

Preserving Records, Creating Memories, Shaping Research:

Inside the Canadian Women's Movement Archives

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Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Table of Contents	ii
List of Tables	iii
List of Graphics	iv
I. Introduction	p. 1
II. Constructing the CWMA	p. 10
III. Acquiring and Classifying: The CWMA Political Button Collection	p. 25
IV. Acquiring and Classifying: The CWMA Photograph Collection	p. 39
V. Conclusion	p. 51
Appendix 1: CWMA Photograph Index – Subject	p. 58
Bibliography	p. 59

Tables

Table 1. CWMA buttons: location of origin	p.33
Table 2. CWMA buttons: buttons relating to selected issues	p.35
Table 3. CWMA buttons: symbols on buttons	p.36

Graphics

- Fig. 1 Canadian Women's Movement Archives, p.1
"Looking Forward, Reaching Backward,"
[advertisement] *Resources for Feminist
Research* vol.15 no.2 (July 1986): 74.
- Fig. 2 "Ryerson Women's Centre" [button] p.28
X10-1-8-358, Ryerson Women's Centre,
CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.
- Fig. 3 "What Part of NO Don't you Understand [button] p.32
X10-1-8-420, Toronto Rape Crisis Centre,
CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection
- Fig. 4 "If k.d. lang can do it SO CAN I!" [button] p.35
X10-1-8-449, producer unknown,
CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.
- Fig. 5 "You can't deface us all!" I Support Gay Liberation" [button] p.35
X10-1-8-314, Carleton University, 1983.
CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.
- Fig. 6 "Women Mobilizing For Power" [button] p.37
X10-1-8-207 NAC , 1985,
CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.
- Fig. 7 "We Are Everywhere" [button] p.37
X10-1-8-90, producer unknown,
CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.
- Fig. 8 "Women in Trades" [button] p.37
X10-1-8-70, producer unknown,
CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection

I. Introduction

In the summer of 1986, the Canadian feminist academic journal, *Resources for Feminist Research*, contained an advertisement for the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA).¹ The headline, Looking Forward, Reaching Backward: Women's Archives In Canada Project, accompanied a cartoon image of a woman sweeping. Behind her, a box of papers labeled "women's movement" sits, popping out of a garbage can. The advertisement's text informed the feminist community of the Archives' proposed projects and asked for assistance through donations of money or records, to "help ensure our history is saved."² The cartoon image added another layer to the advertisement's message, calling attention to women's organizations' disposal of what the CWMA saw as historically significant records.

The advertisement reflects the CWMA's goal of convincing feminists their records were valuable and their preservation imperative to make certain they'd be remembered.

The Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA) Collective, from its founding in 1977 until its closing in 1992, was a Toronto feminist group which sought to



Fig.1 Canadian Women's Movement Archives, "Looking Forward, Reaching Backward," [advertisement] *Resources for Feminist Research* vol.15 no.2 (July 1986): 74.

¹ Advertisement, Canadian Women's Movement Archives, "Looking Forward, Reaching Backward," *Resources for Feminist Research* vol.15 no.2 (July 1986): 74.

I would like to thank Prof. Chad Gaffield and the research group at the University of Ottawa for their suggestions and feedback which greatly contributed to this study.

² Canadian Women's Movement Archives, "Looking Forward, Reaching Backward," [advertisement] *Resources for Feminist Research* vol.15 no.2 (July 1986): 74.

preserve the historical record of grassroots women's movement activism in Canada.³ In addition to documents generated by coalitions, clubs, and organizations active in the women's movement, the CWMA Collective preserved a variety of items such as t-shirts, banners, sound recordings and ticket stubs. In 1992 the CWMA collection was moved to its present location at the University of Ottawa's Archives and Special Collections Department. The collection includes 465 political buttons, as well as many photographs organized in a subject-indexed system created by the CWMA. This paper will explore, through an examination of both the CWMA button and photograph collections, how the CWMA Collective's ideals and vision of the Canadian women's movement influenced their collection policies and practices, and shaped their holdings.

