During the summer of 1943, Radcliffe College received a stunning gift from Maud Wood Park, Class of 1898: the Woman’s Rights Collection. Active in the drive for women’s suffrage during her college days, Park had dedicated her life to the cause, enduring loss and failure many times over the long, difficult years. As she organized new movement groups in Massachusetts and beyond, she documented the fight, amassing boxes of letters, hundreds of books and periodicals, and a dense social network of battle-hardened veterans who wanted to be sure their stories could be told long after the 19th Amendment was ratified, on August 26, 1920.

Radcliffe dedicated the Woman’s Rights Collection in August 1943, on the 23rd anniversary of that landmark moment. War raged around the globe; the Axis powers controlled much of the Pacific and all of continental Europe. The Radcliffe librarian, Georgiana Hinckley, described the challenges of the College library’s “second full year under wartime conditions”: budgets stretched to breaking, “an unprecedented turnover in personnel,” and the compounding effects of deferred maintenance on the physical plant. (There were unintended benefits, too: the war had lessened Harvard men’s demands on Widener, and Radcliffe women found themselves with new library privileges.) Despite the press of war, a fireproof room was readied in Longfellow Hall to house Maud Wood Park’s gift.

A line from a famous 1773 letter by Abigail Adams labeled the space: Remember the Ladies.

A photograph in the Radcliffe Archives documents the ceremony that marked the collection’s founding (see facing page). Three young women, tricked out in smart suits and dresses of suffrage white, their legs covered with the thick stockings that wartime rationing demanded, pull the wagon from which Park and her suffrage sisters had once sold The Woman’s Journal, for a nickel a copy. Four more ride in the wagon, its flat surfaces crudely painted with movement slogans: “8,000,000 WORKING WOMEN NEED THE VOTE FOR EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK AND ALL-LABOR LEGISLATION.” “90% OF THE TEACHERS ARE WOMEN. THE NATION NEEDS INTELLIGENT VOTERS.” “GIVE THE VOTE TO ALL CLASSES OF WOMEN.” As they pull the wagon up to Longfellow Hall, the daughters of the movement lean forward into their burden, as if into the future.

That day in Cambridge in 1943 marked the beginnings of the Schlesinger Library, which turns 75 in 2018: an anniversary layered on an anniversary. Park’s founding collection of 30 boxes of manuscripts, 142 books, 128 volumes of The Woman’s Journal and other magazines, and “much miscellaneous material” seeded an archive whose scale and depth she can scarcely have imagined. More than 4,000 manuscript collections fill three fireproof vaults, with other material held securely offsite. A soaring, sun-filled reading room enhances the work of our researchers; upcoming renovations to our historic main building will unlock fresh ways to teach and learn from these important collections.

A broad range of scholarly and public programming throughout the 2018 calendar year will commemorate the Schlesinger’s first three-quarters of a century and look ahead to the next. We’ll relish the moment in the founders’ shadow and in their honor. There will be cake.

But there must be reckoning, as well. Too many of the slogans on the suffrage wagon still have force today. The Schlesinger’s collections give depth and context to those demands, radical now as then. Remembering the ladies is necessary, but hardly sufficient. There is work to be done.

—Jane Kamensky
Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director
Professor, Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Monthly through April  
2017–2018 Schlesinger Library 
Film Series 
Feminism and the Fairy Tale 

This seven-part film series—curated by Katie Kohn, a doctoral candidate in film and visual studies in the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences—explores the illuminating, alluring, provocative, polarizing, and playful pas de deux that is currently unfolding between feminism and the fairy tale in contemporary cinema. 

For movies and showtimes, visit www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/calendar/list.

February 5, 2018–fall 2019 
Exhibition 
“75 Stories, 75 Years: Documenting the Lives of American Women at the Schlesinger Library”

Items featured in the 75th anniversary exhibit highlight the broad scope of the library’s collections and the many types of materials (digital data and zines, for example, as well as books and manuscripts) found in its holdings. Each one tells a story about women’s lives: There is the 1803 bill of sale transferring ownership of a 23-year-old slave woman named Thankfull from John Youle to a tanner in New York City. The neck-to-ankle Radcliffe College gym suit from the early 1900s is made from yards of itchy black wool. Tiny vials of desiccated vaccine tell the story of young women who joined the Peace Corps in the 1960s and found themselves in Afghanistan in the vanguard of the effort to end the scourge of smallpox.

