

Documenting Maryland Women State Legislators: The Politics of Collecting Women's Political Papers

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ABSTRACT

Collecting political papers related to women requires archivists to adopt a broader perspective than does collecting political papers in general. Special Collections at the University of Maryland, College Park, has collected the papers of women state legislators and other political materials related to women and women's issues for almost forty years and serves as one institutional example of documenting women in politics, more specifically women state legislators. This article identifies the unique challenges related to collecting the papers of women state legislators and provides general recommendations for developing basic collecting and selection criteria that incorporate critical thinking about women in elected office. A brief discussion about research use of the papers of women state legislators follows to illustrate how researchers utilize or neglect these collections for various reasons. Finally, this article demonstrates that even though women appear to be entering the political mainstream, archivists need to be continually vigilant of the complexities inherent in documenting women and other underrepresented groups in the American political landscape.

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KEY WORDS

Appraisal, Political Papers, Collection Management, Women's Collections

Maryland State Delegate Pauline Menes's (D) acceptance to chair the Ladies' Restroom Committee in January 1972 is legendary.¹ At the time, no private restrooms existed in the Maryland State House for the women members of the Maryland General Assembly. Forced to use the public restrooms, which were located much farther away, the women members faced an increased risk of being accosted by lobbyists. In recognition of Menes's appointment to the Ladies' Restroom Committee, then House Speaker William Hunter Lowe later presented her with a toilet seat covered in a muskrat pelt in a failed, and insulting, attempt at humor. Menes, instead of becoming flustered, embarrassed, or angered, accepted the appointment with composure and took the opportunity to speak to the House of Delegates from the rostrum, the speaking platform at the front of the chamber. She noted that this seemingly acquiescent act was exceedingly important: it was the first time one of the women members in the House had ever addressed the chamber from the rostrum.² Even though the first woman member had been elected to the legislature in 1921, Menes's acceptance of the position of Ladies' Restroom Committee chair provides a window into a time when women continued to endure an antagonistic environment in the Maryland General Assembly.

Only a few weeks before, in February 1972, Menes had been involved in the founding of the Maryland Women's Legislative Caucus, the first group of its kind in any state. The success of African American members in organizing the Black Caucus in the Maryland legislature gave women legislators the courage and conviction to form the caucus to advance their own agenda. Women delegates and senators founded the Women's Caucus to "take positive steps to remedy the present inequities in the recognition of women in higher levels of Maryland government" by tracking bills of interest to women and by offering a support network for women legislators.³ The Maryland Women's Caucus also fought effectively for inclusion in exclusive meetings held by the all-male Assembly leadership.⁴ Although women state legislators had organized nationally as early as 1938 with the founding of the National Organization for Women Legislators (NOWL), women political leaders at the state and even national levels had only initiated the establishment of women's caucuses within their own legislative bodies in the 1970s. Even the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, originally the Congresswomen's Caucus, was not formed until April 19, 1977, five years after the Maryland Women's Legislative Caucus.⁵

Without the careful documentation and archiving of the papers of women involved in State of Maryland politics, especially those women in elected offices, historians and other researchers might never know the details surrounding these events or other important events relating to women's challenges and achievements in the political arena. Delegate Menes demonstrated an uncommon awareness of the importance of historical documentation. In

1987, she donated her political papers to Special Collections at the University of Maryland, College Park, Libraries.⁶ She was not the first and certainly not the last Maryland politician to do so. Special Collections has a long history of collecting Maryland political papers and more specifically of collecting materials related to women in local, state, and national politics. From the inception of the Special Collections program in the early 1970s, the manuscript curator at the university began soliciting local and state political papers of women, men, and political organizations. As a major special collections repository in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and the flagship campus of the University System of Maryland, the University of Maryland, College Park, was, and is, ideally situated for collecting the papers of significant Maryland political figures and organizations.

The article discusses the ways in which Special Collections at the University of Maryland began to focus on women's collections, more specifically women's political collections, gradually over time, and how, concurrently, broad historiographical trends influenced the archival profession and the acquisition of women's collections in general. The more in-depth examination of women's political collections, especially the papers of women state legislators, that follows will assist archivists in taking a more critical view of political collections development policy. Furthermore, archivists must be aware and strive to overcome several specific challenges related to collecting the papers of women state legislators. This article provides general recommendations for developing a collections policy and collection-level selection criteria that incorporate critical thinking about women in elected office and briefly discusses researchers' use of the papers of women state legislators. Finally, this article demonstrates that while women have made significant gains in the political arena over the last four decades, archivists still need to sharpen their focus on collecting the papers of women state legislators and on collecting women's political papers in general. In addition, archivists should continue to be vigilant of the complexities inherent in collecting materials related to women and other underrepresented groups.

