

Pease Award

“No Documents—No History”: Mary Ritter Beard and the Early History of Women’s Archives

ANKE VOSS-HUBBARD

Abstract: The 1930s marked an important moment in the history of the national preservation effort in the United States. While the establishment of the National Archives ensured the preservation of the public record, a quest to salvage the record of women’s role in civilization was just beginning. Historian Mary Ritter Beard made a commitment to the promotion of women’s archives throughout the next decades. After she failed to establish a World Center for Women’s Archives at the dawn of the Second World War, Beard sought her dream in institutions of higher learning, inspiring many colleges and universities to collect source material by and about women. Smith College made the greatest commitment to support a women’s archives on its campus. Beginning in the early 1940s, Mary Beard nurtured a close relationship with an ardent supporter of such an archives at Smith College, Margaret Storrs Grierson, the collection’s director from 1942 through 1965. The tireless effort of these two women provided the foundation for what has evolved into one of the most widely recognized woman’s collections in the United States.

About the author: Anke Voss-Hubbard wrote this essay while obtaining her M.L.S. in Archival Administration at the School of Information Science and Policy, University at Albany—State University of New York. She also holds a B.A. and an M.A. in American history from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. She is currently the project archivist at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, where she is processing the Hugh Moore Dixie Cup Company Collection and the Robert and Helen Meyner Papers. The author expresses her gratitude to Philip Eppard, Amy Hague, Margery Sly, and Mark Voss-Hubbard for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

*Without knowledge of women in history
as actual history, dead women are
sheer ghosts to living women—
and to men.*¹

—Mary Ritter Beard

THROUGHOUT HER CAREER, historian Mary Ritter Beard (1876–1958) called on archivists, educators, and historians to preserve, teach, and examine the contributions of women in building our civilization. According to historian Nancy F. Cott, Beard believed that women had always been “co-makers of civilization side by side with men” and that “documenting their past shared leadership would help to cement it into contemporary reality.”² Beard’s unflagging commitment to these goals eventually inspired Margaret Storrs Grierson, the founding archivist of the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, to rally the administration and the alumnae of this women’s college to support a collection of primary source material in women’s history. The story of Beard’s involvement in founding this collection illuminates her lasting contribution to the study of women and her important place in the development of women’s archives in America.

Beard, of course, was not the only historian to recognize the value of primary source material to historical research and the urgency of preserving those records. Beginning in the late 1800s, historian J. Franklin Jameson led the campaign for a national archives from his position at the American Historical Association (AHA) and the Department of Historical Research at the Carnegie Institute. Jameson and others spent many years seeking support for an archives to preserve federal government

records. Although they had had some presidential support in the past, Jameson and his assistants watched numerous legislative efforts to establish a national archives fail in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Finally a bill passed both houses of Congress, and in May 1926 President Calvin Coolidge signed a bill that authorized funding for an archives building; it took Congress almost another decade, however, to establish a program with “broad authority to preserve and care for the archives of the federal government.”³

With the passage of the National Archives Act of 1934, United States Congress established an agency to direct a national preservation effort. During the 1930s and 1940s, repositories dramatically increased their efforts to collect unpublished source material. The growth of special collections was especially visible at numerous academic libraries. According to William L. Joyce, “[a] research became a primary university objective[,] . . . scholarship was institutionalized and professionalized.”⁴ To Beard’s dismay, however, the efforts of libraries to collect primary sources rarely included material related to women’s history.

The Beginning of a Quest for Women’s Archives

Just as Jameson’s goal appeared to have been achieved, Mary Beard’s quest to es-

¹“The Historical Approach to Learning About Women,” speech given at Radcliffe College, 22 May 1944, Mary Ritter Beard Papers (A-9), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass.

²Nancy F. Cott, ed., *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 21.

³Donald R. McCoy, “The Struggle to Establish a National Archives in the United States,” in *Guardian of Heritage: Essays on the History of the National Archives*, edited by Timothy Walch (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1985), 15. See also Victor Gondos, Jr. *Franklin Jameson and the Birth of the National Archives, 1906–1926* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), and James O’Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts, Archival Fundamentals Series* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990).

⁴William L. Joyce, “The Evolution of the Concept of Special Collections in American Research Libraries,” *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship* 3 (Spring 1988): 23, 25.

establish a women's archives began. In 1935, Beard initiated plans to establish a center for the preservation and study of primary source material about women. Suzanne Hildenbrand has pointed out that Beard's achievements "encouraged many individuals and institutions to preserve materials [by and about women] that might otherwise have been lost."⁵ Beard's work on behalf of women's archives was part of a broad movement to establish women's collections in the decades before and after the Second World War. Her idea for a world center was one of the earliest such efforts.

By the early 1930s, Beard had made clear her particular interest in women's history. Mary Beard and her husband, historian Charles Beard, had written several (now well-known) history textbooks, including *American Citizenship* (1914) and *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927). The true nature of the Beards' partnership seems destined to remain a mystery because none of their correspondence with each other survives. What is clear, however, is that Mary Beard's role in these collaborative works was barely acknowledged by her contemporaries. Her scholarly reputation rested instead on her voluminous work on the history of women, most notably her magnum opus *Woman as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities*.⁶

Beard continued to publish articles and books on women's history, even as she devoted considerable attention and energy to promoting women's archives and a university curriculum that would use primary sources to teach women about their past. Since both archivists and historians had in the past considered material on women to be historically insignificant, the curator of the women's collection at Radcliffe College was not surprised that they "did not immediately or happily begin to record new ideas and activities of women." But women in the archival and historical profession were instrumental in calling for a new recognition of women's archives.⁷

Mary Beard's interest in preserving sources on women's history was ignited by a disagreement with some basic premises of the women's movement in the early twentieth century. Beard sparked controversy in the suffrage movement in the 1930s when she rejected the idea women had been subjugated throughout history and called for a reexamination of documentary evidence to prove her thesis.