This examination of the CWMA collection is informed by Bowker and Star's *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences*, which suggests how classification systems unavoidably shape, rather than reflect, our understandings of reality. A central concern of theirs is the way that the creation of categories renders certain subjects invisible; in every classification system, state Bowker and Star, "each category valorizes some point of view and silences another."⁴ In this paper, the phenomenon of simultaneous illumination and obfuscation through archival practices, and its implications, will be explored by way of the CWMA collection.

Due to its self-conscious roles in preserving and creating community identity and memory, the archive is a significant type of classification system for study. A series of classification systems created to both preserve documents deemed by archive decision-

³ "second wave feminism" is a term used to refer to the growth of North American feminist activity during the 1960s and 1970s. For a more detailed definition, see Alison Prentice et.al. *Canadian Women: A History* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 414.

⁴ Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 5.

makers to be of historical worth and to make the collected records accessible to users, whether for legal, personal or scholarly reasons, archives are used by individuals wishing to better understand and interpret the past or create History.⁵ As holders of documents used in such ways, the archive can be understood as a place of memory, imbued with social significance and carrying the aura of a commemorative monument.⁶ Consequently, an item held in an archive could be understood to gain, through its very placement within the institution, an added legitimacy as historically significant; its legitimacy established in a circular fashion, through meeting the archives' criteria for what is considered useful for historical inquiry or representative of the community's past. It is this process which underlies feminist scholar and librarian Susan Searing's description of archives and libraries as "powerful 'gatekeepers'" whose preservation mandates and methods of classification "critically affect the codification of memory."⁷ As such, archives not only function as repositories for historical sources and commemorative items, but in choosing what gets saved they also have the potential to contribute to producing and defining the boundaries of a given group's collective memory.⁸

⁵ The following explanation by Ged Martin, clearly articulates a way of understanding the difference between the past and History which informs my work: "The past comprises the totality of the human experience, every step taken behind every plough, by every peasant who has ever lived, every credit-card bill or every meal, every act of copulation. History, by contrast, is our selective attempt to make sense of at least one corner of that enormous past, the process by which we put some of its chaos into order and to seek to understand how and why it happened the way it did." *Past Futures: The Impossible Necessity of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 13.

⁶ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de mémoire*," *Representations* no.26 Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989), 7-24; Peter Carrier, "Places, Politics and the Archiving of Contemporary Memory," in ed. Susannah Radstone, *Memory and Methodology* (New York: Oxford, 2000), 37-57.

⁷ Susan E. Searing, "Institutions of Memory: Libraries and Women's Work(s)," *Michigan Quarterly Review* Special Issue: Women and Memory, Volume XXVI No. 1 (Winter 1987), 228.

⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 169; Brien Brothman, "The Past Archives Keep: Memory, History, and the Preservation of Archival Records," *Archivaria* (Spring 2001), 72.

In this study, selected elements of the CWMA collection serve as evidence for a systematic analysis of the ways in which archival collection choices and classification structures shape an archive and in turn influence subsequent research activities. As an archive created and maintained by and for members of the women's movement in Canada, the CWMA collection offers the opportunity to explore how feminists in Canada understood themselves and wanted to be remembered. Moreover, through studying in detail selected components of the CWMA collection, we can begin to understand how the CWMA's archival decisions defined their collection, and now shapes how researchers use the CWMA collection to understand the women's movement in Canada.

The CWMA Collective emerged during the rise of second-wave feminism in Canada, when historians were beginning to both broaden the subject and scope of their studies, critically examining the privileged position held by European, male, white, middle-class experiences in the historical record.⁹ Feminists' voices were part of this discussion; alongside demands for equal pay for work of equal value, legalization of abortion and increased demands for women's equality was the demand for women to have a visible presence in history.¹⁰ The result of the parallel and inter-related growth of feminist voices and a broadening of historical inquiry was noted by Alison Prentice in her

⁹ During the 1970s and 1980s, interest flourished in social, ethno-cultural and family histories in Canada. See Kent M. Hawthorn, "Local Archives: Responsibilities and Challenges for Archivists," *Archivaria* no.3 (Winter 1976-77), 28-39; Walter Neutel, "Geschichte Wie Es Eigentilch Gewesen or The Necessity of Having Ethnic Archives Programs," *Archivaria* no.7 (Winter 1978): 104-110; Hugh Taylor, "Family History: Some new directions and their implications for the archivist" (Counterpoint) *Archivaria* no.11 (Winter 1980-81): 228-231; Veronica Strong-Boag et. al., eds. *Painting the Maple: Essays on Race, Gender, and the Construction of Canada*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998). See also Timothy J. Stanley, "Why I Killed Canadian History: Towards an Anti-Racist History in Canada," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* vol xxxiii no.5 (May 2000); 79-103.