February 22, 2018 
Panel Discussion 
“The Difficult Miracle”: The Living Legacy of June Jordan

Mariame Kaba, founder and director, Project NIA
Imani Perry, Hughes-Rogers Professor of African American Studies, Princeton University
Solmaz Sharif, poet; lecturer, Creative Writing Program, Stanford University

Moderated by Joshua Bennett, director, June Jordan Fellowship Program, Center for Justice at Columbia University; 2016–2019 junior fellow, Society of Fellows, Harvard University

In celebration of the 15th anniversary of the arrival of the Papers of June Jordan and the 75th anniversary of the library’s founding, scholars, poets, and activists will explore Jordan’s work.
Everyday History

How one teacher is using the Schlesinger collections to personalize American history

Every day, the first five minutes of Marlin Kann’s class at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School are devoted to journaling. That may not seem particularly unorthodox—until you consider that he teaches the school’s Advanced Placement US history course.

The journaling exercise is one of the many ideas that took shape during the six weeks that Kann spent in the Pforzheimer Reading Room this past summer, after winning a Research Support Grant from the Schlesinger Library for a project to rethink the canon of US history document readers. “From my perspective, sometimes these document readers reinforce that history is of a certain group: of the elite, of white men,” he says. “I wanted to swap it out for stuff that was more equitable in its representation of who takes part in history.”

Once he started going through the sources, however, Kann had an epiphany: choosing new, more representative readers would simply be leading his students in his own chosen direction, which posed a new problem. “I was also not doing service...
to the documents themselves or to the people who created them—to these agents of history,” he says. He had to shift his focus.

As Kann looked around the reading room, he saw professional historians doing their own research—and, he says, “it looked a lot different from what happens inside a history classroom.”

Kann decided to connect his students with history through the photo albums, cartoons, magazines, letters, and journals found in the archives, each more powerful than the last. The prisoners of war whose private accounts made their way into the library’s collections didn’t think of themselves as making history, but their writings are an invaluable resource to researchers today. He sees his own students’ journals—which he does not read—as a potential resource for historians of the future. He wants the students to recognize that they’re making history every day. “It’s important for students to see that,” says Kann. “It gives them more agency to know that they’re not just microbes in this world, to know that their lives matter.”

“It’s important for students . . . to know that their lives matter.”

After his weeks in the Schlesinger, Kann—who earned a master’s in history from Florida International University—created the Schlesinger Miniature Archive, which allows students to explore history in a manner that more accurately represents how historians do their work. He began by thinking about time periods in American history and themes evident during those times; then he identified historical examples that would allow the students to relate to those themes. He scanned hundreds of illustrative documents from the library’s collections—all of which are available to his students through Google Classroom. “They can experience an abbreviated version of what it’s like to sit in the reading room and do history,” he says.

Kann’s mini-archive is minimally processed, he says, but it’s still curated. As he built it, he selected items that from his perspective provide “the most potent representation of themes, trends, or human agency.” He strove to strike a balance between a sense of grand scale and the personal high stakes of history, all while promoting skill-based learning goals. “One of the skills I’m working on developing is how to extract and apply material,” says Kann. “It’s exciting to just let them explore the archive—it doesn’t matter where they go with it, because it’s all real and relevant to what we’re talking about in class.”

—Ivelisse Estrada
Senior Writer

SCHLESINGER AWARDS MORE THAN $80,000 IN GRANTS

Black feminism and the women’s liberation movement. Transgender archives. American women’s history in the high school classroom.

These are a few of the many topics students and scholars will examine as they travel across campus and from around the world to use the collections at the Schlesinger Library. The library provided nearly 30 subsidies in 2017—for undergraduate fellowships, dissertation grants, oral history projects, and other research.