Beard believed women had always been partners with men in the making of history. She explained in an address that when "we trace the lives and labors of women up through the countless centuries, we find women always playing a realistic and dy-

⁵Suzanne Hildenbrand, "Women's Collections Today," *Special Collections* 3 (Spring/Summer 1986): 2; Hildenbrand traces the growth of these collections to early twentieth-century feminists who sought to preserve the documentary record of their movement.

⁶See Cott (ed.), *A Woman Making History*, 4-19; and Beard and Beard, *American Citizenship* (New York: Macmillan, 1914); *The Rise of American Civilization*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1927). Their other collaborative efforts include *America in Midpassage*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1939); *The American Spirit: A Study of the Idea of Civilization in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1942); *A Basic History of the United States* (New York: Doubleday, 1944); A selected number of Mary Beard's publications include *On Understanding Women* (New York: Longmans, Green, and a book of essays she

edited, 1931); *America Through Women's Eyes* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); and, of course, *Woman as Force in History* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

⁷Eva Moseley, "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of Women in America," *American Archivist* 36 (April 1973): 216. See also in that issue, Miriam Crawford, "Women in Archives: A Program for Action," 223-32; Mabel Deutrich, "Women in Archives: Ms. Versus Mr. Archivist," 171-81; Elsie Freeman Freivogel, "Women in Archives: The Status of Women in the Academic Professions," 182-202; and Joanna Schneider Zangrando, "Women in Archives: An Historian's View on the Liberation of Clio," 203-24. See also Michele F. Pacifico, "Founding Mothers: Women in the Society of American Archivists, 1936-1972," *American Archivist* 50 (1987): 370-89.

namic function, or role, in society."⁸ In a fundamental challenge to feminist thought of that time, she argued that women and men shared equally wherever "operations are carried on efficiently for the care and protection of life, or where this fundamental cultural responsibility is discarded in the pursuit of self-interest."⁹ As Beard saw it, women were equally responsible for defining the values of the society.

This formulation, according to historian Barbara Turoff, led to Beard's belief that "only when women learned of their historical significance would they regain self-confidence."¹⁰ Without that knowledge, "modern women have little chance to fulfill their potential."¹¹ Although she praised Arthur Schlesinger's 1922 appeal for historians to consider women's contributions to history, she had little regard for historians who focused on the contemporary battle for women's suffrage while ignoring Schlesinger's plea to integrate women into history. In Beard's view, most scholarship continued to approach women's history from the "conventional view of women as negligible or nothing or helplessly subject to men."¹²

Although her rejection of the mainstream feminist thought remained controversial, Beard's call to widen the field of historical inquiry inspired many.¹³ Beard

realized that historians needed to examine more documentary evidence before they could examine and incorporate women's contributions to civilization into books and curricula. According to Nancy Cott, Beard believed that libraries and archives contained the materials that would illustrate women's integral role. In Beard's aim to "widen the frames of history to the women as they were in past actuality," Cott argues, "documents were her eyepiece, . . . [for] only on documents could a new vision rest." In a great irony, however, Beard herself never viewed her own papers as a source for the study of women.¹⁴

The World Center for Women's Archives

Beard's quest to collect and examine the documentary evidence of women began in earnest in 1935, when Hungarian-born pacifist-feminist Rosika Schwimmer approached her with the idea of establishing the World Center for Women's Archives (WCWA). Schwimmer was primarily concerned that "the facts of women's struggle and achievement" to bring peace to the world be preserved, an idea illustrated in her statement on "A Feminist-Pacifist Archive." Although Schwimmer's goal was limited to documenting women's role in the peace movement, Beard's was wider.

⁸"Woman—the Pioneer," a radio broadcast in 1939, jointly sponsored by Columbia Broadcasting Systems and the Women's National Radio Committee, in *Mary Ritter Beard: A Source Book*, edited by Ann J. Lane (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 193.

⁹"Introduction," *America Through Women's Eyes*, 5.

¹⁰Barbara K. Turoff, *Mary Beard as Force in History* (Dayton, Ohio: Wright State University, 1979), 32.

¹¹Turoff, *Mary Beard as Force in History*, 48.

¹²Mary Ritter Beard, *Woman As Force in History* (New York: 1946; reprint ed., New York: Persea Books, 1987), 59.

¹³One of the earliest discussions appears in Alma Lutz, "Women's History," *Journal of the American Association of University Women* 40 (Fall 1946): 6–

8. For other selected studies, see Gerda Lerner, "New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History," *Journal of Social History* 3 (Fall 1969): 53–62; and "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 1975): 5–14; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman and the New History," *Feminist Studies*, 3 (Fall 1975): 185–98.

¹⁴Beard, *A Woman Making History*, 47–48; a scholar once asked to examine Beard's correspondence with Alice Paul of the Woman's Party. Beard replied that although there must have been some important documents among them, she had not kept most of her correspondence, adding, "It has not been concern for my own archives which has thrust me into the big archives business." Mary Beard to Mary Philbrook, 17 November [1936], in Beard, *A Woman Making History*, 164.

From the outset, she believed the WCWA should expand to collect material about women's various activities, functioning as both an archives and an education center for the study of women. As Beard stated in a letter to prospective sponsors in 1935: "[W]e want more than shelves filled with records. It is our idea to make this center a vital educational plant in which the culture represented by the archives will receive the attention at present given in 'seats of higher learning' to the culture of men alone."¹⁵

The WCWA had its first organizational board meeting in New York on 15 October 1935. In addition to appointing a board of directors as the main decision-making body, attendees of the inaugural meeting voted to invite well-known women sponsors to serve in an advisory capacity. From the beginning the WCWA was torn by internal strife over the center's mission and focus. As Schwimmer and others considered a collaboration with the New York Public Library, the Library of Congress, or some other institution, Beard voiced strong opposition successfully arguing that such a union would undermine the WCWA's organizational independence and "again take women off the record." Beard later expressed these sentiments in a letter to Sue Bailey Thurman, a member of the "Negro Women's Archives Committee" of the WCWA, which was calling for a separate black women's archives: "Many women and men deny the validity of a separate archive for women. I maintain that only by dramatizing women can women be recognized as equally important with men."¹⁶

