

Z E N I T H,



TRANSFORMING
SMITH COLLEGE
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Access to Collections Project
2018–2021





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As a steward of historical materials of enduring value, SMITH COLLEGE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS—housed within the Smith College Libraries—fosters inquiry, critical thinking, and knowledge building through an active engagement with the past and a focus on the future.

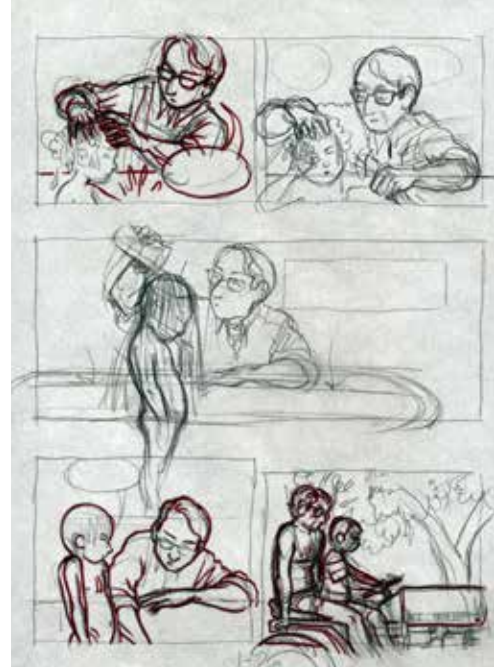
OUR VISION

Special Collections envisions itself as a liberal arts laboratory: a place for imagination, active experimentation, and dynamic exchange. As such, we will provide engaging approaches to research, access, and pedagogy. We will skillfully curate materials relating to women's history, the history of material texts, and the institutional memory of the College. Through these efforts, we will engage our communities in the process of discovery that lies at the heart of our archival endeavors.

With three distinct repositories—Smith College Archives, the Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History, and the Mortimer Rare Book Collection—Special Collections is a robust resource for research on the history of US women's activism, women's health, Smith College history, literature, book history, and book arts.

Core to mission is ensuring that these materials are available for use by any and all researchers, and the Access to Collections Project (A2C) was a three-year effort to evaluate and enhance our work in this area. What once required extraordinary determination, intervention, and navigation to find and leverage material has been significantly simplified and streamlined for a more human-centered experience.

Thanks to the vision, commitment, and generosity of Smith College and our supporters, we have transformed Special Collections access, discoverability, and stewardship practices—fortifying the free exchange of ideas and information now, and for years to come.



GOALS

As with any large, multi-year endeavor, the specific goals of A2C changed over time, particularly as the issues to be addressed were clarified and better understood. The fundamental goals, however, remained consistent throughout the project:

Maximize access to and discoverability of the holdings of Special Collections. As evidenced by the name of the project, the most basic goal of A2C was to make our collections as accessible as possible to as wide an audience as possible. In many ways, the other goals of the project all flow from this initial objective. Access starts with knowing something exists; this is why so many of the specific goals revolved around publishing and improving existing descriptions and addressing the backlog of material.

Modernize systems and processes. Access is inextricably linked to use, so it was imperative that we prioritize creating sustainable systems and processes. Combining modern, flexible collection management systems like ArchivesSpace with staff who have the technical skills to manipulate data at scale can exponentially increase an institution's capability to serve its users.

Treat our collections, our donors, and ourselves ethically. Responsible stewardship means we must be ethical to our collections by following professional standards and best practices to preserve them and make them accessible. It means we must be ethical to our donors and other funders by spending money responsibly and efficiently. It also means ethical treatment of staff to balance work priorities with balance and intention.

COLLECTION SPOTLIGHT

Scrapbooks



Student scrapbooks are some of the most sought after materials to understand life at Smith and the daily lives of women from the past 140+ years.

A2C BY THE NUMBERS

3

years of project

7

staff members

57

percent increase in published finding aids

816

rare book titles cataloged

1,600

volumes of rare books stabilized

2,340

linear feet of collections processed

5,000

bibliographic catalog records created or corrected

35,000

archival boxes barcoded for container control

COLLECTION
SPOTLIGHT

**Women's
Basketball**



The birth of women's basketball is well documented and includes the papers of Senda Berenson, who adapted the rules for women in 1892 and introduced the game to Smith College.

FUNDING

The Access to Collections Project would not have been possible without support from Smith College administrators and individual donors who collectively believed in its necessity. It is a credit to the long-term vision of this community who understood that while it is not highly visible work, infrastructure projects like A2C are the foundation of best practices worthy of the quality and quantity of the materials in Smith College Special Collections. The total funding for A2C was \$1.5 million.