“We live in an era of profound social and political change,” says Jane Kamensky, the Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director of the Schlesinger Library. “These scholars and the diversity of the projects they are undertaking underscore how important it is to look into our history in order to understand the present and shape the future.”

For a full list of recipients, visit bit.ly/2017SchlesGrants.

UNBOXING HISTORY

In order to demystify archival work for his students, Marlin Kann shot simple, soundless videos as he opened dozens of archival boxes. “What does the box look like?” he muses. “What does the next step look like? And here you are with what look like normal folders, but inside those folders is where you start finding some magical items.” He hopes the videos, inspired by the “unboxing” trend on YouTube, will help familiarize students with the research process. To celebrate his efforts and build on his work, Radcliffe will release some of these videos in 2018, in a series called History Unboxed.
Writing from the Library

Scholars continue to flock to the Schlesinger to conduct research for their projects. Here we highlight three recently published books that relied in part on the library’s holdings.

**Christoph Keller and Jan Heller Levi, editors**

*We’re On: A June Jordan Reader*  
(Alice James Books, 2017)

Christoph Keller and Jan Heller Levi gathered public and private writing by June Jordan to give a sense of the poet, essayist, and activist and the impact she had during her 40-year career. In addition to the poetry, unpublished writing, speeches, and letters mined by the editors, the Papers of June Jordan at the Schlesinger Library include photographs, audio, video, and more.

*Said Publishers Weekly* in a starred review: “Jordan begs us to trust one another and to tell the truth, to read the world more closely, to learn the wisdom of those who came before, who resisted before, and loved before. She laid a foundation, leaving a revolutionary blueprint for poetry to transform our lives beyond the white gaze and its literary imagination. . . . This book is not just a collection of figurative words; it is a tool for liberation.”

Keller is a novelist and a playwright, and Levi is a poet and a professor of English at Hunter College.

**Jessica M. Frazier**

*Women’s Antiwar Diplomacy during the Vietnam War Era*  
(University of North Carolina Press, 2017)


A 2011–2012 recipient of a Schlesinger Library Dissertation Grant, Frazier is now an assistant professor of history at the University of Rhode Island whose research interests include transnational social movements, diplomacy, and race. She consulted several collections during the course of her research for this book, including the papers of the activists Charlotte Bunch, Florence Luscomb, and Nancy Grey Osterud ’71; the author and activist Barbara Deming; and the economist Helen Boyden Lamb ’28, PhD ’43.

**Karissa Haugeberg**

*Women against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the Twentieth Century*  
(University of Illinois Press, 2017)

Karissa Haugeberg looks at antiabortion activism from the 1960s through the 1990s for this social history of the movement. At the Schlesinger, she researched the Papers of Mildred Jefferson, a surgeon and right-to-life activist who in 1951 also became the first African American woman to graduate from Harvard Medical School.

The book earned reviews in the *New Yorker* and the *Times Literary Supplement*. “Some of the most vociferous and effective opponents of abortion have been women, and Haugeberg focuses on them,” said the *New York Review of Books*, which called the book “excellent” and put it on that issue's cover. “Through their eyes we see what moved them, and through their activities, the increasing violence of the movement.”

Haugeberg is an assistant professor of history at Tulane University, where she also edits the Newcomb College Institute’s *Journal for Research on Women and Gender*. 
ADD SUFFRAGISTS AND STIR: REFLECTIONS ON A CROWD-SOURCED BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

Despite generations of scholarship on the suffrage movement, no large-scale, longitudinal study of its “ordinary” adherents exists. In 2015, the digital archive Women and Social Movements in the United States (WASM) announced a new, crowd-sourced initiative: to trace the lives of the grassroots militant activists of the National Woman’s Party (NWP), whose spectacular tactics kept women’s suffrage in the headlines even during World War I. To tackle such a daunting task, the directors invited faculty members across the United States to mentor their students in researching and writing brief biographical sketches, which WASM would publish with author credit.