Beard gathered numerous sponsors, "women of the kind who would really push [WCWA] along to realization," and their involvement again altered the immediate goals of the organization. Women friends such as Carrie Chapman Catt, Jane Addams, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter Harriet Stanton Blatch offered valuable support for an archives that would preserve women's history. The scope of Beard's project broadened, reflecting the wide array of backgrounds and occupations of the women lending their assistance. Much to the distress of Rosika Schwimmer, Beard's expansive vision of the WCWA's mission no longer was that of a center focusing solely on women in peace movements.¹⁷ In 1936, Schwimmer resigned from the center's board of directors in frustration. Schwimmer's dream for a collection devoted to her and other women's role in the struggle for peace would be realized, however, in 1942, at the New York Public Library.¹⁸

The WCWA finally gathered an operational fund, with endorsements from such prominent women as Eleanor Roosevelt and Frances Perkins and support from Fannie Hurst, Inez Haynes Irwin, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Alice Paul. It was officially launched on 15 December 1937, at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City. A pamphlet, bearing the Center's motto, "No documents, No history," which had been coined by French historian Fustel de Coulanges, also stated the WCWA's purpose:

To make a systematic search for undeposited source materials dealing with women's lives and activities, in-

¹⁵Ann Kimbell Relph, "The World Center for Women's Archives, 1935-1940," *Signs* 4 (Spring 1979): 601, 599.

¹⁶Mary Beard to Rosika Schwimmer, 14 February 1936, in *A Woman Making History*, 148; Mary Beard to Sue Bailey Thurman, 25 March 1940, in *A Woman Making History*, 198.

¹⁷Mary Beard to Rosika Schwimmer, 12 May 1936, in *A Woman Making History*, 151; *A Woman Making History*, 145.

¹⁸Suzanne Hildenbrand and E. Wynner, "Women for Peace: The Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection of the New York Public Library," *Special Collections* 3 (Spring/Summer 1986): 37-42.

terests and ideas, as members of society everywhere. . . . To reproduce important materials, already deposited elsewhere, by means of microfilm and other modern processes. . . . To encourage recognition of women as co-makers of history.¹⁹

Despite wide publicity and initial support from prominent individuals, the WCWA never received the financial support it needed to meet its far-reaching goals. Disagreements among its leadership about racial issues furthered weakened the WCWA. Mary Beard had asked Mary McLeod Bethune, founder and president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), for her organization's assistance in promoting African-American women's history. In 1938 Bethune was invited to chair the Negro Women's Archives Committee because of her advocacy of African-American women's history dating back to the mid-1920s.²⁰ Although she declined, Bethune and the NCNW worked with the WCWA the following year. African-American women soon concluded, however, that the WCWA's commitment to promoting their efforts was tentative at best. No African-American women ever served on the board of directors, only two were asked to become sponsors, and expenditures for their committee's fieldwork was minimal.²¹

Frustrated both by a lack of solidarity among the members about these and other issues and by her inability to solve the project's financial woes, Mary Beard finally resigned from the board of the WCWA. In

June 1940, in a letter to the members of the board of directors, she wrote, "Unless strong new blood can be transfused into our movement's management, neither my continuous service nor any other service, old or new, will carry us further toward our goal. . . . I will not go on soliciting archives when there is no real push for money."²² The center's demise in 1940, shortly after Beard's resignation, was blamed on the outbreak of the Second World War and the inability of any organization not involved in the war effort to raise funds. In private, however, Beard expressed a different view: "I don't like to hide behind the idea that we are a casualty of war because I think we are hiding our own inefficiency."²³

Although unable to build a permanent future for itself, the WCWA had nevertheless, during its five years of existence, publicized Beard's ideas for the preservation of women's history. The center had received numerous pledges from women, and its preliminary work in soliciting women to donate or deposit their papers in an archives center later proved to be invaluable. Moreover, through the efforts of numerous state volunteers, the center had identified historical records about women in private hands, historical societies, universities, and other archives. Among many other activities, it had promoted exhibits of women's collections at the Library of Congress and the National Archives. From its offices in Washington and New York, the center compiled and distributed lists of secondary sources essential to the study of women, served as a clearing house for information about women at other institutions, and furnished information for a series of radio

¹⁹World Center for Women's Archives brochure, International Organization Records, Sophia Smith Collection (SSC), Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

²⁰Marjorie White to Mary McLeod Bethune, 28 November 1938, Mary Beard Papers (SCH).

²¹Betty Collier-Thomas "Towards Black Feminism: The Creation of the Bethune Museum Archives," *Special Collections* 3 (Spring/Summer 1986): 43–66.

²²Mary Beard to the members of the Board of the World Center for Women's Archives, 26 June 1940, in Beard, *A Woman Making History*, 211–12; Mary Beard to Miriam Holden, 15 August 1940, in Beard, *A Woman Making History*, 216.

