ¹³

¹² Jacqueline Jones, “Spheres of Economic Activity among Southern Women in the Twentieth Century,” in *Southern Women at the Millennium; A Historical Perspective* (University of Missouri Press, 2003), 40-41.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13, 20-32

Melissa Walker's essay "The Changing Character of Farm Life," is a study of rural southern women and is an example of the importance of oral history in recording women's experience. Using oral history, she recorded the voices of rural white, black, Native American, and immigrant women in different areas of the South. Echoing the work of Jones, Walker demonstrates the dramatic shift from rural to urban life in the South. In 1900 the "average southern woman" lived in a rural area. By 1990, only 30% of southern women lived in a rural environment, suggesting a direct link to the significance of the changing national and global economic landscape. She found many similarities between Southern farmwomen's experiences to other regional areas. The post-war years brought some prosperity, but typical of agricultural history, the bust and boom cycles created by national and global economic forces, replaced small family farms with large scale agribusiness, and today few Southerners make their living from the land. In the 1980s as much as 70% of rural families lived below the poverty line. Today many of these women are trying to spread the same low wages working at Wall mart and the Indian Casinos. So, while the environment has changed, the same low wages persist, and the cycle of poverty continues.¹⁴

Concluding the session, historian Carol Bleser writes "...there will be no separate southern women's culture after 2050. There will be only one American culture with no significant differences between southern and northern women." The inter-migration of new comers to the South suggests that in time the regional identity so strongly tied to slavery and Jim Crow will recede but a new identity will take root as new groups contribute to Southern culture, and it will not be dictated by the dominance of one group over the other.¹⁵

This group of essays presents both challenges and obstacles in how we will document Southern history. The challenge is not available sources, rather the added complexity of inter-migrants or foreign immigrants to the mix, means that archivist have their work cut-out for them. This series is filled with good suggestions and sources that could be tapped, from organizational records to the more difficult task of documenting the less known

¹⁴ Melissa Walker, "The Changing Character of Farm Life," in *Southern Women at the Millennium; A Historical Perspective* (University of Missouri Press, 2003), 145. Ibid., 171-175, Jones, 32-37.

¹⁵ Carol K. Bleser, "Conclusion," in *Southern Women at the Millennium; A Historical Perspective* (University of Missouri Press, 2003),

experiences of mother and daughters working in tandem as field workers and domestic labor at home. This is where oral history projects are critical in documenting the voiceless. These women are less likely to come from literate traditions, and will not leave behind diaries, correspondence, and scrapbook characteristic of middle class and elite women. And while computer access in public libraries provides some access to web resources, poor women are the least likely to take advantage of literacy based tools.¹⁶

Southern Oral History Projects:

[Oral history center at UNC and the continued efforts of Southern programs documenting southern life. Examples include :](#)

[T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History \(LSU\)](#)

[Southern Oral History Program \(UNC\)](#)

Western Women

The recent flight to the South by inter-migrants reflects changes in the global economy, while demonstrating some of the clashes and conflicts caused by the influx of new e/immigrants to a region. The West has been working through this process since westward expansion began in the antebellum period. Immigration to California has been a fluid since before the Civil War.¹⁷ Inter-migrants and new immigrants have and continue to relocate to the state for a variety of reasons, not excluding the climate and promise for a better life. At the last OAH, California historians considered what California means as a region, ostensibly to honor retired state historian Kenneth Starr, but each reflected on what California meant to them individually and as scholars of California and Western history. Drawing from the autobiographical work of Joan Didion *Where I Was From*, each panelists described their views on regionalism and the construction of cultural and regional identity.

¹⁶ O'Sullivan, Catherine, "Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives; or, Blogs and the Blogging Bloggers Who Blog Them," *American Archivist* 68 (Spring/Summer 2005)53-65.

¹⁷ Danelle Moon, "Educational Housekeepers: Female Reformers and the California Americanization Program, 1900-1927," in *California History: A Topical Approach*, Edited by Gordon Bakken (Harlan Davidson, ILL, 2003); 109-112.

