

Shorter Features

MARK S. STEINITZ, *Editor*

The purpose of this occasional "Shorter Features" department is to provide a forum for those topics that may not require full-length article treatment but are related to the management and use of archives. To be selected for this section of the journal, papers must be between 500 and 1,000 words in length and without footnotes. Members of the Society and others knowledgeable in the fields of archives are encouraged to submit such papers for consideration. Papers should be addressed to Mark S. Steinitz, Department Editor, *The American Archivist*, National Archives Building, Washington, DC 20408.

The Papers of International Women's Year, 1977

ANNE R. KENNEY

IN NOVEMBER 1977 THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE convened in Houston, Texas. For the first time in the history of the United States, the federal government sponsored and paid for a national meeting of discontented citizens in order to determine their grievances. The origins of the Houston Conference can be traced to 1975 when the United Nations celebrated International Women's Year (IWY) and declared 1975-1985 the UN Decade for Women. Prompted by the UN's actions, President Gerald R. Ford issued Executive Order 11832 on 9 January 1975 establishing a National Commission on the Observance

of International Women's Year. Also in January 1975, Congress authorized the national Commission to organize and convene a national women's conference and allocated five million dollars to the project. The lawmakers requested that the conference identify the barriers to women's full equality, make recommendations to eradicate those barriers, and set a timetable for the implementation of the proposals. To prepare for the Houston Conference, the national commission appointed coordinating committees in each state and territory. These committees convened state meetings to elect delegates to the Houston gathering and pass resolutions to be discussed there.

The Houston Conference and the many related activities of IWY 1977 in-

volved millions of women in all states and territories. Unprecedented and costly, IWY 1977 thrust the Equal Rights Amendment to the forefront of public attention and indicated to many citizens that the federal government was beginning to accept the importance of the women's movement. IWY 1977 offered archivists a major opportunity to collect documentation on events of great significance to American and women's history.

What has happened to the records of IWY 1977? The National Archives has accessioned most of the records of the national commission. Some of the current records are housed in the Department of Labor with the National Advisory Committee for Women, and eventually will be offered to the National Archives. In the fall of 1978, approximately 240 hours of taped interviews gathered by a team of historians at the Houston Conference were added to the National Archives collection. The Women's History Collection, Division of Political History, Smithsonian Institution, has collected artifacts, posters, tapes, handouts, and reports from the national conference and from many of the IWY state meetings.

Collecting has been less systematic on the state level. In April 1978, the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection (WHMC), University of Missouri—St. Louis, sent a questionnaire to all state and territory coordinating chairs asking if anyone had collected

and maintained their IWY papers. By April 1979 fifty-one of the fifty-four coordinating chairs responded to the survey.* In twenty-seven states, the IWY papers have been or soon will be sent to suitable repositories. These papers are available to researchers in sixteen states: Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah. Eleven of the coordinating chairs indicated that a repository has been named and that the papers are being or soon will be deposited: Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. In the District of Columbia and six states, the Commission on the Status of Women maintains the IWY papers: Arizona, Hawaii, Maryland, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Vermont. Four states are currently searching for suitable repositories: California, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.** No provision has been made for IWY papers in ten states and a commonwealth: Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Virginia, and Puerto Rico. This means that at least fifteen collections of IWY papers remain in private hands. American Samoa, North Dakota, and the Virgin Islands did not respond to the questionnaire. According to Dan Ryland, curator of the Orin G. Libby

* A copy of the survey results is available from the author. Please send \$1 to cover copying and mailing charges to: Anne R. Kenney, Western Historical Manuscripts, University of Missouri—St. Louis, 8001 Natural Bridge, St. Louis, MO 63121.

** Archivists interested in the California records should contact: Suzanne Paizis, PO Box 943, Aptos, CA 95003. Archivists interested in the Louisiana records should contact: Shirley Marvin, % ACTION, 1 American Place, Baton Rouge, LA 70825. For New Jersey, contact: Clara Allen, 301 Manhattan Avenue, Union City, NJ 07087. For Pennsylvania, contact: Mary Hughes Burns, RD #2 Box 141, New Cumberland, PA 17070.

Manuscript Collection at the University of North Dakota, none of the leading women associated with IWY in North Dakota are still living there. Unfortunately, on 2 November 1977, fire destroyed the Arkansas IWY papers, and as of June 1978, the Washington State papers were still involved in litigation.

Archivists in some states have worked diligently to add to the IWY papers and to make them available to researchers. The WHMC, University of Missouri—St. Louis, houses the papers of Missouri IWY 1977. Because the Missouri Coordinating Committee and the elected delegation split over the issues of abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment, WHMC had to convince both sides to share their papers. Taped interviews with key participants document the division between the two groups. The Women's Records Project of Georgia is also supervising interviews with members of the elected Georgia delegation. These interviews will supplement the IWY papers deposited with the Georgia State Archives. In Illinois, the coordinating committee not only deposited its papers with the Manuscript Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, but also allotted five hundred dollars of its funds to publish a summary of those papers. Colorado hired a librarian to sort through the IWY materials

and preserve and accession all important documents. In Nebraska and Oregon, the WHMC survey itself resulted in efforts to preserve the IWY papers.

According to the WHMC survey, the fate of twenty-six collections of IWY papers remains unclear. The records could be discarded or destroyed at any time, as the case of the Arkansas IWY papers clearly illustrates. For the time being, IWY papers maintained in state commissions on the status of women are safe, but state commissions are not permanent repositories. Even in states where official repositories have been named, not all records have been collected. In six of those states the IWY collections contain the papers of the coordinating committees but not those of the elected delegation. In its survey, WHMC did not contact the delegation chairs, but it appears that many still have their papers and may be willing to deposit the files with the IWY collections.

The records of IWY 1977 represent an important source in the history of women and of the United States. Archivists should take a leading role in insuring their preservation.

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