²³Mary Beard to Miriam Holden, 10 October 1940, in Beard, *A Woman Making History*, 220.

talks on women in American society. Beard also convinced Ellen Woodward, an officer of the Federal Works Project's Historical Records Survey, "to instruct the field workers . . . to make a note of women's records when they found them. The note was to take the form of a 'WH' in the margin." Although Woodward gave the instructions and the reporting took place, Beard recalled that Woodward's superiors "were exceedingly cross and said it had no place in the reports."²⁴

In part because of Mary Beard's early work with the WCWA, several colleges and universities, most notably Radcliffe College and Smith College, began collecting source material for the study of women's history.²⁵ After these collections took shape in the early 1940s, a number of other institutions throughout the country launched additional projects in an effort to document, preserve, and provide better access to sources on women's history.²⁶ Beard

gained recognition among librarians and college presidents such as Wilbur Jordan at Radcliffe College and Herbert Davis at Smith. Even before the closing of the WCWA, Beard had contacted several institutions of higher learning, "attempting to affect their curricula as well as [their] collecting policies," Cott notes. Margaret Grierson, archivist of the women's collection at Smith College from the early 1940s through the mid-1960s, also recalled that Smith "was but one of many institutions where she sowed the seed."²⁷

Evidence of Beard's involvement with numerous educational institutions can be seen in correspondence in the Sophia Smith Collection and in the records of the WCWA at the Schlesinger Library. Writing to one of her supporters of the World Center, Beard reported that the librarians at Syracuse were following her advice to acquire more books and manuscripts "for this advancing education . . . so everyone associated with WCWA . . . may feel that social ideas are not all being destroyed by the sweep of war." Beard not only gave

²⁴"Brief Report of the WCWA," 13 November 1939, Mary Beard Papers, SCH; Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 22 June 1940, Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

²⁵For a brief history of these collections and their holdings see Patricia M. King, "Forty Years of Collecting on Women: The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America," *Radcliffe Special Collections* 3 (Spring/Summer 1986): 75-100; Mary Elizabeth Murdock, "Exploring Women's Lives: Historical and Contemporary Resources in the College Archives and the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College," *Radcliffe Special Collections* 3 (Spring/Summer 1986): 67-74. For a discussion of special reference issues in a women's archives see Anne Engelhart, "Remembering the Women: Manuscript Reference at the Schlesinger Library," *Reference Librarian* 13 (Fall 1985): 11-22.

²⁶For studies about new sources of women's history, see Martha S. Bell, "Special Women's Collections in United States Libraries," *College and Research Libraries* 20 (May 1959): 235-42; Sandra L. Chaff, "Archives and Special Collections on Women in Medicine at the Medical College of Pennsylvania," *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 66 (January 1978): 55-57; R. McQuaide, "A Well-Kept Secret: The Religious Archive as a Reference Source," *Reference Librarian* 13 (Fall 1985): 137-48; Eva S. Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" *American Archivist* 43 (Spring

1980): 180-90; Eva S. Moseley, "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of Women in America," *American Archivist* 36 (April 1973): 215-22; Mary J. Oates, "Religious Archives Undo Stereotypes about the Role of Sisters," *Catholic Library World* 63 (1991): 47-52; Sarah Pritchard, "Library of Congress Resources for the Study of Women," *Special Collections* 3 (Spring/Summer 1986): 13-36. For selected projects attempting to preserve women's history, see Ronald J. Chepsiuk and Ann Y. Evans, "Videotaping [Women's] History: The Winthrop College Archives' Experience," *American Archivist* 48 (Winter 1985): 65-68; Ruth Edmonds Hill, "The Black Women Oral History Project," *Behavioral and Social Sciences Librarian* 4 (Summer 1985): 3-14; "NOW Oral History Project at Radcliffe," *Library Journal*, 115 (March 1990): 16; Diane Pederson, "The Photographic Record of the Canadian YWCA, 1890-1930: A Visual Source for Women's History," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 10-35; and "Women's History: A Heritage of Strength and Vision," *Ohio Libraries* 2 (January/February 1989): 7.

²⁷Beard, *A Woman Making History*, 118; Handwritten draft from Margaret Grierson to William Beard, (1959), SSC Donor Files, Smith College Archives (SCA), Northampton, Massachusetts.

her advice to these institutions, but distributed some important source material for the study of women.²⁸

When the WCWA project folded in late 1940, many of the donated collections fell into Beard's keeping. She returned some of the books and manuscripts at the donors' request, but she distributed others to Radcliffe College, the Institute of Women's Professional Relations, Connecticut College, Purdue University, Hunter College, Columbia's Teachers College, Barnard College, and Smith College. Despite the WCWA's demise, Beard's careful distribution of the salvaged records promoted, in the opinion of one biographer, "a concern for the preservation of women's records among educators who then attempted similar projects."²⁹ Although Beard had advised several college librarians on their collections' strength in women's history, her most significant involvement was with the women's archives at Radcliffe and Smith. Beard's mission for the WCWA had been to support the education of women in their history. Her enthusiasm for collections at these two institutions was grounded in her belief that, by placing an archives at a women's college, this goal could be achieved.³⁰

Mary Beard and Radcliffe

Beard's involvement with Radcliffe College began when it established a Woman's

Rights Collection following the donation in 1943 of the papers of alumna Maud Wood Park, a noted suffragist. Newly appointed college president Wilbur K. Jordan contacted Mary Beard for advice on improving the collection. Beard responded by expressing hope for Radcliffe's success in establishing a women's archives; she subsequently wrote numerous letters advising Jordan on how to establish such a collection. From the events that followed, however, one may conclude that despite initial enthusiasm, Radcliffe was not fully committed to the project Beard envisioned. In a letter to Margaret Grierson, Beard recalled the Radcliffe's librarian's question about the scope of the intended collection. Somewhat irritated, Beard replied, "[W]here women began their distinctly human work." According to Beard the male librarian was silent for a moment, then asked "How many books do you think we ought to have—5000? Beard replied "[T]hat would make a good start."³¹

In Beard's view, the collection at Radcliffe was growing very slowly. She noted in 1945 that "President Jordan . . . seems to falter, for reasons I do not understand, in the ardent and yet practical promotion of a great women's archive at Radcliffe." What must certainly have added to Beard's frustration was that she had sent Jordan a list of women "who were interested in the WCWA and might contribute financially," and she herself contributed \$1,000 to the Radcliffe project. She also gave the college the WCWA records, the Leonora Reilly papers, the Inez Irwin papers, and other collections. Although Beard kept abreast of progress on the project, the institution

²⁸Mary Beard to Alice Lachmund, 7 December 1942, Mary Beard Papers, SSC; Beard's correspondence discussing these efforts can be located in the papers of women who supported the WCWA and donated their papers to Smith College; also see WCWA records in the Mary Beard Papers, SCH.