I decided to participate and found great interest among the undergraduate and graduate students at Simmons College. The volunteer Suffragist Research Brigade (as we decided to call ourselves) ranged from an undergraduate computer science major to candidates for master’s degrees in history. I later integrated the project into a women’s and gender studies class on the history of feminism.

When WASM pushed to crowd source biographies of local National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) leaders, Simmons signed on again. Over the past three years, almost 30 of my students have engaged in the project. Whether as a course assignment or as an extracurricular endeavor, the work beautifully fulfilled my hopes of introducing students to the importance of archival research and the challenges it poses for women’s historians.

Naturally, we based our endeavors at the Schlesinger Library. Although we searched widely for sources, from local historical societies to Google Books, none proved as rich as the women’s rights publications and manuscripts at the Schlesinger. The Schlesinger even made available to us the unprocessed papers of the suffragist Betty Gram Swing; these offered an opportunity to illuminate what archivists do to render a collection accessible. To help peers farther away benefit from the Schlesinger’s collections, we volunteered to be liaisons for students at St. Anselm College and the University of South Dakota who are participating in the same overarching project.

We quickly realized the importance of both creativity and rigor in tracing rank-and-file suffragists. We persevered in the face of common names and married names, such as “Mrs. H. Turner.” Misspellings in the records plagued our progress. Corroboration of facts was essential, if elusive at times. For instance, many newspapers covered the suffrage protest on Boston Common in February 1919, but their accounts disagreed about exactly who was arrested there. We all gained valuable experience in research—especially in how to work with (and around) the silences that are particular to women’s lives. We stirred new suffragists into the pot and let it simmer.

Gradually and unexpectedly, the project became more than the sum of its ingredients. We thought the militants would be young, white, and privileged, like the NWP leaders Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, Doris Stevens, and Inez Haynes Irwin. None of the individuals on our lists were women of color; indeed, in recognition of the racial exclusions of the NWP and NAWSA, WASM has a separate crowd-sourced project to research African American suffragists.

Although we searched widely for sources, . . . none proved as rich as the women’s rights publications and manuscripts at the Schlesinger.

Eleanor Calnan, researched by Anna Faherty, a graduate student in history and archives, turned out to be a 45-year-old dressmaker. Calnan had left NAWSA because she found its members “too conservative in their methods.” Camilla Whitcomb, researched by my undergraduate student Kassie King, was the daughter of a machinist. At age 57, Whitcomb spent months jailed in the Occoquan workhouse with other militant suffragists. In fact, she shared a cell with 24-year-old Betty Gram Swing and the two became fast friends.

Activists like these have often remained invisible because their biographies are difficult to reconstruct. They become visible only after intense, collaborative research on their lives. Our greatest disappointment was the inability to trace Betty Connolly, identified by newspapers as a domestic servant. Although newspapers named and photographed Connolly, we could not reconstruct the basic facts of her life. We nevertheless wrote a biographical entry for her. We wanted to acknowledge the gaps in the record while recognizing Connolly for being in the movement. And from our starting point, other researchers may be able to renew the search.

Projects like this one demonstrate the great value of collaborations, between faculty members and students, between researchers and archivists, and across institutions. The process taught as much as the product did, revealing the power and limits of written sources and the continuing importance of reconstructing women’s ordinary lives.

—Laura R. Prieto
Professor, History/Women’s and Gender Studies,
Simmons College
Above and at right, some selections pulled from the four cartons of baby books, dating from the 1890s to the 1950s, recently acquired by the Schlesinger Library.

PHOTOS BY KEVIN GRADY/RADCLIFFE INSTITUTE
THE LIBRARY'S BABY BOOKS

Vintage baby books—whether issued by companies and hospitals or intended as heirlooms—reveal important details about their time.