Didion's provocative writing style provides an interesting framework for evaluating the impact that national and global economics plays in forming regional identity. Unlike the majority of Californian resident, Joan Didion can trace her heritage back to the first white settlers during the gold rush era. Her identity as a Californian is tied to early state history and the rise of the white elite, and she weaves her personal narrative by looking at the past and present, concluding that California has always been in a state of constant economic and social change— and has reinvented itself decade by decade.

In one example Didion reflects on her experience eating dinner at local hotel in Gilroy. She describes her first memories there dining on short ribs and cherries with her father. She writes: "I am unaware at what point the Miliias Hotel vanished (probably about the same time Santa Clara Valley started being called Silicon Valley), but it did, and the "farm town" vanished too, Gilroy having reinvented itself as a sprawl of commuter subdivisions for San Jose and the tech industry....Discussion on how California has "changed," then, tends locally to define the more ideal California as that which existed at whatever past point the speaker first saw it....Gilroy as it was in the 1960s and Gilroy as it was fifteen years ago and Gilroy as it was when my father I ate short ribs at the Miliias Hotel are three pictures with virtually no overlap, a hologram that dematerializes as I drive through it."

Didion's essay parallels the concept of regional identity raised by Southern historians and she presents commentary on the fluidity of change on regional identity and the significance of place brought on by economics and the influx of new immigrants the West and the Sun Belt.¹⁸ It is clear to me that regional identity is shaped by many factors including location, climate, culture, ethnicity, and gender. Regional identity is both personal and communal, and each ethnic group contributes to the overall identity of that region. In the South, one cannot yet escape the black/white dichotomy that has defined

¹⁸ Joan Didion, *Where I Was From*, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2003). See Part III, and 173. Didion makes some very interesting comments on the Miliias Hotel in Gilroy, where she and her father dined on short ribs and cherries. She writes: "I am unaware at what point the Miliias Hotel vanished (probably about the same time Santa Clara Valley started being called Silicon Valley), but it did, and the "farm town" vanished too, Gilroy having reinvented itself as a sprawl of commuter subdivisions for San Jose and the tech industry....Discussion on how California has "changed," then, tends locally to define the more ideal California as that which existed at whatever past point the speaker first saw it....Gilroy as it was in the 1960s and Gilroy as it was fifteen years ago and Gilroy as it was when my father I ate short ribs at the Miliias Hotel are three pictures with virtually no overlap, a hologram that dematerializes as I drive through it." 173-174.

Southern culture, and the history of this struggle is important to preserve. In the same way, California cannot escape its racist past in scape-goating different ethnic groups, starting with Chinese Exclusion to more recently anti-Mexican immigration legislation. The history of the Silicon Valley provides is a good example of a region that has experienced tremendous change and growth since the early 20th century. Very few historians have studied this area, and yet it represents a microcosm of the movement and influence of different ethnic groups in changing regional identity across time. What once was described as the “Hearts of the Valley of Delights,” going back to its agricultural roots, it is now, despite the economic down-turn of the dot-com burst, it still holds significant economic weight as the Silicon Valley. Economics notwithstanding, the influx of, and power of different immigrant groups mixed with the native population elites has created a diverse regional identity. Historian Glenna Matthews in her recent study on *Silicon Valley, Women and the California Dream*, argues that economic success of a region is a double-edged sword for women, particularly poor women. Using oral history as primary evidence, she exposes the hardships women faced working in the canneries and electronics, and she shows some of the continuities of female poverty within the context of regional identity.¹⁹

Documenting Regional Women

Western women historians have been leaders in promoting oral history projects that document the diversity of women’s experience. The 1977 *Frontiers* groundbreaking publication on women’s oral history helped shape the field and filled an important gap in providing scholars and activists access to women’s history. The 1977 series focus on oral history gave voice to a number of oral history interviews of ordinary women, and the editors Sherna Gluck and Joan Jensen provided basic guidelines for conducting women’s oral history. (The original series has been reprinted and updated in a new volume entitled *Women’s Oral History* (2002).) It also represents the success of oral history as a primary source, and reflects one of the first steps toward recapturing the history of women. This and other oral history projects provide important documentation that did not exist in the