Women's Political Collections at the University of Maryland: History and Development

The new social history and women's history that developed and gained prominence in the 1970s and early 1980s encouraged the library and archives professions to rethink collecting practices and arrangement and description tools, and to shift focus to collections that documented women's lives.⁷ Historians of women insisted on enhanced discoverability of women's and related collections, and produced surveys and bibliographies of women's history

resources. In 1979, the Women's History Sources Survey produced one of the most thoroughly researched resources, *Women's History Sources: A Guide to Archives and Manuscript Collections in the United States*.⁸ A new feminist consciousness and a women's collection movement took shape and flourished among library and archives professionals as well.⁹ Librarians, archivists, and curators also compiled their own local and national guides to resources, including the Schlesinger Library's *Directory of Repositories Collecting Women's Organizations*, which was begun in the late 1980s and was eventually published in 1994.¹⁰ With this directory, two of the most well-established archival institutions supporting women's history research in the United States, the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University and the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, realized that they alone could not accommodate the need for collecting local and state women's organizations and hoped "to promote preservation of the records of such organizations through cooperation with repositories that have collected, or might collect, such materials."¹¹

Influenced by these developments in the archival and history professions, Special Collections at the University of Maryland began acquiring women's collections during the 1960s and 1970s. Women's political collections began arriving in the 1970s, with the acquisition of the Archives of the League of Women Voters of Maryland (1972), the Papers of State Delegate Ann R. Hull (D) (1975), and the Papers of State Delegate and Senator Mary Nock (D) (1975). Additionally, by the 1980s, Special Collections expanded its holdings to encompass women's collections that were national and international in scope such as the archives of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (1981), the archives of the Association for Childhood Education International (1987), and the archives of the National Women's Studies Association (1988). More local and state women's political collections began arriving with increased frequency, including the archives of the Maryland Division of the American Association for University Women (1986), the papers of Maryland Congresswoman Majorie Sewell Holt (R) (1987), and the archives of the Women's Action Coalition of Prince George's County (1987).

During the early years of acquiring women's political materials at the University of Maryland, two women politicians were influential in creating a cache of local and state women's political papers: state legislators Ann R. Hull and Pauline Menes. State Delegate Ann R. Hull, the first woman state politician to donate her papers, had strong ties to the university. In 1972, she fought for a State of Maryland House bill requiring that all units in the state government "file one copy of every report, bulletin, periodical, catalog, and other publication issued by them with the McKeldin Library of the University of Maryland" and thus created an official repository for state government documents at the university.¹² Hull also later served on the university's board of regents. Although

she had some awareness that government documents were important historical sources, she was at first not entirely convinced about the significance of her own political papers. In a letter to Hull in September 1972, the manuscript curator at the university wrote, "Although you did not seem to feel that your papers were historically worthwhile, the focus of your activities and interests makes them so by documenting not only your activity but interrelationships with other members of the Assembly and other groups."¹³ With her increasing awareness of the importance of historical documentation and her ties to the university, Delegate Hull would be the first woman legislator from Maryland to donate her papers in 1975.

Other political and history-conscious women and women's organizations would follow in Hull's footsteps. Delegate Pauline Menes became instrumental in creating an interest in women's political papers at the university. Menes's influence and political connections extend throughout the women's political collections holdings at the University of Maryland Libraries. She became significant for three reasons. Maryland governor Spiro T. Agnew appointed Menes chair of the Committee for Public Library Laws, her first successful leadership position in public office, and a position that made her more aware of the importance of libraries in general.¹⁴ Furthermore, she donated her political papers to the archives in 1987, relatively early in Special Collections' process of collecting women's political papers. And, finally, and most importantly, she influenced and provided information to other women state legislators regarding donating their collections to the university. Documentation in collections control files suggests that several other women state legislators discovered the university's collections through discussions with Menes. Current political collection donors also attest to this fact and continue the tradition of passing on information about potential acquisitions.

This brief history demonstrates how a group of women's political collections at the University of Maryland, College Park, has developed over time. No official written collections policy specifically states that Special Collections collects Maryland political papers or political papers related to women in politics; however, archivists and curators inherently accept that the university specializes in these subject areas. Special Collections currently has over thirty-five historical manuscripts collections directly related to women in politics, out of over a hundred collections of political papers. These thirty-five-plus collections consist of women's congressional papers, women's state legislative papers, papers of women who served in local government, women's political organizations, and ancillary women's political collections. This body of research materials documenting women is one of the most significant concentrations of Maryland women's political papers within the state of Maryland.¹⁵

Toward a Collecting Policy for the Papers of Women State Legislators

Collecting the papers of women state legislators has and continues to present unique challenges to archival repositories. These challenges include a traditional lack of awareness regarding women's political collections, an absence of legal definitions or guidelines relating to the status of state legislative papers in most states, difficulties in women's political collections standing out against other political collections, and an ever-growing number of potential state legislative collections to accession into the archives. Archivists need to acknowledge these challenges and determine how to combat and overcome them. Some basic collecting criteria and a greater awareness of women's and gender issues can assist archivists to better document women state legislators and women's political collections in general.