²⁹Turoff, *Mary Beard as Force in History*, 72. For the full list of institutions that received material from the defunct WCWA, see memorandum from the World Center for Women's Archives, 25 November 1940, International Organizations Records, SSC. For a description of Beard's involvement at other colleges, see, for example, Mary Beard to Alice Lachmund, 17 August 1943, Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

³⁰Beard, *A Woman Making History*, 132.

³¹Among the many letters, see Mary Beard to Wilbur Jordan, 14 January 1944, 7 June 1944, Mary Beard Papers, SCH; Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 28 October 1949, Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

would not contact her again to promote their women's archives until 1951.³²

In her response to Radcliffe's archivist, a disappointed Beard recalled her early support for and contribution to the project, only to "learn for the first time detail of its status at this moment." She concluded rather bluntly that she had "led many women to believe that Radcliffe was the place in the U.S. for a great collection. I have regretted that Radcliffe . . . was in no great sense apparently warranting that belief."³³

The Start of the Smith College Project

While she was involved with the project at Radcliffe in the early 1940s, Beard had also become interested in a similar effort at Smith College. At Smith, at least one person greeted Beard's efforts with open arms. Subsequent success of the women's collection at Smith College can be attributed primarily to an "intimate, lasting friendship" that developed between Smith archivist, Margaret Grierson and Mary Beard.³⁴ Their mutual admiration and shared commitment to promoting women's history is clear in their correspondence, spanning the early 1940s until Beard's death in 1958. Grierson had all the skills Beard had once recommended for director of a women's archive—a person who would need to be "a capable woman to go into the field as an interpreter, archives collector, and fundraiser." In a letter to

Beard's son, Grierson noted that it was Mary Beard "who patiently led us to a clear understanding of the significance of women in history and to a clear conception of the proper nature of our research collection. It is very truly her own creation."³⁵

Newly appointed Smith College president Herbert Davis first proposed the women's archives at an Alumnae Association meeting held in conjunction with commencement on 14 June 1941. Davis, who saw the archives as a literary collection of works by women writers, noted that such a collection "is yet to be found anywhere outside certain private collections . . . in addition to printed books." He also urged the founding of "an association of the friends of the Smith College Library, to support us in the gathering together such a collection. [T]hey will help bring us into contact with people having suitable books and manuscripts."³⁶

Davis evidently wrote Beard soon after his address, though his letter has not survived, and she responded with characteristic enthusiasm, commending Smith College for its intention to "broaden the base of their education by supplying [students] with richer materials for discovering themselves as co-makers of history." She warned, however, that this would not be achieved unless Smith made an equally strong commitment to hiring faculty "who are wise about women as [a] historical force. I think it is not an extreme statement that at present our faculty lacks such members." Despite these notes of caution, Beard was hopeful enough to inform one of her WCWA supporters that "[President Davis] has written me about his purpose as

³²The material donated to Radcliffe was listed in a memorandum from the WCWA, 25 November 1940; Records of International Organizations, SSC; Mary Beard to Nancy Cox-McCormack Cushman, 10 August 1945, Cushman Papers, SSC; Turoff, *Mary Beard as Force in History*, 65; Mary Beard to Wilbur Jordan, 27 June 1944, Mary Beard Papers, SCH; see Mary Beard to Nancy Cox-McCormack Cushman, 18 May 1947, Cushman Papers, and Mary Beard to Marine Leland, 6 February 1951, Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

³³Mary Beard to Elizabeth B. Borden, 8 February 1951, Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

³⁴Beard, *Mary Ritter Beard: A Source Book*, 54.

³⁵Mary Beard to Wilbur Jordan, 9 January 1944, Mary Beard Papers, SCH; handwritten draft from Margaret Grierson to William Beard, (1959), SSC Donor Files, SCA.

³⁶Typescript of speech by President Herbert Davis, before the Alumnae Association meeting, 14 June 1941, Records of the President's Office, SCA.

if he really intends to make it count large in education."³⁷

Within a few months of her initial contact with Smith College in August 1941, Beard offered Davis some source material from the WCWA for Smith's collection. His acceptance of the gift and his expressed interest in preserving primary sources gave Beard "intense pleasure," and she expressed her hope "to do more and better work for you in the future."³⁸

Indeed, Mary Beard periodically sent books and other printed matter relating to women's history to the Smith collection. Paradoxically, Beard considered her own manuscripts and letters of little value to historians. In response to Grierson's interest in collecting her papers, Beard admitted that she had not retained any of her own manuscripts, since she could only "regard [her] revisions as revealing to excess the fuzziness of [her] mind." She even went so far as to ask that some of her "bum speeches," donated to Smith as part of another woman's collection, be destroyed "to save my face." Unfortunately, Beard's admission that she did not save her papers was true. But her promise in the 1941 letter, "to get others to give you what I do not have to give" would nonetheless signal the beginning of Beard and Grierson's fruitful relationship.³⁹

The Friends of the Smith College Library (FSCL), the organization that President Davis had envisioned would take charge of the women's archives, was formally inaugurated at an Alumnae Council

session on 20 February 1942. Margaret Grierson, Smith College Archivist since 1940, was appointed executive secretary of the FSCL and director of the women's collection, which was introduced as a special project of the society. In the first of her detailed annual reports for the Friends, Grierson reported that the Works of Woman Writers collection "is an appropriate project for the college which so notably enlarged the opportunity of achievement for women by first providing them an education equivalent to that offered their brothers."⁴⁰

Although Herbert Davis had proposed the women's collection, neither he nor Grierson were certain about its intended mission after it was formally established. Davis seemed partial to making it a strictly literary collection. Grierson, however, expressed her uncertainty in a letter to Nina Browne, the college archivist she had replaced in 1940: "I think that you are right in feeling that President Davis is not clear in his own mind as to what he wants." Clearly reflecting Beard's influence to expand the collection beyond literary women, Grierson continued: "Mrs. Beard, as you know, rather hoped that we would be interested in carrying on the work of the abandoned women's archives."⁴¹

In the early summer of 1943, Beard invited Grierson to her home in Milford, Connecticut, to discuss "a model archive" and the steps needed to accomplish that ideal.⁴² Although she later admitted having been skeptical about Beard's vision for Smith, Grierson returned exclaiming, "I am all enthusiasm!" Grierson's brief stay at Beard's home convinced her that historians had ignored women's role in shaping

³⁷Mary Beard to Herbert Davis, 5 August 1941, Records of the President's Office, SCA; Mary Beard to Eva Hansl, 12 August 1941, Eva Hansl Papers, SSC.