¹⁰ For example, see Sheila Ryan Johansson, "Herstory As History: A New Field or Another Fad?" in ed. Berenice Carroll, *Liberating Women's History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 400-430, Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women and Historical Practice* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998). For a more detailed description of the variety of issues central to the women's movement in Canada, see Ruth Roach Pierson et. al., *Canadian Women's Issues: Twenty-Five Years of Women's Activism in English Canada. Volume I Strong Voices* (Toronto: Lorimer & Co., 1993).

reflection that "[i]n the context of the women's movement and of a general widening of historical inquiry, Canadian women's history flowered. By the mid-1980s, enough work had accumulated that we could write a general history of women in Canada."¹¹

The process of writing this history, however, was laden with difficulties, some of which were the result of previous archival practices. As historians sought out sources to interpret women's pasts, frustrations with both a lack of materials and useful subject headings within archives led to questions about the objectivity of both collection policies and classification practices of archival institutions.¹² The main critique put forth by women's historians, sensitized to systems of patriarchal oppression through burgeoning feminist theoretical frameworks, was that traditional archives' decisions on collection criteria and organization structure reflected, as Veronica Strong-Boag described in 1978, a valuing of aspects of life dominated by men, such as military and political activities, over those predominated by women.¹³

Strong Boag's criticism of archives resonates with Bowker and Star's assertion that "standards and classifications, however dry and formal on the surfaces, are suffused with traces of political and social work."¹⁴ Not only were such emphases problematic for hindering women's historians' abilities to locate sources useful to study women's pasts, but feminist academics asserted these biases were symptomatic of the larger de-valuation

¹¹ Alison Prentice et al., eds., "Introduction," *Canadian Women: A History, Second Edition* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1996), 1.

¹² Carole Gerson, "Locating Female Subjects in the Archives," in Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar, eds., *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 7. Antoinette Burton, "Archive Stories: Gender in the Making of Imperial and Colonial Histories," in ed. Philippa Levina, *Gender and Empire: The Oxford History of British Empire Companion Series* Oxford University Press: 2005, 283-284.

¹³ Veronica Strong-Boag, "Raising Clio's Consciousness: Women's History and Archives in Canada," *Archivaria* no.6 (Summer, 1978), 71-82. For similar perspectives in an American context, see Eva Moseley, "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of Women in America," *The American Archivist* (April 1973): 114-222.

¹⁴ Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 49.

of women in Canadian society. The weak correlation between decidedly historically significant subjects, and areas of life in which white, middle-class men dominated, argued Strong Boag, evidenced patriarchal valuing of men's work and societal contributions over the majority of women's, with the exception of some whose actions fit within dominant ideas of importance and gained them titles of heroes or "woman worthies" which, in their exclusion, were rendered "historically meaningless."¹⁵

By the mid 1980s, the growth of social history, post-colonial history and women's history, along with burgeoning public interest in local and family histories placed increased pressure on archivists to widen the scope of holdings and make them more accessible for the general public.¹⁶ In response to demands for women's records fuelled by increased interest in women's history, The National Archives of Canada created thematic guides, such as the National Archives of Canada's *The Widening Sphere: Women in Canada, 1870-1940* in 1982 and *Women's Archives Guide*, in 1991.¹⁷ The guides were essentially alternative classification systems that sorted existing collections in new ways and brought to light records of women's experiences buried under male family member's names or in larger organization collections and often rendered invisible through subject headings.¹⁸ Although useful for making accessible previously hidden records, such thematic guides could expand the archives' usefulness only as far as the

¹⁵ Ibid, 72.