*Baby's Days and Baby's Ways, When You Were Very Small, All About Me, The New Baby's Biography:* These are just a few titles in a recently acquired collection of more than 140 baby books published from the 1890s to the 1950s. Some are slim booklets distributed by companies such as Metropolitan Life Insurance, Borden’s Eagle Brand, and Carnation; some were gifts to new parents from hospitals and Catholic congregations; some are thick tomes beautifully bound in silk with slipcases and stunning illustrations. A few are filled out in detail and include locks of hair and sweet photographs, but most are brand-new. Like the other baby books in the library’s collections—among them those of Amelia Earhart and the poet and activist June Jordan—these books reflect in their text, images, and fill-in-the-blanks what was important in the culture at the time: name, height, and weight always, but also mothers (the only adults depicted are the nurturing mothers who will write in the books), gifts, solid food, and “first short pants.” A 1926 baby book put out by the Chicago commissioner of health ends with the “Ten Commandments for the Mother.” Number 1: “Thou shalt not spoil the baby by humoring him.”

—Kathryn Allamong Jacob
Johanna-Maria Fraenkel Curator of Manuscripts at the Schlesinger Library
Calling All Cryptologists!

We’re reproducing the mystery messages here in the hope that someone in our readership will be able to decode them.

Long before Cynthia Anthonsen Foster became a civil rights, peace, and social activist, she was a teenage girl living in Ashby, Massachusetts. Deeply embedded in one of the 68 boxes of papers she started donating to the Schlesinger in 1986—among love letters sent to her by her high school sweetheart, Kenneth R. Miller, in 1921—is a curious find: three notes written in a code that no one at the library has been able to break.

We’re reproducing the mystery messages here in the hope that someone in our readership will be able to decode them.

Do you have a lead for us?
E-mail cara_raskin@radcliffe.harvard.edu.

And what of Cynthia and Kenneth’s romance? After a passionate period, their relationship transitioned into a friendship, and the collection includes 60 years of correspondence between them.
The historian Beverly Palmer, whose most recent work is on Lucretia Mott (who helped write the Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls in July 1848), is confident that the figures here do not depict “real” women: not Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or any of the other women in attendance. “Taking an airing,” Elyse Moore of Historic Deerfield points out, denoted a pleasant perambulation. The mercurial and chaotic outing of these women’s rights advocates is, of course, the very opposite of leisurely. Moore also wonders whether the four horsewomen could be a play on the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, whose appearance will herald the End of Days.

Robin Bledsoe, of Robin Bledsoe Bookseller (ABAA), in Cambridge, which specializes in equestrian books and ephemera, notes that in 1848 it was very unusual—and slightly scandalous—to portray women riding astride instead of sidesaddle and explains much about both horses and riders. The young woman in the left foreground, for example, seems to have her act together but does not—her horse’s head betrays its resistance. She strikes a very masculine, military pose and seems almost prim in her collared dress—but her skirt is hitched up to reveal quite a bit of booted leg, which is anything but. Her odd, helmetlike hat is actually a jockey’s cap, not unheard of on a woman but definitely masculine.

The woman in the center is completely undone. Her horse has stolen her bonnet, whose style suggests she might be a country woman, and her comb has come loose from her hair. Her skirt, too, is hiked up, revealing her ankles and tiny feet. The woman on the right is holding on for dear life to a galloping mount, probably a horse meant for pulling a cart rather than carrying a rider (you can tell by its clipped mane and cropped tail). If she had a hat, it has blown away. Her hair is a mess, her dress is billowing behind her, and she’s showing not just foot, ankle, and calf but knee. The woman riding away astride her horse is wearing a proper hat and riding outfit, although she, too, is showing some leg. Do the whips held by two of the women suggest anything? Probably not. While these were more often stiff and straight rather than bent and floppy in prints of the era, whips with dangling “ticklers” weren’t uncommon.

It’s clearer than ever that the artist James Baillie meant to do the women who attended the Woman’s Rights Convention no favors. We appreciate all the help with decoding the digs in his drawing and suggestions about the bigger picture. The door is always open for more ideas. If you have one, or if you’ve seen this print before (we really, really hope not!), please e-mail kjacob@radcliffe.harvard.edu.