³⁸For her offer of material from the WCWA, see Mary Beard to Herbert Davis, 24 October 1941; Mary Beard to Herbert Davis, 6 November 1941; see also 16 November 1941 and 21 November, 1941, Records of the President's Office, SCA.

³⁹Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 7 December 1941, Mary Beard Papers, SSC; Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 8 November 1948, Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

⁴⁰*Annual Report of the Friends of the Smith College Library*, March 1942, SCA.

⁴¹Margaret Grierson to Nina Browne, 8 April 1943, Nina Browne Papers, SCA.

⁴²Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 1 June 1943, Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

history. She now believed that Smith must "redefine the collection to include works about, as well as by women . . . material that records and reflects the ideas, interests, visions, endeavors and achievements of American women as a force in shaping the patterns of our national growth." Surprisingly, Davis did not seem to mind straying far from his earlier proposal for a literary collection. According to Grierson, "[H]e even suggested that we might get women to come to give talks on various aspects of women's activities."⁴³

On hearing about Grierson's success in winning support for the "new" collection, Beard praised her newfound friend: "You performed a master feat. . . . Your force will play a goodly part in designing a new interpretation of women in history."⁴⁴ The prospect of a distinct women's collection, however, did not meet with enthusiasm by everyone. As Grierson noted in the Friends' annual report, at least one alumna protested a separate women's collection, saying, "Aren't women people?" Grierson responded that "[t]he purpose of the collection is certainly not to sharpen the distinction between the sexes . . . but further to diminish the distinction by gathering an imposing evidence of work of women comparable in every way to that of men."⁴⁵ To Beard the episode was a perfect illustration of why a women's archives was needed. The alumna's question indicated that too many women needed to realize "that to be 'people' they must be recognized as such and not lost to view."⁴⁶

In 1945 the collection was renamed the Historical Collection of Books By and About Women. It is not certain whether the

name change was a direct response to Beard's suggestions. The women's collection was becoming such an important project of the Friends of the Library, that in 1945 librarian Harriet McPherson included "a special mention" to the collection, which is "devoted to material by and about women," in her annual report to the president of the college.⁴⁷

In 1946, the women's archives was renamed the Sophia Smith Collection, in honor of Sophia Smith who had donated her fortune to found Smith College in 1870. In the FSCL annual report for 1946, Grierson wrote, "[t]he collection of material directed toward a fuller and clearer knowledge of the history of women is in line with our founder's intention" to offer women the same rigorous academic training as had always been offered to men. As one alumna, who was a friend of Grierson and a supporter of the women's collection, wrote in a college publication, the project "will prove to be one of the most significant contributions Smith College will make to the future."⁴⁸ By the end of 1947, the popularity of the women's collection among alumnae and friends of the college was growing rapidly. The Friends of the Library reported that its growing membership, now numbering more than 700, was due largely to "the increasingly popular enterprise in the collection of material in

⁴⁷*Bulletin of Smith College, President's Report Issue*, 18 December 1945, SCA.

⁴⁸Sophia Smith envisioned the college providing new opportunities for women but said that: "It is not my design to render my sex any the less feminine but to develop as fully as may be the powers of womanhood, and furnish women with the means of usefulness, happiness, and honor, now withheld from them." The women's collection, it seemed could play an integral part in the educational experience that Smith had hoped to provide for women. These excerpts are from the last will and testament of Sophia Smith, 8 March 1870, SCA; *Annual Report of the Friends of the Smith College Library*, 1946; the devoted friend of the women's collection was Dorothy Brush and her article appeared in the *Smith College Quarterly* 37 (August 1946), SCA.

⁴³Margaret Grierson to Nina Browne, 10 July 1943, Nina Browne Papers, SCA.

⁴⁴Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 27 June 1943, Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

⁴⁵*Annual Report of the Friends of the Smith College Library*, 1943, SCA.

⁴⁶Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 11 April 1943, Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

the social and intellectual history of women."⁴⁹

To ensure that women's contributions would be treated equally with those of men, Smith College decided to shelve books by and about women with the rest of the material already in the library, thus avoiding "physical segregation of the material within the library."⁵⁰ But Beard's views were influential in the way women's works were represented in the library's catalog. Because she feared that women's material would be invisible in a large library served by only one catalog, Beard urged the library to create a separate catalog for materials related to women stressing that such a catalog would be necessary "if research is to be handled in connection with the subject." In support of her contention, Beard invoked her own experience in researching the role women played in urban history, pointing out that she had been unable to find materials about women at the New York Public Library, which at that time had no separate catalog. One cannot measure the influence Beard had on the decision, but in 1947 the Smith library developed a separate subject card catalog of materials related to the history of women.⁵¹

In comparing this arrangement with the women's archives at Radcliffe, Grierson noted that "[Radcliffe's] is a physically separated collection," and in her view, "much of what is purely feminist loses its significance in segregation. . . . It is artificial to consider one sex as a world apart." Balancing the goal of a physically nonsegregated collection with the goal of ensuring the preservation of delicate materials was a dilemma that gnawed at Grierson.