¹⁹ Glenna Matthews, *Silicon Valley, Women and the California Dream; Gender, Class, and Opportunity in the Twentieth Century* (Stanford University Press, 2003)-1-7.

early 1970s, and since that time oral history continues to add to the documentary evidence.²⁰

Across the United States there are oral history centers connected to academic departments and within libraries and archives. These repositories provide important access to “bottom-up” history, while also documenting the memories of important feminist leaders. For example, The Regional Oral History Office at the Bancroft Library captured the elderly voices of Alice Paul, Mabel Vernon, Jeannette Rankin, while Sherna Gluck concentrated on the voices of less well-known first wave feminists through the “Feminist Research History Project,” which was later published as *The Suffragists from Tea Parties to Prison*. More recently oral history has charted illegal abortions, grassroots organizations, the Chicana farm labor, homeless women, gay and lesbian, and international experiences of women from Palestine, Latin America, and Africa.²¹

What are Archivists Contributing to Oral History?

Archivist Ellen Swain in “Oral History in the Archives: Its Documentary Role in the Twenty-First Century,” *American Archivist* (Spring/Summer 2003) reminds us of the need to collaborate with the academic community to “document and provide access to our oral heritage in the digital age.” Through a careful literature search, she found that despite the absence of archival literature on oral history, the field has come of age. In the digital age, where traditional sources will be less common, oral history will play a critical role in documenting historical memories and representation, and will serve a greater purpose than just filling the gaps; it will become a central form of documentation.²²

In the larger context of the archival universe, oral history plays a minor role. Moreover, funding opportunities for oral history projects has all but dried up, despite the growing need to conduct oral history. The NEH has expressed no interest in oral history projects, although I understand there may be some interest in funding community history

²⁰ Susan H. Armitage, Patricia Hart, and Karen Weathermon, Editors, *Women’s Oral History* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002).ix-xii.

²¹ Sherna Berger Gluck, *From Parlor to Prison; Five American Suffragists Talk About Their Lives* (Month Review Press, New York, 1985).

²² Ellen Swain “Oral History in the Archives: Its Documentary Role in the Twenty-First Century,” *American Archivist* (Spring/Summer 2003), 139-140, 146-149.

projects that use oral history as part of the documentation strategy. Archivists need to work with oral historians to help educate the federal funding sources of the value of oral history, particularly in light of its significance as a primary source.

Despite the lack of funding, institutions across the country are re-embracing oral history projects. There are a number of women's history projects that have been on going and reflect a renewed commitment to conduct oral histories in the archives. For example, Smith College has initiated a new oral history project to document 2nd wave feminists, the Southern Oral History Collection at UNC, documented 200 grassroots feminist leaders < http://www.sohp.org/projects/davis/davis_41b.html>,

Cal State Long Beach, Virtual Oral/Aural History Archive documenting specific ethnic groups, women, local history< <http://salticid.nmc.csulb.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/OralAural.woa/wa/collection?ww=957&wh=568&pt=109&bi=1>>—

Have we succeeded in documenting women's lives?

Documenting women from the top and bottom has not always been a primary goal of historians or archivist. I took several decades before Archivist and historians recognized the value in women's history. In 1973 when the *American Archivist* published Eva Moseley article "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of Women in American," women's history was a relatively new field. Moseley (1972-1999), curator of the Schlesinger Library commented that the neglect of women as historical characters in history required extreme measures be taken in the archival community to a correct the peripheral treatment of women in history books. She writes:

"The neglect of women has not only meant little or no space given to them in historical writings, but is has also meant little or no space given to women's papers in manuscript repositories and little or often no effort to acquire these materials."²³