We are grateful for significant funding from the Smith College President Kathleen McCartney, then Smith College Provost & Dean of Faculty Katherine Rowe, Smith College Dean of Libraries Susan Fliss, and individual donors. All gifts were deeply appreciated and put to excellent use. A special thank you to Jan Fulgraff Golan '71, Ann Stranahan '57, Julia Waterfill '90, and Martha Tolles '43, who supported the project in significant ways.





CHALLENGES

An undertaking of this size and scope is not without challenges—some we anticipated and planned for, others unexpected. In addition to the natural limitations of funding and timeframe, and parallel projects with potential high impact on this one (and vice versa), the renovation of Neilson Library and Alumnae Gymnasium required us to temporarily relocate all staff and collections from 2017 to 2021. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 when all staff were sent home, up to and through the limited return to campus in June 2021, required additional and unprecedented flexibility and creativity.

OUTCOMES

From inception to implementation, A2C profoundly improved the access to and control of our archival and bibliographic collections. Project size and scope allowed staff to understand the scale of ongoing needs and plan for future work. Some aspects of the project were targeted and

time-limited, others were overarching and ongoing, and all were key to A2C's success. Among the highlights:

- Completed a full survey of the College Archives, Sophia Smith Collection, and Mortimer Rare Book Collection archival collections.
- Harmonized the archival practices of three repositories with very different historical approaches.
- Automated or modernized existing workflows and established new ones.
- Launched the public interface for ArchivesSpace, updating thousands of collection and data points in the process.
- Prepared archival and bibliographic materials for the move to the new Neilson Library.
- Identified and documented restrictions for oral histories and college records to ensure ethical and legal compliance.
- Deaccessioned 456 boxes of non-permanent college records and identified approximately 800 additional ones pending College approval.
- Created emergency supply kits and written plans for responding to water incursions in Special Collections.

COLLECTION SPOTLIGHT

Cuneiform Tablets



The oldest items in the collection are 370 Babylonian clay tablets ranging from 2700 and 500 B.C.E.

Gloria Steinem publisher/author/activist ·
Ms. Magazine · 20th century poets **Virginia Woolf**
and **Sylvia Plath** · **Jane Fonda** actress/author/fitness icon/
activist · welfare rights activist **Guida West** · Planned
Parenthood founder **Margaret Sanger** · novelist **Mary
Shelley** · **Native American Women's Health Education
Resource Center** · **Loretta Ross** founder of Black women's
reproductive rights group **SisterSong** · **Constance Baker
Motley** lawyer/politician/civil rights activist · **Cosmopolitan**
editor and author **Helen Gurley Brown** · **Joan Biren**
photographer/artist/documentarian of lesbian life in
20th century · authors **Ann M. Martin** and **Madeleine
L'Engle** · **Red Cross** founder **Clara Barton** · **National
Network of Abortion Funds** · **Mary Daly** academic/
ecofeminist theologian · graphic artist and author **Alison
Bechdel** · 19th century abolitionists the **Garrison Family** ·
15th century author and poet **Geoffrey Chaucer** ·
Diana Davies documentarian/photographer · educator and
T.S. Eliot muse **Emily Hale** · writer and aviator **Anne
Morrow Lindbergh** · **Ruth Frances Woodsmall** educator/
author/pioneering researcher on women in Middle East ·
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum ·
Aileen C. Hernandez civil rights activist/union organizer

COLLECTIONS AND CONSTELLATIONS

Smith College Special Collections is the fortunate beneficiary of documentation of people changing the world on behalf of women and other gender minorities. We are honored to hold extraordinary collections of individual icons while recognizing that our collecting is strongest and most useful to researchers when it represents a wide variety of women's backgrounds in conversation with one another. That might mean the individual papers of

Loretta Ross, Nkenge Touré, and Byllye Avery as part of the Black Women's Health Imperative or the works of Linda Burnham and Miriam Ching Yoon Louie alongside the Third World Women's Alliance; our Juvenile

Collection explores childhood as a concept through hundreds of early school primers and children's books across two centuries; and individual War Service records and those of the Smith College Relief Unit and WAVES gives insight into women's role in the war efforts at home and abroad and programs on campus during WWI and WWII. For the researcher interested in one particular person or project, or a grouping of materials from an era or shared experience, our collections provide information, inspiration, insight, context, and connection. To the left are some of our most heavily used collections.