—Kathryn Allamong Jacob
Johanna-Maria Fränkel Curator of Manuscripts at the Schlesinger Library
Adele Murry had plenty of time to write letters while living in Bangor, Maine, in 1860. But letter writing may not have been what she preferred to do. “I have often thought of what you wrote about the entertainments that the people of color [have] in Hartford,” she told a friend, 24-year-old Rebecca Primus, the eldest child of an African American family well established in Connecticut’s capital. Murry envied Primus her membership in several sewing and reading circles. She herself didn’t belong to any and never had. In Murry’s day, Bangor was a thriving lumber port and shipbuilding boomtown, but, she complained, there were “so few people of color . . . that no such pleasures [were] afforded.”
At an auction this past March at Swann Galleries, in Manhattan, the Schlesinger Library acquired a rich cache of correspondence written to Primus (1836–1934) by Murry and other friends as well as by family members. This collection of 41 handwritten missives presents only one side of each conversation. To learn the whole story, research will have to be done and interpretations made. But even without that scholarship, these newly discovered pages are a treasure. A rarity in the realm of historical documents, which invariably favor the doings of privileged white men, they are a record of ordinary life as lived by young, educated, middle-class African American women from pre–Civil War days through Reconstruction.

In 1999, the Columbia University professor Farah Jasmine Griffin published Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends: Letters from Rebecca Primus of Royal Oak, Maryland, and Addie Brown of Hartford, Connecticut, 1854–1868 (Knopf), a study based on letters at the Connecticut Historical Society written by Primus to her family (including her cat, Little Jim), along with ones to Primus by Brown, a domestic servant. Primus and Brown had an erotic relationship. An 1857 letter by Eliza of Springfield, Massachusetts, which came as part of the Schlesinger’s new acquisition, provides evidence of another Primus relationship that was at least romantic. “I feel so lonesome without you,” Eliza writes, asking Primus for a portrait, just a small one, since “you know begers [sic] must not be choosers.” In a while, Eliza writes again, forlornly: “I have not received no letter from you. I have dreamt about you every night since you been gone.”

Eliza reports that “Fred Douglass” will lecture in Springfield “on the signs of the times in view of the Dred Scott decision.” The US Supreme Court had handed down its judgment three weeks earlier. Eliza’s mention of current events is anomalous content for this batch of letters. The Civil War itself is given short shrift: One correspondent does mention the Union’s first official all–African American unit, the “poor soldiers” of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, remarking that “richly have they earned the encomiums of the Old Bay State.” Another describes a “dreadful riot” in Jersey City in August 1863, during which gangs “sallied forth in quest of colored people threatening to hang all they found.” Undoubtedly a draft riot, it prompted the terrified correspondent, her landlady, and her family to find refuge with “some of our white friends in the neighborhood.” More commonly, the writers are caught up in exchanges about their personal joys and sorrows, but that is precisely where the value here lies.

Primus was trained as a teacher. In 1865, when she was 29, the racially integrated Hartford Freedman’s Aid Society sent her to Maryland to establish a school. While living and working in the Eastern Shore community of Royal Oak, she formed a network through the postal service with women who had been sent elsewhere in the upper South as part of this experimental enterprise, bringing literacy to formerly enslaved people. “Dear Friend & Fellow Laborer,” one of them writes Primus. “How are the whites in your town, friendly toward the colored people? Isn’t that Trappe [Maryland] a horrid place? It seems no teacher can remain any length of time there. I [heard] there have been four teachers there since I left.” Another wonders if her school will close, since it is so poorly attended. “The children come on slow learning their pieces [sic], and I myself do not feel as much interest in the affair as I should, I will have to spur up and be more energetic or it will be a sad failure.”

A correspondent who signs herself “Josephine” was, like Primus, originally from Hartford and sent to teach in a community on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. She is Josephine Booth, identified in Beloved Sisters. Booth writes Primus in 1869 about how the religious revival sweeping the country has adversely affected students: “They go to the meetings at night, can’t study during the day.” The most philosophical of the Primus pen pals represented here, Booth tells Primus on another occasion, “It takes time to do anything well and especially in this thing called civilization.”