In the past, professional archivists and curators in the United States did not definitively acknowledge the importance of collecting women's papers, including those of women who held political office. Following this national trend, as previously mentioned, not until the late 1970s and early 1980s did Special Collections begin to collect the political papers of women within the state of Maryland. Many gaps still exist in the historical record concerning the first women who served in the Maryland General Assembly. Special Collections only has some of these women's papers; other collections are housed at archival repositories within the state, and many have been destroyed outright or may still be in the hands of private individuals. For example, papers of five out of the twelve founding members of the state legislature's Women's Caucus, now the Women Legislators of Maryland, reside in Special Collections, another collection can be found at the University of Maryland, School of Law, and one is housed at the Jewish Museum of Maryland.¹⁶ The rest are perhaps hidden collections in other archives or, more likely, lost to history. However, even though some papers may be hidden or lost, fairly good representation remains for such an important group of women within the state. On the other hand, many other women legislators' papers, especially those of more recent women legislators, have not been archived. Almost certainly this gap in collecting the state legislative papers of women is a common occurrence in many states. As historians and other researchers constantly remind archivists, the archives is not a neutral zone, potential collections are overlooked because of bias or lack of awareness, and acquisition is complicated by lack of resources. This historical lack of awareness has caused complications to locating women as subjects in the archives.¹⁷ Often, women legislators just do not know that their papers can and should be archived. Women's lives have been historically underdocumented, and the archival and historical professions need to continue to remediate this oversight. This redress encompasses the specialized area of women state legislators' papers.

One of the primary challenges in collecting women state legislators' papers is that, unlike congressional papers collections, which are clearly and legally defined as personal papers, state legislators' papers fall into ill-defined categories within most states.¹⁸ No officially accepted viewpoint exists within state legislatures on how state legislators may archive their papers. In some states, the state archives may collect state legislators' papers as official government records, but more often than not, these materials are considered personal papers collections that can be acquired by universities, historical societies, and other archival institutions.¹⁹ Nevertheless, most states have no laws or even guidance governing this process, although some conscientious state legislators, in the absence of any laws or other official guidance, donate their papers by tradition to the state archives or other regional repository. Collecting the papers of women legislators is part of this larger issue of accessioning state legislative papers in general and may even prove to be a more challenging process for several reasons.

Compared to other types of political collections, archivists and researchers may simply overlook women state legislators' papers. This is especially true in archival repositories that do not specialize specifically in collecting women's collections or that do not define themselves as women's archives. Kären M. Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher contended that "separate women's collections are critical for two reasons. First, they provide a means of rectifying the earlier neglect of women's papers and preventing such gaps in documentation from occurring in the future. Second, they provide a vehicle to promote and enhance the study of women's history."²⁰ The papers of women legislators that are not in repositories dedicated specifically to women's collections tend to be lost in the shuffle of other political collections or the sheer volume of overall collections. Furthermore, researchers may overlook smaller archival repositories and repositories not dedicated entirely to women's collections as potential venues to discover women's collections, including women's political papers. Additionally, if a state legislator was not very well known, regardless of gender, attention given to the collection by archivists or researchers could be limited. Often the collections with the most research appeal are those with widespread name recognition and those of politicians who served at the national level. In the archival profession, state legislators' papers are regularly deemed less important than congressional collections, unless the state legislator went on to become a congresswoman or served in a federal position. Although archival repositories may currently focus their efforts on acquiring congressional collections, some argue that collecting state legislators' papers may be more useful in documenting women (and men) as political officeholders. In a 1985 *American Archivist* article, Paul Chestnut asserted that "state legislative files, rather than congressional ones, may more thoroughly document the demographic, geographic, and political factors that influence decisions concerning what topics a repository wishes to include in its collecting policy and who among potential

donors to approach.”²¹ State legislators’ files may give researchers more insight into political and social issues within a particular state. A general lack of documentation and scholarly inquiry into the papers of state legislators makes finding information about how to document state legislators all the more challenging.²² In addition, the files of women state legislators’ may have greater significance than the files of congresswomen for certain areas of research. A 1995 article by Cindy Simon Rosenthal reaffirmed Chestnut’s point, but also applied it directly to women’s legislative collections. Rosenthal postulated that “one of the best arenas to study women’s experiences as office-holders remains state legislatures. Moreover, because state legislative service is one of the most common formative political experiences of congressional members, the backgrounds of women state legislators may shed some light on women’s future at the Congressional level.”²³ Of all the political arenas—local, state, national, and international—women have predominantly broken into local and state governments, and consequently the papers of these individual women are among the best ways to document women’s roles as elected officials.

As with all collections of elected officials, challenges lie in the sheer number of women’s collections available for the archival repository to acquire. The number of women in elected positions in the Maryland General Assembly steadily increased until the mid-1990s. Since 1995, Maryland has consistently ranked in the top ten states with the highest percentage of women state legislators at around 30 percent of the total membership of the General Assembly. In 2013, during the 431st legislative session, 56 women are serving in the Maryland General Assembly, making up about 29.8 percent of the membership. This percentage is down slightly from the previous year, when 58 women served.²⁴ These figures for Maryland women legislators are not typical for most states. The majority of states have only 15 to 24 percent total women legislators.²⁵ Overall figures for 2013 indicate that women make up about 24.0 percent of state legislators in the United States.²⁶ These statistics demonstrate the continued disparity in women’s participation in elected political office as compared with men. Nevertheless, women still continue to break new ground in state legislatures, and a stable percentage of women hold political office. With more women holding office in the current political landscape than in past decades, archivists face increased challenges in determining whether or not to save their political papers into perpetuity and in deciding to actively solicit and collect women’s political papers specifically.