²³ Eva Moseley, "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of Women in America," *American Archivist* 36, number 2 (April 1973), 215-216. Moseley served as the curator of the Schlesinger Library from 1972-1999. It is important to note that the Schlesinger was founded by Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., and W.K. Jordan, then president of Radcliffe College. In 1943, the first collection was offered by Mrs. Maud Wood Park, an alumna of Radcliffe College, and an important leader in the suffrage movement. In 1967, the women's archives was renamed the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women

Moseley presented a strong case for the creation of separate women's archives, based on the total neglect of women's history, but she also stressed the need for other libraries and archives to collect in this area and to "make known their holdings on women." The Schlesinger Library and the Sophia Smith Collection set the precedent for the growth of future women's history archives. Since 1973, archives documenting the history of women has grown exponentially. As noted by Kären Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher, in "A Room of One's Own: Women's Archives in the Year 2000," in *Archival Issues* 24, no. 1 (1999), the growth of women's collections is due in large part to the success of women's studies programs and acceptance of women's history as a mainstream subject and discipline.²⁴

Challenges--Where Do we go from here?

In 2005, students of women's history might find it hard to believe, but both historians and archivist needed convincing that enough primary sources existed to warrant documenting women's history. A number of articles and unpublished guides slowly appeared, but it was not until Andrea Hinding published her survey findings *Women's History Resources* (1979) that historians and archivist really took notice. Hinding's work was significant in revealing the extent of buried collections across the United States, but more importantly forced archivist and librarians to think about how

in America; The Sophia Smith Collection formed in 1942 under the leadership of historian and feminist, Mary Beard. Eva Moseley briefly describes the formation of Smith. For a fuller examination of Beard's role in developing the Sophia Smith Collection, see Anke Voss-Hubbard, "No Documents—No History," Mary Ritter Beard and the Early History of Women's Archives," *American Archivist* 58, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 16-30.

²⁴ Kären M. Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher, "A Room of One's Own: Women's Archives in the Year 2000," *Archival Issues* 24, no. 1 (1999): 37-54 [Internet version: http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/results/results_single.jhtml?nn=77, 6/1/305, pages 1-14], 2; There are a number of other studies that pre-date Mason and Zanish-Belcher. See Eva Moseley, "Documenting the History of Women in American," *American Archivist* 36 (1973): 215-222; Suzanne Hildebrand, "Women's Collections Today," *Special Collections* 3:3-4 (1986); Anke Voss-Hubbard, "No Documents—No History": Mary Ritter Beard and the Early History of Women's Archives," *American Archivist* 58:1 (1995); Martha S. Bell, "Special Women's Collections in US Libraries," *College and Research Libraries* 20 (May 1959): 234-242; Mary Trigg, "To Work Together for Ends Larger than Self: The Feminist Struggles of Mary Beard and Doris Stevens in the 1930s," *Journal of Women's History* 7:2 (1995): 52-85; Anne Firor Scott, "Unfinished Business," *Journal of Women's History* 8:2 (1996); Valerie Browne, "Women and Leadership Archives for Women's Studies Research," *Feminist Collections* 18:3 (1997); Dianne Beattie, "An Archival User Study: Researchers in the Field of Women's History," *Archivaria* 29 (Winter 1989-1990): 35-40.

they arrange, describe, and catalog their holdings, by creating better access points to these records.²⁵ Nearly ten years later, *Women in the West: A Guide to Manuscript Sources*, was published. In the forward, historian, Lillian Schlissel writes:

This bibliography represents a major step toward bringing the writings and the lives of western women into the mainstream of historical records. From the diary to the oral history, these sources affirm the centrality of women's experiences and serve to help us re-vision western traditions.²⁶

This guide captured the essence of documenting under-represented groups, and its creation was intended to encourage multi-cultural research in western women's history and to prove that materials existed.²⁷ The amount of literature documenting multiculturalism and the interconnections of gender that soon followed, demonstrate how important women's history archival sources are from a collection development standpoint as well as promoting multicultural and gender history.²⁸