Her annual report of 1947 recognized that growing amounts of Smith's materials, such as "manuscript collections, correspondence, records of organizations, ephemeral printings," required special storage facilities.⁵²

Grierson's detailed list of donations was growing steadily by the end of the 1940s. Beginning in 1949, her annual reports devoted separate section to acquisitions for the Sophia Smith Collection, listing donated books and manuscripts under such headings as *literary interests, education, religion, medicine, woman's movement, antislavery, and foreign materials*.

The Sophia Smith Collection Matures

The seventh year of the Sophia Smith Collection coincided with Smith College's election of a new president. Knowing how unlikely it was that a woman would be appointed, Beard complained rather pointedly that "if only in the whole land there were a woman who knew enough about women to take [Herbert Davis's] place, how grand that would be!"⁵³ When Benjamin Fletcher Wright was named to replace Davis in 1949, Beard was hopeful that the support for the women's collection at the college would continue. She had met the president-elect earlier at the home of Wilbur Jordan, Radcliffe's president, and she recalled, "Professor Wright *asked* me to tell him more about my idea of women." Unfortunately, however, Wright did not believe that a college required such a research facility, and he therefore lacked Davis's commitment to the expansion of the Sophia

⁴⁹*Annual Report of The Friends of the Smith College Library*, 1947, SCA.

⁵⁰*Annual Report of The Friends of the Smith College Library*, 1945, SCA.

⁵¹Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 22 June (1944), Mary Beard Papers, SSC; for a more detailed description of the new catalog see *Annual Report of the Friends of the Smith College Library*, 1947.

⁵²For Grierson's comments on the arrangement of the collections, see "Consideration of Several Aspects of the Sophia Smith Collection in Comparison with the Radcliffe Women's Archives," a report by Margaret Grierson, September 1950, Records of the SCA/SSC, SCA; *Annual Report of The Friends of the Smith College Library*, 1947, SCA.

⁵³Mary Beard to Dorothy Hamilton Brush, 26 January 1949, Dorothy Brush Papers, SSC.

Smith Collection.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, after her initial disappointment with Wright, Beard told Grierson that, with or without his support, the collection's "development will proceed and be a center, as you rightly declare, for the higher education of women."⁵⁵ Grierson agreed.

By the early 1950s, Beard had begun laboring to expand the archives program at Smith College to include seminars on women's history. From the time of Wright's inauguration as Smith's president and lasting through the mid-1950s, Beard campaigned to win his support for such seminars. Although she scheduled several speaking engagements at the college and penned numerous letters to the skeptical president, her efforts were fruitless; she seemed only to annoy him with her repeated requests. In one such letter Beard asked, "Don't you think the time has come to launch a course on women in history at Smith College!" In the margin Wright noted to his secretary, "Stop these!"⁵⁶ As Margaret Grierson recalled much later, Wright did not hold the Sophia Smith Collection—and especially the idea of seminars in women's history—in high regard.⁵⁷

But with or without the administration's support, the Sophia Smith Collection was being noticed. During the 1950s, the FSCL annual reports documented, in addition to the growing book and manuscript collection, a steady increase in the use of the source materials in the women's collection. To the dismay of its director, however, few

faculty at Smith and the surrounding colleges were among those users.

Early in her involvement with the Sophia Smith Collection, Mary Beard had cautioned that the archives would succeed only if the faculty incorporated it in their teaching. If one goal of the archives was to educate women about their past, "the faculty must cooperate by setting research projects." Although Margaret Grierson recalls a few faculty members, such as Smith history professor Daniel Aaron, incorporating the collection in assignments, most faculty, especially at Amherst and other local colleges, "steered [students] away" from using the source material in the early days.⁵⁸ The situation changed slowly, but it did change. By the late 1950s many faculty members and students at Smith, as well as a growing number of faculty members at other colleges and universities, had recognized the collection's unique holdings. Indeed, a 1959 letter from Grierson to William Beard, Mary's son, shows the degree to which the collection was altering the habits of the faculty: "[Mary Beard] would especially rejoice . . . that at least a dozen of our professors have revised their courses to include women in their fields."⁵⁹

While more and more people were praising the Sophia Smith Collection, support from the college's administration was intermittent and unpredictable. Hence, the growth of the collection during the 1950s and 1960s continued as a result of Grierson's extensive and descriptive reports and skillful relations with potential donors. According to the current archives specialist, Maida Goodwin, Grierson was frequently more familiar with the contents of these collections than the donors themselves. In a 1948 letter to Eleanor Garrison, William

⁵⁴For a description of her meeting with Wright, see Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 19 March 1949, Mary Beard Papers, SSC; For Wright's views of the SSC, see Margaret Grierson to Eleanor Garrison, 3 December 1950, Margaret Grierson Papers, SCA.

⁵⁵Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 17 February 1951, Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

⁵⁶Mary Beard to Benjamin Fletcher Wright, 4 April 1954, Records of the SSC, SCA.

⁵⁷Margaret Grierson to Barbara Turoff, 16 October 1979, SSC Donor Files, SCA.

⁵⁸Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 6 March 1944, Mary Beard Papers, SSC; Margaret Grierson in conversation with Anke Voss-Hubbard, 5 July 1993.

⁵⁹Margaret Grierson to William Beard, 1959, SSC Donor Files, SCA.

Lloyd Garrison's granddaughter, Grierson rejoiced at the revelation that the Garrison family was becoming "Smith-minded" in their search for a depository. Although the initial donation was small, Grierson did not neglect to tell Garrison that "what you have given us . . . has put us more firmly on the map."⁶⁰ In view of the fact that more than one hundred document boxes containing Garrison family papers now grace the shelves, her dedication was not in vain. Responding to a description of one of her family's donations, Eleanor Garrison wrote, "[O]f course I've read and reread the report and fluffed up with pride at all honorable mentions. You certainly did full justice to the offerings."⁶¹ As with all other acquisitions, Grierson never failed to make an extensive note of the additions to the collection in her yearly reports. Grierson later recalled that at first she had no idea what her role as executive secretary of the Friends of the Smith College Library would entail, but that she concluded the society would probably like her "to write about the collections."⁶² It is also clear from her daily logs that Grierson made a point to carefully inspect every new acquisition before she reported on their contents.