Collecting Criteria for the Papers of Women State Legislators

Given all of these challenges and the stable, if not necessarily increasing, numbers of women who have invested their lives in state politics, how does the archivist determine whose political papers are important enough to collect? This

question is not a new one for seasoned archivists, who are constantly evaluating potential collections. Archivists realize that they cannot accumulate everything, even though they have a responsibility to document society, and that there must be limiting factors and selection guidelines.²⁷ To help answer this question, some basic criteria are needed to define collecting goals for the papers of women state legislators. The criteria outlined in Table 1 build on Faye Phillips’s collection policies for general manuscript and congressional papers collections, as almost no collection development policy or selection guidelines for state legislators’ papers specifically exist in the professional archival literature.²⁸ Most of these criteria could be applied broadly to all political collections, but the questions and brief explanations are meant to assist archivists in increasing their understanding and awareness about women’s and gender issues and in critically thinking about women’s political collections, specifically those of women legislators. These criteria are intended to be macro-level examples to encourage archivists to think more about how awareness of women’s and gender issues can and does affect collection decisions.

Table 1. Collecting Criteria for Documenting Women State Legislators and Women’s Political Issues

Criteria	Questions	Explanation
Geography	Is the legislator a state of [insert state name] politician? Does she represent particular counties or legislative districts that the archival repository is interested in? Are there particular counties or geographic regions in the state that have had a preponderance of women serving as elected officials?	This is probably one of the most basic questions for geographically based collecting. For example, the University of Maryland, College Park, already has collecting strengths in Maryland’s Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties, the two counties nearest to the university. Most women legislators’ papers at the university also relate to these two counties.
Leadership	Has the woman legislator held any leadership positions? Has she chaired or served on any important legislative committees? Has she served on committees of particular interest to women’s issues? Is she a member of the senate or the house?	Often, fewer women have been elected to the state senate and that may make the papers of higher historical value. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the files of women in leadership positions may not thoroughly document all levels of women’s experiences within the state legislature. Collections should not be accepted or rejected on leadership experience alone.

Legislation	Has the legislator passed any bills or resolutions of particular significance within the state? Has she supported or rejected any bills with particular significance to women's issues?	Any legislator (woman or man) who has worked for or against legislation related to women's issues would likely be highly desirable for an archival repository with collection priorities in the area of women's legislative papers.
Diversity	Is the legislator a member of a minority population? Did the legislator assist in supporting legislation related to minority issues, gay and lesbian issues, or equity and diversity initiatives?	The papers of minority women legislators would have special significance within women's legislative papers collections. Minority experiences are likely the most underdocumented in most traditional political papers collections.
Membership	What organizational memberships outside of the legislature did the legislator hold? Was she a member or leader in a women's organization at the local, state, or national level? How active was the legislator in particular organizations?	Women state legislators typically have strong connections to women's organizations outside of the legislature. Active membership in women's organizations increases the likelihood that a particular legislator will represent women's concerns within the legislature. ²⁹ Her papers may document both women's issues and the women's organizations of which she is a member.
Time in Office	How long did the legislator hold office?	A longer term in office is usually desirable, but this should not be the only limiting factor. When selecting the political papers of women in particular, time in office may be less important. The simple fact that a woman has held an office may be a significant reason to document her.
Historical Importance	Was the state legislator an eyewitness to or participant in a major historical event at the local, state, or national level? Was the event important to the history of women within the state?	Archivists should be aware of major historical events, especially those related to women, that could have occurred during the legislator's time in office and investigate the papers for evidence of such an event.

Related Social and Political Issues	Do the legislator's papers contain information on social, political, or other issues that a repository is particularly interested in documenting, even if the legislator did not hold high leadership positions or otherwise distinguish herself?	For example, Special Collections acquired the Papers of Congresswoman Marjorie Sewell Holt, even though she never held a top leadership position. However, she had been involved with federal government projects relating to the Chesapeake Bay, a topic that the university was also interested in documenting. ³⁰
Flexibility	Is the collection development policy flexible enough to adapt to future perspectives on documenting women and gender?	Collection development policies can be made more specific and incorporate some or all of the above criteria, but policies must leave room for flexibility as issues and perspectives change over time. Archivists should revisit collections policies on a regular basis and adapt to new trends in documentation if necessary. ³¹

The above criteria provide a basic outline for building a stronger foundation to better analyze, select, and eventually decide to accession the papers of women state legislators. The criteria can also assist institutions in preparing a formal collection development policy and collection-level selection guidelines for political papers, state legislators' papers, and women's political papers collections. Researching a potential collection to establish if the collection materials exemplify some of these criteria can sometimes be a difficult but necessary step when determining whether or not to accession a new collection. Developing relationships with past and current politicians in the state legislature and staying informed about current women members and women's and gender issues is also of great importance. In Maryland, the Women's Legislators of Maryland (Women's Caucus) is a distinct and tightly knit group that can quickly communicate information, including where to donate their political papers, with current and former women members of the legislature. Such political relationships can also acquaint archivists with potential collections on the horizon when women are planning on retiring or otherwise leaving political office.