¹⁶ Kent M. Hawthorn, "Local Archives: Responsibilities and Challenges for Archivists," *Archivaria* No.3 (Winter 1976-77), 32.; Antoinette Burton, "Archive Stories: Gender in the Making of Imperial and Colonial Histories," in ed. Philippa Levina, *Gender and Empire The Oxford History of British Empire Companion Series* (Oxford University Press: 2005), 281-393

¹⁷ Jeanne L'Espérance, ed. *The Widening Sphere: Women in Canada, 1870-1940* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1982); Joanna Dean and David Fraser, eds. *Women's Archive Guide: Manuscript Sources for the History of Women* (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada, 1991). I would like to thank Prof. Sharon Anne Cook for pointing me to these sources.

¹⁸ Jeanne L'Espérance, "Introduction." In *The Widening Sphere: Women in Canada, 1870-1940* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1982), 1-2.

records in its collection would allow; despite their best attempts at re-classification, the National Archives' initial acquisition criteria - which had largely privileged records of activities and events involving white, middle-class men - limited their success at remedying women's invisibilities, or filling out what Buss and Kadar describe as the "the incompleteness of the historical record."¹⁹

In response to previous exclusions, groups either under-represented in established archives or wishing to remain outside such institutions created their own archives in which their records would be preserved for future use. Numerous collections of women's records, both independent and university-affiliated, existed in North America alongside the CWMA collection.²⁰ Reasons for establishing separate women's archives included both a desire to keep records in a safe and secure place where women would feel comfortable consulting them, as well as wanting to sort them according to subject headings tailored to better reflect nuances in records that may be lost in general headings used in traditional archives. Furthermore, fears that future political shifts would bring the destruction or malicious use of women's records dealing with matters such as abortion or lesbianism if they were held in established archives was a concern.²¹

Given Bowker and Star's assertion that all classification systems carry residues of their makers' biases and ideals, no matter how sincere their efforts may be to avoid such transferences, any method of collecting and sorting records is based upon an

¹⁹ Buss and Kadar, *Women's Archives*, 8. Some historians have responded to such incompleteness by locating and utilizing materials outside traditional archives as historical sources. For example, see Sharon Anne Cook, Lorna R. McLean and Kate O'Rourke. *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). I would like to thank Prof. Terry Cook for directing me to these sources.

²⁰ For a listing and discussion on the growth of women's archive collections in North America, see Susan Hildebrand, ed. *Women's Collections: Libraries, Archives, and Consciousness* (New York: The Hawthorn Press, 1986).

²¹ Susan E. Searing, "Institutions of Memory: Libraries and Women's Work(s)," *Michigan Quarterly Review* Special Issue: Women and Memory, Volume XXVI No. 1 (Winter 1987), 229-30.

organization's goals and motivations, as well as its interpretation of the sources it has collected. It follows that not only do an archives' contents contain evidence of these ideals, but so do the classification structures created to sort its items. Just as historians had difficulty locating women's records as a result of established archives' classification structures, so too must the structures used by the CWMA, created in response to these previous difficulties, affect research possibilities. My research grows from these ideas, and has three related objectives that will be pursued through an evidence-based analysis of selected components of the CWMA collection: to articulate the CWMA's goals and motivations; to explore how these goals and motivations manifested in their archives; and to suggest how the CWMA influences present-day and future research.

After examining published and unpublished materials created by the CWMA to understand their organizations' objectives and reasons for creating their archive, the CWMA political button collection will be analyzed in detail. Political buttons may at first glance appear out of place in an archive. They might seem better suited for a museum, or collector's curiosities of little historical value and thus not meriting a place in an archive at all. Yet, the CWMA Collective chose to collect a large number of buttons. Why did they save buttons in their archive? This line of questioning will lead to an examination of how CWMA's objectives and understandings of the women's movement in Canada shaped what would be saved in their archive and how they wanted the movement to be remembered.

In addition, the ways in which classification structures are shaped by and reproduce their maker's viewpoints will be examined through the CWMA photograph collection's subject headings. Informed by the work of Sanford Berman, whose lucid

analysis of the underlying Western biases embedded in Library of Congress' subject headings revealed both subtle biases and implicit value judgments within heading choices, selected headings created for the CWMA photograph collection will be explored.²² The CWMA photograph collection is organized by the classification system created by the CWMA Collective. As with the discussion on political buttons, the analysis of subject headings used to sort the photographs will function as a point of entry into discussions of how choices made in collection and classification shape archival structures and influence research possibilities. What can a reading of subject headings tell us about the CWMA's perceptions of the women's movement? And, what implications might their choices in subject headings have on researchers today?