PRESIDENT WILSON SAYS:
This is the time to support Woman Suffrag

WOMAN SUFFRAGE

NEXT STEPS

Stewardship and care of collections is fundamental and ongoing, and the work of providing access to Special Collections will continue. Active planning is already underway for a second major project focused on bibliographic description, especially for the rare book collection. A2C II: Rare Books and Serials Cataloging is currently funded for two years (2023–2025), a combination of The Mellon Foundation major grant funding, Smith College funding, and individual donor gifts. At current funded levels, the project will:

- Begin to address the uncatalogued backlog in Mortimer Rare Books Collection by creating catalog records for approximately 2,300 titles in the acquisitions backlog and roughly 4,100 volumes that remain uncatalogued in the Dewey classified section of the rare books.
- Review and improve existing rare book catalog records that correct out of date, incorrect, or even harmful cataloging terms; highlight marginalia and other unique markers; and deepen description of extremely rare items that highlight women and persons of color authorship, printing, or bookmaking.
- Support the analysis of the subject manuscript collections in the Sophia Smith Collection of women's history; generating item level description for difficult to discover materials.
- Support the cataloging of all serial publications—historic journals, magazines, zines—in the Sophia Smith Collection and College Archives.





TEAM

This transformational project would not have been possible without the expertise and dedication of our staff, stakeholders, and student workers.

Leadership

Beth Myers, *Director of Special Collections*

Christie Peterson, *Head of Special Collections Technical Services*

Staff

Dan Michelson, *Project Manager Archivist*

Ellice Amanna, *Archives Technical Services Specialist*

Scott Biddle, *Archives Technical Services Specialist*

Abigail Connick, *Rare Books Technical Services Project Librarian*

Sylvia Hickman, *Mellon Post Baccalaurate Fellow*

Claire Marshall, *Metadata Migration Project Archivist*

Madison White, *Processing Archivist*

Student Workers

Alex Caba '21

Audrey Davis '20

Vivian DeRosa '24

Rose Feiwel '22

Grace Hartley '22

Sky Karp '21

Lyric Lott '21

Katie McCann '21

Milo Michels '21

Isabel Montesanto '21

Emma Paradies '21

Venice Teeter '20

Fiona Wu '22

Catherine Zeng '20

Stakeholders and Contributors in Special Collections

Maureen Callahan, *Sophia Smith Collection Archivist*

Shannon K. Supple, *Curator of Rare Books*

Nanci Young, *College Archivist*

Michelle Paquette, *Metadata & Technical Services Archivist*

Tristan Chambers, *Digital Applications Developer*

Althea Topek, *Accessioning Archivist*

Mary Biddle, *Reading Room Supervisor*

Kate Long, *Research Services Archivist*

Marlene Znoy, *Library Technology Services Specialist*

Margy Jessup, *Digital Preservation Archivist*

Renee Pelletier, *Marilyn Blackwell '69 Post-Baccalaurate Fellow 2020*

Iris Afantchao, *Marilyn Blackwell '69 Post-Baccalaurate Fellow 2021*

COLLECTION
SPOTLIGHT

Periodicals



There are 1,500 titles of current and historical, U.S., and international women's magazines, newsletters, and other serials dating from the 18th century to the present.

Photographs, in order of appearance:

Libro dela Cosmographia by Peter Apian. Anvers: 1548. MRBC

Clara Barton journal, 1860s (Jim Gipe, photographer). Clara Barton papers, SSC

Protesters at the Miss Universe pageant, 1970s (Chie Nishio, photographer). Gloria Steinem Papers, SSC

Clockwise from top left: Undated sketch from Chapter 1 of *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel. Alison Bechdel papers. SSC; Various buttons from the Loretta J. Ross papers. SSC; Unidentified manuscript in MRBC (Jim Gipe, photographer); Cyanotype of Smith students during Ivy Day, 1887. Class of 1897 Records, CA

Smith College student scrapbooks (Jim Gipe, photographer). CA

Senda Berenson with rope in the Alumnae Gym, 1890s. Senda Berenson papers, CA

Collection of feminist publications (Jim Gipe, photographer). SSC

Top to bottom: Researcher photographing collection material, 2018 (Jim Gipe, photographer); *Thierbuch* by Conrad Gessner, Dietikon-Zürich: 1965 (Jim Gipe, photographer). Oversize 590 G331h Gf 1965. MRBC; Smith College Yearbooks (Jim Gipe, photographer). CA; Researcher looking at photographs, 2018 (Jim Gipe, photographer). SSC

Cuneiform tablet, from the town of Umma in Sumeria (far south of present-day Iraq), ca. 2040 B.C.E. MRBC

Women's suffrage parade, 27 October 1917. Garrison Family Papers, SSC

Clockwise from top left: Ellen Wright Garrison hair book, 1848–1911 (Jeff Baker, photographer). Garrison family papers. SSC; Florynce Kennedy, 1970s (Hasi Vogel, photographer). Gloria Steinem Papers. SSC; Reels from the Jane Fonda papers (Rebecca Neimark, photographer) SSC; Sylvia Plath's typewriter (Jim Gipe, photographer). Sylvia Plath collection, MRBC