Maintaining awareness about women's and gender issues when considering potential acquisitions is an important skill for the political collections archivist and for all archivists. In the past, the lack of awareness of such issues among archivists and historians created large gaps in the historical record. Today, archivists recognize that selection criteria can be based on factors such as race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or some additional category of analysis that is documented in a repository's collection policy.³² Undeniably, women's collections often have important dimensions beyond gender relations or feminist activism. Race relations, social movements, class struggles, and the role of

sexuality are embedded in women's political collections. Archivists documenting women need to ensure that the definition of "women" in collection development policies includes women from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Elsa Barkley Brown, a historian of African American women, reminded us that "we have still to recognize that being a woman is, in fact, not extractable from the context in which one is a woman—that is, race, class, time, and place."³³ Political archives relating to any underdocumented group need to review their collection policies with a critical eye and consider what has been overlooked, what new selection questions should be asked, and what issues complicate collecting political papers for the group in question. For example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) donors are frequently concerned about privacy issues and may feel more comfortable donating to a purely LGBT archives, rather than to a formal political archives.³⁴ Developing an increased archival consciousness and improved understanding of the complexities of social issues are key for archivists. In the last forty years since women's collections rose to prominence in historians' and archivists' awareness, many archival repositories have dedicated their resources to collecting substantial amounts of women's papers.³⁵ However, archivists must endeavor to remain ever-vigilant about selection and collecting procedures and the influence of archival collecting in relation to the historical narrative.

Research in Collections Documenting Women in Politics

Special Collections at the University of Maryland has determined that certain women's political collections, including those of women state legislators, are important enough to retain into perpetuity, but researchers do not necessarily agree on the value or usefulness of these collections. Unfortunately, although political papers documenting women frequently contain a treasure trove of materials and information, researchers have not utilized these collections very often, especially the women state legislators' papers. The most frequently requested political papers in Special Collections remain those of two men involved in national politics: Vice President Spiro T. Agnew and United States Senator Millard Tydings, most likely because they are better known and have documented national political significance within the research community. Of course, researchers take different paths when consulting women state legislators' papers. There are four main possibilities, but these do not eliminate other nontraditional or creative research uses of the collections. These four research tracks typically include studying an individual woman's life; researching women's political history and activism within the state; understanding local, state, or national history; and investigating a particular social or political issue. From observations of the way researchers use women state legislators'

and other women's political collections, the majority of researchers tends to focus on political or social issues in the collections, rather than writing biographies or general state or local histories. For those researchers interested in political or social issues, the importance of keeping subject or issue files in women state legislators' and other political collections is paramount. For archivists focused on women's issues, these subject or issue files may be the most significant in women state legislators' papers because women legislators are frequently involved in social movements and issues related to women.

Substantial research on the topic of women in Maryland politics is lacking. No significant monographs on this topic even with regard to Maryland women's involvement in the early twentieth-century suffrage movement exist in the scholarly literature. A quick search in ProQuest's database *Dissertations and Theses* reveals that the notes and bibliographies of several dissertations in various fields related to Maryland women in politics do not take advantage of archived women state legislators' papers. Instead, most, but not all, writers relied on newspaper articles and interviews with former or current women legislators.³⁶ However, this does not necessarily indicate that scholars or other researchers do not use the women legislators' papers. The most recent long-term researcher interested in women's political collections visited the University of Maryland's Special Collections reading room in summer 2010 to uncover sources for a dissertation for his PhD in history at a major public university. He was not interested in women's history or women's studies, but instead, his research question centered on the history of urban development and planning in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C. He used a variety of political collections—not just women's legislative collections—to search for subject files related to his topic.

In addition to graduate students, undergraduates are a vital research constituency of a public academic institution. The University of Maryland's undergraduates have only used the women's political collections very selectively, mostly concentrating their efforts on historically recognized organizational archives, such as the League of Women Voters of Maryland. Not surprisingly, undergraduates most frequently use fully processed collections with clearly written, succinct online finding aids. Most important, they deal with topics readily accessible to undergraduate research, such as the early twentieth-century woman suffrage movement, women's reproductive rights, and civil rights.

The women's political collections donated within the last ten to fifteen years are requested much less frequently in the reading room or via email reference requests. One reason for this lack of interest is likely because these collections are, for the most part, unprocessed, and therefore less accessible to inexperienced researchers who may be relying on simple Google searches. These unprocessed collections are available to researchers with few limitations, they

typically have abstracts and MARC records in the online catalog, and they are listed in the online Maryland politics subject guide in our EAD online database. Nevertheless, undergraduate and most other general researchers still have difficulty accessing or interpreting them. As is typical for any archives, inexperienced researchers often do not understand exactly what they may have discovered through an online search and do not take the extra step of contacting the archives for additional assistance.

