

## Organizing and Digitizing the Lesbian-Feminist Archive in Los Angeles

### PAPERS OF THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WOMEN FOR UNDERSTANDING AND OF CONNEXUS/CENTRO DE MUJERES

Over the past seven months, I have been processing the operational records of Southern California Women for Understanding (SCWU) and Connexus/Centro de Mujeres, two significant lesbian nonprofit organizations in Los Angeles history. These two key collections from the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives reveal the evolution of lesbian visibility and activism in Los Angeles from the 1970s through the 1990s.

A group of middle-class professional lesbians founded SCWU in 1976 as the explicitly lesbian organ of the Whitman-Radclyffe Foundation, a gay rights nonprofit organization. SCWU later gained its own nonprofit status and declared itself an

educational organization dedicated to "enhancing the quality of life for our community and for lesbians nationwide, creative and positive exchange about homosexuality, changing stereotypical images of lesbians." While originally based in Los Angeles, SCWU grew beyond Southern California and formed chapters in the Ventura/Santa Barbara area, Santa Maria, the San Gabriel Valley, the Inland Empire, the San Fernando Valley, San Diego and Orange County. Its membership consisted primarily of professionally successful upper-middle-class lesbians. At its height, SCWU reached membership of 1,100. In 1982, *Lesbian News* hailed SCWU as the "largest lesbian support group in the country."

The materials in the SCWU collection reflect the broad base of the organization's operations. The collection includes newsletters, galley proofs,

calendars, flyers and other documents from the various organizational chapters, board meeting agendas and minutes, as well as administrative records from the central unit of the organization. The collection also contains audio recordings of board meetings and video recordings of SCWU events, such as its stage production "Welcome to Our Lesbian World." Because of the archival foresight of June Mazer, the organization's historian and one of the newsletter editors, the early years of the organization are well documented through binders of documents and photos that were meticulously organized, labeled and annotated. The collection also features survey research data for the study on Los Angeles lesbians, photographs from notable events such as SCWU's Myra Riddell and eleven other gay and lesbian activ-

ists' invitational trip to the White House by Midge Costanza, Special Assistant to the President for Community Affairs, and the programs from the annual Lesbian Rights Awards Dinner which honored luminary artists, writers, musicians, and activists such as Charlotte Bunch, Elsa Gidlow, Gloria Anzaldua, and Cherrie Moraga.

Connexus/Centro de Mujeres originated as an organization under the nonprofit auspices of SCWU in 1985. Founders Adel Martinez and Lauren Jardine envisioned Connexus as a space where lesbian women could thrive professionally, privately, and personally through programming and through such services as referrals, support groups, the Connexus Business and Professional Women's Alliance (called the Alliance), the West Coast Lesbian Collection/Mazer Lesbian Archive, counseling/therapy services, workshops, social events, and a coffeehouse. Unlike SCWU, they strove to cater to lesbian women of all social classes and not just those who were upwardly mobile; one of their most prominent programs was Con-

nexus East, a satellite center in East Los Angeles that catered to Latina lesbians. Decreased funding caused Connexus to close its doors in 1990, but the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives and Connexus East remained in operation.

The materials in the Connexus collection include organizational policies and by-laws, board meeting agendas and minutes, newsletters, event flyers and planning information, fundraising and financial records, administrative records, press releases, correspondence, photographs and documentation related to various Connexus programs. The organization's publicity binders of newsletters, press clippings, flyers, and press releases provide a comprehensive timeline and overview of the organization's operations and political and educational direction at distinct historical moments. The subject files as a subset of the administrative records provide insight to the breadth of projects, campaigns and cross-organizational collaboration of which Connexus was a part.

Through this project funded by the UCLA Center for Community Partnerships, both collections will soon have detailed keyword-searchable finding aids available online through UCLA and the Online Archive of California. A select amount of materials will also be available digitally for online perusal. It is hoped that the increased access to such valuable will enrich future scholarship and our historical understanding of the complex dynamics of lesbian experiences in Los Angeles.

– T-KAY SANGWAND

#### LILLIAN FADERMAN PAPERS AND MARGARET CRUIKSHANK PAPERS

My responsibilities have included primary archival functions such as re-foldering and transferring materials to acid-free folders, re-housing collections in acid-free containers, preservation photocopying of fragile documents, removing destructive fasteners from print-based materials and transferring audio cassette tape recordings to more stable formats.

I have also been responsible for the documentation of associated descriptive information and the preparation of finding aids.

Since I began working on this project, I have successfully completed the arrangement, description, processing, preparation of finding aids and the preservation of two collections: the Lillian Faderman Papers (1976-1989) and the Margaret Cruikshank Papers (1971-1986). As of this writing, the processing of a third collection, the Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) Collection (1974-1986), is close to completion.

The Faderman and Cruikshank collection consist mainly of print-based materials (including correspondence, newspaper clippings, drafts of published and unpublished writings, manuscript drafts and galley proofs and publicity materials). Particular strengths of both collections are the pioneering and often fleeting lesbian, gay and lesbian-feminist periodicals of the 1970s.

A highlight of the Faderman papers is the extensive correspondence with publishers and agents concerning the editorial process for three

of Faderman's books: *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981); *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (1991) and *Chloe Plus Olivia* (1994). There is also a 1981 interview with Barbara Gittings, an early pioneer lesbian activist, for *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*.

Cruikshank has edited three major anthologies on lesbians: *Lesbian Path* (1980, 1985); *Lesbian Studies* (1982) and *New Lesbian Writing* (1984). In her papers, Cruikshank explains the three anthologies, their genesis and their inclusions. A highlight of this collection is the course syllabi, readings and bibliographies for women's studies and lesbian studies courses taught by Cruikshank at City College of San Francisco (CCSF) where she helped incorporate lesbian and gay studies into the curriculum. There is also an extensive private correspondence (subject to special access restrictions). The Faderman and Cruikshank collections as a whole will allow researchers to study these pioneering lesbian scholars, and the development of both lesbian and women's studies, and lesbian and women's publishing

The WAVAW collection is a mixture of print-

based materials, ephemera and audio-visual materials relating to WAVAW, which played a pivotal role in the late-1970s in bringing national attention to the relationship between media violence and actual violence against women. Of note are the national newsletters and memoranda generated by the Los Angeles chapter for national chapter distribution which detail the formation of the organization in the late 1970s and its activities over the course of several years. The collection as a whole will allow researchers to study the organizational function and history of WAVAW, most notably its major three-year campaign against Warner Communications, Inc.

– JANINE LIEBERT