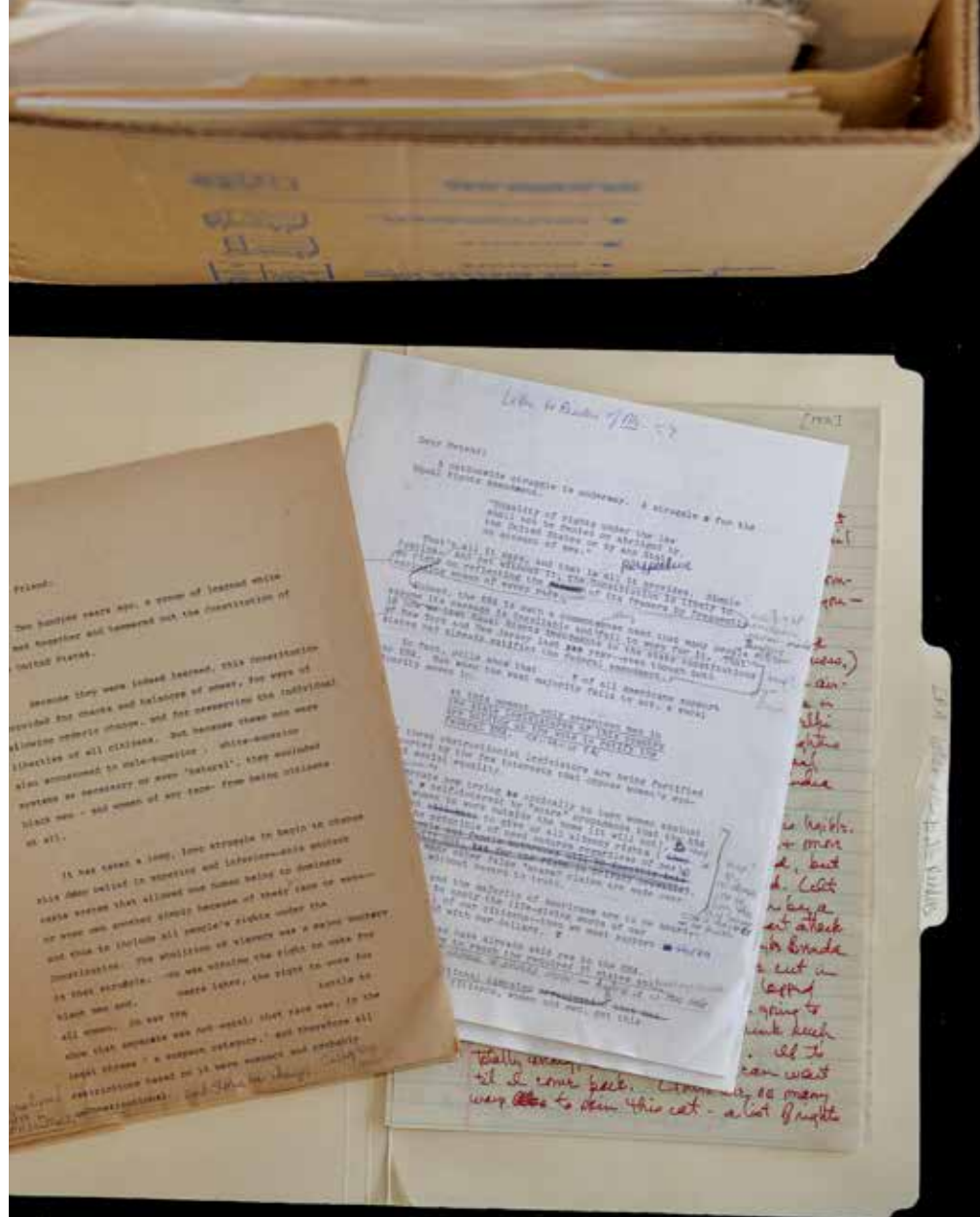
Koōgi [小扇] by Akiko Yosano, Ōsaka: Kanao Bun'endō, Meiji 37 [1904] (Jeff Baker, photographer). PL819.O8 K6 1904. MRBC

The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties, 1986 (Jeff Baker, photographer). SSC

Periodicals collection. SSC; Letters to readers regarding the Equal Rights Amendment, 1970s (Jeff Baker, photographer).

Ms. Magazine records, SSC

Archival boxes on the shelf from Smith College Special Collections (Rebecca Neimark, photographer)





Smith College
Libraries

Smith College Special Collections
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Northampton, MA 01063
<https://libraries.smith.edu/special-collections>