Conclusion: Women's Political Papers and the Current Political Landscape

Besides writing formal collection development policies, archivists still need to take many steps to overcome the challenges of documenting women in state politics and encouraging more frequent research use of women state legislators' papers and other women's political collections. Individual states should develop statewide collecting policies that inform and invite cooperation among state archival institutions. All archival institutions that collect state political archival materials should write formal collection development policies for state legislative papers, including specific guidelines for the collecting of women's papers. These collection policies must complement each other, or one institution in the state might be specifically designated as the official archival repository for state legislators' papers and/or for concentrating on documenting women's issues. The state of Texas, for example, "has one of the most organized, comprehensive, and explicit plans for legislators' records" in the United States.³⁷ Texas is the only state that has a systematic statewide plan to collect state legislators' papers and that considers these papers to be public records without question.³⁸ Although it may not be feasible for other states to follow the Texas model, the state archives and other large archival institutions within each state should take a leadership role in developing a state documentation policy for political collections.

In addition, archivists need to increase accessibility to women state legislators' papers and should prioritize women's political collections. Once more collections are processed and made accessible, researchers will likely take notice. Archivists also need to inform potential and experienced users that these collections exist and that they are available for research, even though they may be unprocessed. Archivists should target undergraduate and graduate classes at colleges and universities, and encourage students to understand the variety of social and political issues available for research in the collections, including topics beyond the early twentieth-century woman suffrage movement such as biotechnology, child care, displaced homemakers, divorce laws, drunk driving, women's education, the Equal Rights Amendment, and many others. Finally,

the donor of a particular collection needs to be engaged with the processing and the promotion of the collection. She can often inform the archives about new collection prospects and the current political trends within the state, and she can offer additional donor and networking opportunities for the archival institution.

Although archivists have made some significant strides over the last several decades in collecting women's collections, questions still remain. What has changed about collecting women's materials from the inception of the "new women's history" in the 1970s and 1980s? What issues are still at stake? Have women's collections, specifically women's political collections, become so widely available that they are accepted as mainstream? Mason and Zanish-Belcher discussed the 1970s and early 1980s rationale for collecting women's archives: "Women's archives were founded on the premise that women's lives and activities were not being adequately documented in traditional repositories and that women's archives turned collection development on its head in the 1970s by insisting that the papers of women be preserved and made accessible to researchers."³⁹ They discussed how "women's archives have broaden[ed] their collecting scope to include previously under-documented groups" and women with diverse backgrounds.⁴⁰ While specialized collections document women and minority groups at many archival institutions, archivists and curators still need to focus on all forms of difference, including gender, race, sexual orientation, and disability, when documenting politics. Although archival professionals may focus on a particular collecting category, group, or diversity initiative, they should never forget to consider the influences that all forms of difference have on each other and where they intersect. Moreover, while collecting traditional archival materials such as women state legislators' papers remains important, archivists should continue thinking beyond the traditional women's archive to accession materials related to underdocumented populations and grappling with lack or loss of "traditional" archival materials related to women. Several recent discussions focused on how to begin more innovative programs in collecting women's materials, especially in relation to women's participation in politics and archival activism.⁴¹ The Amsterdam Women's Archives and Library, for example, noted that "we are for instance now making extensive videotaped interviews with women who were active in the Second Wave of the women's movement. In many cases, we already have their paper archives, but the medium of film adds other dimensions. . . ."⁴² While most women do not have time, or perhaps the desire, to participate via an elected office or a "traditional" women's political organization, they contribute to the political discussion in grassroots efforts, online forums, and other "nontraditional" political landscapes. Documenting this type of political participation presents new challenges to archivists.

In the twenty-first century, the general public has certainly become more aware of women's political issues and political participation. Women politicians have made many gains over the last forty years, and women, such as Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, and Condoleezza Rice, have held positions at some of the highest levels of Congress and the executive branch. Although women running for political office are certainly more familiar to the public eye, this heightened visibility often obscures the reality of the statistics for elected women in political office and women's acceptance as political candidates and officeholders.⁴³ In a 2010 National Public Radio interview, Debbie Walsh of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University highlighted this fact by indicating that "only 17 percent of all the members of Congress right now are female. . . . Less than a quarter of all state legislatures around the country are women. Only six women currently serve as governor. So there is still a very long way to go when we think about political balance. . . . There is still a long way to go before we get political parity for women."⁴⁴ Although American women gained entrance into national politics almost a century ago (and, in some states, had access to state politics at even earlier dates), first by gaining the vote with the Nineteenth Amendment and then slowly as elected officeholders, women still have not completely entered the political mainstream or achieved equity with men in the political arena; and women continue to be the exception as political officeholders. Certainly, recent events such as the continuing "war on women," an attack by conservatives on women's reproductive and other rights, illustrate the need for documentation of women's political achievements and activism so that previous hard-won rights for women are not taken for granted. Archivists and curators need to keep these issues in mind as they endeavor to document women in politics for future generations. No matter how much more acknowledged women's history has become in the historical and other professions, historical scholarship in women's history continues to fight for legitimacy among new historical trends.⁴⁵ Although particular historiographical moments will pass, it will still be important to document women's lives.⁴⁶ Women's state legislative papers and other women's political collections will continue to have significance not only to document political movements and issues, like all political papers, but also for women's history, gender history, and the next historiographical trend.