While we have clearly taken giant steps from where we were 30 years ago, The

²⁵ Ibid., 3-4. Andrea Hinding, primary editor of *Women's History Sources: A guide to archives and manuscript collections in the United States* (New York, Bowker, 1979), survey documented volumes of buried women's collection, and listed over 18,000 collections, spanning over 1000 institutions across the United States. See Mason and Zanish-Belcher for a quick summary of this study, 4. A number of earlier articles were written in library journals. See the following: Martha S. Bell, "Special Women's Collections in the United States, *College and Research Libraries* (May 1959); 235-242); Suzanne Hildebrand, "Women's Collections Today," *Special Collections*, 3, no.3-4 (1986); Valerie Browne, "Women and Leadership Archives for Women's Studies Research, *Feminist Collections*, 18, no. 3 (1997): 10-11; Dianne Beattle, "An Archival User Study: Researchers in the Field of Women's History, *Archivaria*, 29, no. 29 (Winter 1989-1990)33-50.

²⁶ Susan Armitage, Helen Bannan, Katherine G. Morrissey, and Vicki L. Ruiz, Editors *Women in the West, A Guide to Manuscript Sources* (Garland Publishing, 1991), x.

²⁷ Ibid., xiii-xiv. *Western Women* was modeled after Hinding's guide, and in their survey of archives and libraries, found similar problems identifying women of color, as result of the local and national nomenclature. For example, different institutions used different terminology to categorize ethnic groups. (i.e., Mexican, Mexican-American, Spanish, Hispanic). Recent archival directories include May Lee Tom, *Directory of Repositories Collecting Records of Women's Organizations* (Schlesinger Library, 1994) and Mason and Zanish-Belcher, "A Room of One's Own," 49-51, provides a list of institutions and urls.

²⁸ There are numerous examples of edited series and readers documenting women's history studies as well as western women's experiences. Two of best examples include: Ellen DuBois and Vicki Ruiz, Editors, *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader In U.S. Women's History* (Routledge, 200_?); Linda Kerber and Jane De Hart, Editors, *Women's American Refocusing the Past* (Oxford University Press, 200_?); and most recently Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, Editors *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents* (Bedford/St. Martin Press, 2005).

we are just beginning to tap the experiences of the poor, working class, and people of color. Oral history combined with the collection of other sources has helped shape the success of the field.

Where Do We Go From Here?

It is clear that regional identity informs how people relate their personal experiences through oral history. Archivists have an opportunity to help define and shape historical understanding of regional identity by conducting and managing regional oral history projects. If the prediction that oral history will become more dominant as a primary source is correct, then we need to recognize that we play a significant role in making oral histories accessible on paper and in digital format. Archivists need to include oral history as a critical function. We also need to collaborate with other disciplines to conduct and manage oral history projects, to promote new funding sources, and to create innovative ways to display audio and video clips through the Internet and other resource databases. We also need to be aware of the historiography of the fields we represent, we need to be part of the shifting changes in oral history methodology, and we are in a position to offer leadership in the preservation of electronic media.

This is not to suggest that archivists aren't engaged with oral history, but we need to do a better job, than the archival literature of the last 10 years suggests. There are a number of success stories. The Cal State Long Beach, Virtual Oral/Aural History Archive documenting specific ethnic groups, women, local history is a good example of using sound, video, photography, and transcription in one database. The Alexander Street Press Oral History database is another example in providing access to thousands of oral history transcripts, audio, and images, to its subscribers. The Press actively works with archivists, librarians, and scholars to develop new products and document programs. For example, the "Women and Social Movements" has put out a call for projects that document 2nd Wave, and there are a number of projects that archivists could contribute.

The first challenge is becoming part of the discourse. The second challenge is to bridge the communication gap with other disciplines, and to make funding sources aware of the significance of oral history for the future. Third, we need to make contact with individual women and their communities, building their trust, and convincing them that

they have something to contribute.²⁹