Throughout Mary Beard's involvement with the collection at Smith, she had directed attention to numerous women whose papers she thought should be solicited. She also advised Grierson to take a proactive approach to collection management, filling her letters with frequent suggestions about possible donors.⁶³ Here, Beard was not at-

tempting to influence the purview of the archives' holdings. Although she privately criticized Alma Lutz's biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, calling Lutz an "intellectual juvenile," Beard nonetheless believed Lutz's papers would be very valuable to the collection. Beard also disagreed with Margaret Sanger's method of distributing birth control to poor women, but when Grierson announced the acquisition of Sanger's papers, Beard replied that "they are among the basic materials for the study of [women]." In regard to musicologist Sophie Drinker's collection, Beard noted perceptively, "She has an extraordinary collection of books on and by women in her home—is an avid collector . . . what she will do with it before she dies or where she may will it, I wonder."⁶⁴

Beard downplayed her role in expanding the Sophia Smith Collection, but Grierson reported growing interest among potential donors as a result of Beard's association with the collection. Beard's recognition among prominent women, combined with her faith in the collection, resulted in some important acquisitions over the years.⁶⁵

letter includes the name of a physician at the State Department who would be a good source for material on Latin American countries, Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 14 October 1944. In another she recommends that Grierson contact Eleanor Roosevelt to get the original copy of her speech to the WCWA, Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 26 October 1945; all letters are in the Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

⁶⁴For Beard's comments on Lutz, see Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 6 March 1944; on Sanger, see Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 2 July 1946; and on Drinker, see Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 31 March 1950, all letters are in the Mary Beard Papers, SSC.

⁶⁵Because of the noninterventionist stand both Beards took during the war, Mary Beard believed that "the name Beard is anathema in many, many quarters," and she expressed doubt that it "has the pull which you think it has" (Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 6 March 1944, Mary Beard Papers, SSC). On Beard's influence, see Margaret Grierson to Nina Browne, 15 April 1944, Nina Browne Papers, SCA; in these letters, for example, Beard recommends to

⁶⁰Margaret Grierson to Eleanor Garrison, 19 November 1948, Garrison Family Papers, SSC.

⁶¹Eleanor Garrison to Margaret Grierson, 19 March 1950, Garrison Family Papers, SSC.

⁶²Margaret Grierson in conversation with Anke Voss-Hubbard, 5 July 1993.

⁶³In this letter, for example, Beard advises Grierson to contact Luther Evans at the Library of Congress for material about the suffrage amendment, Mary Beard to Margaret Grierson, 30 July 1945. Another

Even after Beard's death in 1958, a woman who had worked with her on a book about Japanese women offered her correspondence to Smith only because she recalled Beard's enthusiasm for the collection.⁶⁶

In 1968, three years after her retirement, the trustees of the college presented Margaret Grierson with the Smith College Medal in recognition of her achievements and service. In announcing the award, President Thomas C. Mendenhall exclaimed, "Under your skillful hand the Collection was given its eventual shape and purpose: the intellectual and social history of women around the world."⁶⁷

Grierson was too modest to accept such tributes to her achievements. As she recalled in 1992, despite her two decades of work establishing and enlarging the Sophia Smith Collection, "I was around only for the beginning, for the planting of an acorn." It was Mary Beard, she would later insist, who deserved at least part of the credit for the collection. As Grierson wrote to a donor in 1961, "I wish that [Mary Beard] might be at hand to see how her project has developed and to give continuing advice to us. I hope it is obvious to one and all, that our enterprise took shape in an earnest effort to make material some of Mary Beard's sound ideas."⁶⁸

While academic libraries were busy collecting primary source material, their archives supported only the research of men,

in Beard's view. As she boldly stated in 1938:

[T]here has been no systematic effort to get the story of women together in any Archive center. . . . Men preside over most libraries. They naturally think of manuscripts in terms of men. In view of these conditions, . . . the need of a special library for women's papers seems convincing.⁶⁹

As Beard's work demonstrated, the struggle to establish women's archives had to overcome many hurdles. The historic transformation at universities and colleges in the 1930s and 1940s, to professionalize and institutionalize scholarship did not include women's history. It was not until pioneers, like Mary Beard, who recognized that only through the establishment of women's archives could women's history be thoroughly professionalized and institutionalized.

The early history of the Sophia Smith Collection also exemplified how the development of archives have often depended on the vision and toil of nonarchivists. Beard was the direct inspiration for the Smith College collection of primary source material on women, and she encouraged such collections at numerous other institutions. As Beard stated while organizing the WCWA, "If we only accomplish the stimulation of interest and thinking in colleges and communities by our plan for a great Women's Archive, I shall believe that we have been justified in this movement."⁷⁰ Beard was fortunate to find Margaret Grierson, a knowledgeable person dedicated to preserving the evidence of women's achievements, who would make her plan a reality.

journalist Margery Steer and Alice Lachmund, a friend from her WCWA period, that they send their source material to Smith (Mary Beard to Margery Steer, 28 April 1951, Margery Steer Papers; Mary Beard to Alice Lachmund, 30 March 1943, Mary Beard Papers, SSC).

⁶⁶Ethel Weed to Margaret Grierson, 31 May 1960, SSC Donor Files, SCA.

⁶⁷For T. C. Mendenhall's Smith College medal citation, 23 October 1968, see Margaret Grierson Papers, SCA.

⁶⁸Margaret Grierson to Amy Hague, 17 September 1992, Margaret Grierson Papers; Margaret Grierson to Margery Steer, 4 April 1961, SSC Donor Files, SCA.

⁶⁹Mary Beard to Elsie Yellis, 16 May 1938, Mary Beard Papers, SCH.

⁷⁰Mary Beard to Theodore C. Blegen, 14 July 1939, Mary Beard Papers, SCH.