NOTES

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- ¹ "Woman Chosen to Head Committee," *The Baltimore Sun*, January 21, 1972.
- ² "Women Gain Seat of Honor in House Battle of Sexes," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 3, 1972; "Equal Rights in the General Assembly," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 11, 1972; Gilbert A. Lewthwaite, "Woman Delegate Transcends Male Barbs," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 14, 1972.
- ³ Georgia Sorenson, "Our History," Women Legislators of the Maryland General Assembly, Inc., <http://www.womenlegislatorsmd.org/history.htm>.
- ⁴ Richard M. Cohen, "Distaff Legislators form Maryland Caucus," *The Washington Post*, March 1, 1972; "Two State Senators Snap Male Barrier," *The Washington Post*, March 8, 1972.
- ⁵ "Caucus History," Women's Policy, Inc., "The Women's Caucus," http://www.womenspolicy.org/site/PageServer?pagename=History_Accomplishments_Leadership.
- ⁶ Hereinafter "Special Collections."
- ⁷ Eva S. Mosley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" *The American Archivist* 43 (Spring 1980): 180; Susan E. Searing and Joan Ariel, "Women's Studies," in *Selection of Library Materials in Applied and Interdisciplinary Fields*, ed. Beth J. Shapiro and John Whaley (Chicago: American Library Association, 1987), 250–69. See also Kären M. Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher, "Raising Archival Consciousness: How Women's Archives Challenge Traditional Approaches to Collecting and Use, Or, What's in a Name?," *Library Trends* 56 (Fall 2007): 344–59.
- ⁸ Gerda Lerner, "Women among the Professors of History: The Story of a Process of Transformation," in *Voices of Women Historians: The Personal, The Political, The Professional*, ed. Eileen Boris and Nupur Chaudhuri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1–10; Andrea Hinding and Ames S. Bower, *Women's History Sources: A Guide to Archives and Manuscript Collections in the United States* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1979).
- ⁹ Suzanne Hildebrand, "Women's Collections Today," in *Women's Collections, Libraries, Archives, and Consciousness*, ed. Suzanne Hildebrand (New York: The Haworth Press, 1986), 1–9.
- ¹⁰ Mary Lee Tom, *Directory of Repositories Collecting Records of Women's Organizations* (Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, July 1994).
- ¹¹ Eva S. Mosley, "Sharing Archives of Women's Organizations," *SAA Newsletter*, July 1988, 9.
- ¹² Maryland General Assembly, "Chapter 582 (House Bill 1076)," *Session Laws* 78 (1972): 1571–72, Archives of Maryland Online, <http://www.msa.md.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000708/html/am708-1571.html>.
- ¹³ Mary Boccaccio, letter to Ann R. Hull, September 20, 1972, Ann R. Hull Papers collection control file, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Md.
- ¹⁴ Maryland Women's Hall of Fame, "Pauline Menes (1924–2009)," Maryland State Archives, <http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/educ/exhibits/womenshall/html/menes.html>.
- ¹⁵ Based on an informal email survey sent out to the Maryland History and Culture Collaborative (MHCC) Listserv, October 2010. The MHCC is a group of individuals and organizations from a variety of Maryland archival and historical institutions across the state interested in documenting Maryland history and culture.
- ¹⁶ The papers of Maryland State Delegate Lena K. Lee (D) can be found at the University of Maryland, School of Law, and the papers of State Delegate and Senator Rosalie Abrams (D) can be accessed at the Jewish Museum of Maryland.
- ¹⁷ Carole Gerson, "Locating Female Subjects in the Archives," in *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents*, ed. Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 7.
- ¹⁸ House Resolution 307 passed in 2008 strongly encourages members of Congress to donate their political papers to an archival institution. Only committee files and the files of select officers of Congress are considered official records to be deposited at the Center for Legislative Archives.