Swann Galleries is not at liberty to reveal the consignor of these letters, whose stamped and postmarked envelopes, with intriguing scribblings on their backs, were intact. So we do not know where they came from or—thrilling idea—whether more are forthcoming. Wyatt Houston Day, in 1996 the founding organizer of the auction house’s Printed & Manuscript African Americana department, could say only this: “Things turn up in the most unlikely places. So much [African American history and its artifacts] got ignored, covered up, lost, forgotten, or destroyed. There were sins of commission and omission. You have things just squirreled away.” Day—whose aunt, incidentally, was the activist Dorothy Day—said one of his original hopes for the department was to establish a market and prices for this material. “And prices are important, because they’re an incentive for people to preserve things.” His other hope was “that it would coax stuff out of attics and basements and dresser drawers, which it has most effectively done.”

— Jeanne Schinto

Schinto has been an independent writer since 1973. Since 2003, she has been reporting on auctions and trends in the antiques trade for Maine Antique Digest. Her papers are housed at the Schlesinger Library.
The Path of the Archivist

JEHAN SINCLAIR
Growing up in Florida, the daughter of an aeronautical engineer (her father) and human resources professional (her mother), Jehan Sinclair was encouraged to pursue a career as a doctor or a lawyer. “My parents didn’t consider the humanities a career path,” she says. But that’s the trail she began to follow.

Throughout middle and high school, Sinclair discovered many African American writers—including Zora Neale Hurston—whose depictions of folk life and black communities entranced her. “I really enjoyed literature and initially wanted to be an English teacher or a writer,” she says.

At New College of Florida, in Sarasota, Sinclair majored in anthropology—not realizing at first that her favorite author, Hurston, had also been an anthropologist. During this time, she became fascinated with historical archaeology and material culture. “I was interested in the way objects can tell a story about our history,” she says. Sinclair set her sights on becoming a museum curator—until, that is, she learned about library and information science and archives. “The idea of making information and history more accessible to people in libraries appealed to me,” she says.

When she shopped around for graduate schools, Sinclair discovered Simmons College and its master’s program in library and information science. “I could have taken classes online,” she says, “but I figured now was the perfect time to experience a different area.” That was in 2014.

At Simmons, she learned about the Schlesinger Library’s vast archives pertaining to women’s history and knew she wanted to learn more about them. She landed a job at the library as a part-time cataloging assistant. Then, in September 2016, she began working there full time on a three-year appointment, during which she holds two fellowships: one from Harvard’s Administrative Fellowship Program, which attracts talented professionals, especially from historically underrepresented groups, to leadership opportunities and careers in higher education; and a HistoryMakers fellowship. The latter is a collaboration among three libraries—Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library; Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library; and the Schlesinger—to provide support for three archivists working on African American archives across the country.

In her three-year appointment is up, Sinclair hopes to stay on at the Schlesinger. “I love working here,” she says. “I get to work with amazing collections.”

—Pat Harrison
Publications Manager

African American Collections Processed by Jehan Sinclair

Papers of Gwendolyn C. Baker: educator, professor, activist, and nonprofit executive known for developing the concept of multicultural education
Papers of Robin W. Kilson: professor, historian, and former Bunting fellow who organized the first conference for black women professors and scholars, titled “Black Women in the Academy: Defending Our Name, 1894–1994”
Papers of Linda A. Davis Watters: business executive, expert on insurance regulatory issues, and former CEO of Detroit Commerce Bank
Papers of Cleo F. Haley: convention secretary for the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs
Papers of Beatrice Jeanette Whiting: Virginia native and lifelong schoolteacher
Biographical Files of the Black Women Oral History Project: additional biographical information about women interviewed for the Schlesinger Library’s Black Women Oral History Project
Papers of Hortense Carter Saxon: servant, housekeeper, and Harlem resident who worked in New York and Connecticut during the 1920s to support her family
Papers of Deborah Wolfe: educator, minister, and education chief for the United States House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor from 1962 to 1965

“I was interested in the way objects can tell a story about our history.”
Altered Gazes

On view at the Schlesinger Library through January 19, 2018

Altered Gazes foregrounds women as creators and consumers of countercultural content. The works presented in the exhibition offer a response both to mainstream society and to the male-dominated countercultural spaces in which they were created.