- For more information about HR 307, see Robin Reeder, "House Concurrent Resolution 307," *The Federalist: Newsletter of the Society for History in the Federal Government* 19 (Fall 2008): 1, 3.
- ¹⁹ Sara Roberson Kuzak, "Collection Policies at State Archives for Legislators' Papers," in *An American Political Archives Reader*, ed. Karen Dawley Paul, Glenn P. Gray, and L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), 39–50.
- ²⁰ 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): 39.
- ²¹ Paul I. Chestnut, "Appraising the Papers of State Legislators," *The American Archivist* 48 (Spring 1985): 162.
- ²² Few articles in the professional archival literature deal specifically with the challenges of documenting state legislators. They include Paul Chestnut's article and Sara Roberson Kuzak's book chapter cited previously.
- ²³ Cindy Simon Rosenthal, "Once They Get There: The Role of Gender in Legislative Careers," *Extensions: A Journal of the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center* (Spring 1995): 15.
- ²⁴ Maryland State Archives, *Maryland Manual On-line*, "Caucuses—Women Legislators of Maryland," <http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/mdmanual/07leg/html/caucus/women.html>; Department of Legislative Services, "Welcome to the Maryland General Assembly," Maryland General Assembly, <http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmgale/frmmain.aspx?pid=legisrpage&tab=subject6>, compared the current roster for the Women Legislators of Maryland to the current roster of all legislators in the Assembly.
- ²⁵ Women's Legislative Network of the NCSL, "Women in State Legislatures: 2012 Legislative Session," National Conference of State Legislatures, <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/wln/women-in-state-legislatures-for-2013.aspx>.
- ²⁶ National Foundation for Women Legislators, "Facts about Women Legislators," <http://www.womenlegislators.org/women-legislator-facts.php>.
- ²⁷ The term "selection" is used instead of "appraisal" as defined in Frank Boles, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), xiv–xv.
- ²⁸ Faye Phillips, "Developing Collecting Policies for Manuscript Collections," *The American Archivist* 47 (Winter 1984): 30–42; Faye Phillips, "Congressional Papers: Collection Development Policies," *The American Archivist* 58 (Summer 1995): 258–69; Faye Phillips, *Congressional Papers Management: Collecting Appraising, Arranging and Describing Documentation of United State Senators, Representatives, Related Individuals, and Organizations* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1996), 8–18. Two articles touch on collection development for state legislators' papers: Chestnut, "Appraising the Papers of State Legislators" and Kuzak, "Collection Policies at State Archives."
- ²⁹ Center for American Women and Politics, "Women State Legislators: Past, Present, and Future," Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2001, 6–7, <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/research/topics/documents/StLeg2001Report.pdf>.
- ³⁰ Lauren R. Brown, "Present at the Tenth Hour: Appraising and Accessioning the Papers of Congresswoman Marjorie S. Holt," *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship* 2 (Fall 1987): 96–7.
- ³¹ Faye Phillips, "Developing Collecting Policies," 42.
- ³² Chestnut, "Appraising the Papers," 162.
- ³³ Elsa Barkley Brown, "What Has Happened Here: The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 300.
- ³⁴ Angela L. DiVeglia, "Accessibility, Accountability, and Activism: Models for LGBT Archives," in *Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the 21st Century*, ed. Lyz Bly and Kelly Wooten (Litwin Books: Los Angeles, 2012), 67–88.
- ³⁵ Mason and Zanish-Belcher, "A Room of One's Own," 37–54.
- ³⁶ Examples of these theses and dissertations include Mary Stoddard Lewis, "Women Legislators of Maryland, 1921–1977" (master's thesis, Salisbury State College, 1979); Jane Whitehouse Cohen, "Women's Political Power in Maryland, 1920–1964" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1993); Diane Weaver, "Maryland Women and the Transformation of Politics, 1890s–1930" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1992); Kathy Postel Kretman, "The Impact of Women's Legislative Caucuses on Public Policy: A Case Study of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues and the Women Legislators of Maryland" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park,

- 1995); Judith Ann McCormick Higgins, "Finding Our Way: Women's Lived Experiences Leading to the Legislatures of Pennsylvania and Maryland" (D.Ed diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2005); Nadia Elizabeth Brown, "The Intersection of Race and Gender on Representation: Black Women Legislators' Impact on Legislation" (PhD diss., Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, 2010).
- ³⁷ Kuzak, "Collection Policies at State Archives," 46.
- ³⁸ Kuzak, "Collection Policies at State Archives," 47.
- ³⁹ Mason and Zanish-Belcher, "Raising Archival Consciousness," 344.
- ⁴⁰ Mason and Zanish-Belcher, "Raising Archival Consciousness," 344.
- ⁴¹ Society of American Archivists Conference, Session 410, "Beyond the Ivory Tower: Archival Collaboration, Community Partnerships, and Access Issues in Building Women's Collections (Washington, D.C., 2010); Joanne L. Goodwin, "Revealing New Narratives of Women in Las Vegas," in *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 177–91 Bly and Wooten, eds., *Sometimes You Have to Make Your Own History* Tanya Zanish-Belcher and Anke Voss, eds., *Perspectives on Women's Archives: A Reader* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, forthcoming 2013).
- ⁴² Saskia E. Wieringa, "The (Sexual) Revolution of the Amsterdam Women's Archives and Library," in *Traveling Heritages: New Perspectives on Collecting, Preserving and Sharing Women's History*, ed. Saskia E. Wieringa (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008), 12.
- ⁴³ For a discussion of issues of sexism and racism during the 2008 presidential campaign and recent politics in general, see Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Johnnetta B. Cole, eds., *Who Should Be First?: Feminists Speak Out on the 2008 Presidential Campaign* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010).
- ⁴⁴ Debbie Walsh, director, Center for Women in Politics, interview by Mary Louise Kelly, "Electable GOP Females Lag Democratic Counterparts," NPR, *Morning Edition*, October 27, 2010, transcript, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130851845>.
- ⁴⁵ Alice Kessler-Harris, "Do We Still Need Women's History?," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 54, December 7, 2007.
- ⁴⁶ Joanne Meyerowitz, "A History of 'Gender,'" *American Historical Review* 113 (December 2008): 1353.

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