This study of the CWMA collection attempts to understand how it represents feminism between 1960 and 1990 in Canada. My work fits into historian Joan Scott's assertion that the historical pursuit to answer questions relating to gender "is no longer about the things that have happened to women and men and how they've reacted to them; instead it is about how the subjective and collective meanings of women and men as categories of identity have been constructed."²³ Understanding my research as a pursuit to explore what Scott calls a "category of identity," I will be attempting to map out some of the ways the CWMA collection produces a given image of the women's movement, and in turn, feminism. This will be explored through discussion on their archival practices and the collection's content as it exists today. Through this, consequences of such decisions for both the scope of archive itself, its representations of the women's movement, and for present-day researchers will be enumerated.

²² Sanford Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1971), ix-x.

²³ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 6.

II. Constructing the CWMA

When *The Other Woman*, a Toronto-based feminist newspaper folded in 1977, its editor, Pat Leslie, unable to part with what she viewed as historically-significant material, stored the administrative records, documents and files generated throughout its existence, in her basement. As small-scale feminist publications and organizations throughout the movement met with a similar end, the same belief in the value of women's movement's records which drove Leslie to save *The Other Woman's* files led her to add her collection.²⁴ The collection continued to grow, and as other women's movement members became interested and active in Leslie's project, it eventually became known as the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA).

Pamphlets published to advertise the CWMA in its earliest stages suggest Leslie envisioned it to be both a preserver and protector of records generated by women's movement members, particularly lesbian feminists. In a 1980 leaflet created to advertise the Archives' holdings and recruit donations, Leslie explained the significance of saving records and materials, stating that without sources evidencing their efforts, women's history and "specifically lesbian history [would] be forever buried." She attempted to quell "the fear of oppression and the shyness of self-expression," by vowing that "if need be, the Women's Movement Archives would go underground, file by file, to protect

²⁴ Aisla Thomson, "Interview: The Canadian Women's Movement Archives Collective," *Women's Education des Femmes* (Winter 1986), 20.

records of the growing movement,” and assuring potential donators that “[a]ccess to everything donated by lesbians is strictly limited.”²⁵

Leslie’s assurances about lesbian feminists’ records’ safety in her archive speak to the larger social discrimination of lesbians in Canada in the 1970s, both outside of and within the women’s movement. Historian Tom Warner stated that many lesbians involved in feminist organizing felt the need to keep quiet about their sexual orientation for fear it would impede access to government funding for projects, or lead to chilly social interactions with their feminist “sisters” who may have felt uncomfortable with this aspect of their identity.²⁶ Furthermore, those who were contributing to the movement found little public recognition for their efforts, with heterosexual feminists embraced more enthusiastically by the media as acceptable examples of feminism in action. Certainly some feminist organizations placed lesbian struggles against bigotry on their agendas, however, the general push to silence and render lesbians within feminism was so strong that it was a central factor in the emergence of the lesbian liberation movement, separate from both gay liberation and the women’s movement.²⁷ Within this context, Leslie’s emphasis on collecting lesbian feminist records within an archive whose name indicated it was a collection of the “women’s movement,” can be understood as an attempt to counteract forces both within and outside the feminist circles that were working to silence lesbian feminists and render invisible their efforts and contributions to the women’s movement.

²⁵ Pat Leslie, “Women’s Movement Archives.” [leaflet] file: Women’s Movement Archives; Leaflet with Original, 1980. Box 291, CWMA/ACMF Administrative files, University of Ottawa Archives and Special Collections (hereafter CWMA/ACMF).

²⁶ Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: a History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 173.

²⁷ Ibid.

By 1982, Leslie had accumulated an amount of records unmanageable for any individual. The need for archival space reached the ears of the Women's Information Centre, a Toronto feminist collective concerned with encouraging research and interest in women's rights and culture.²⁸ They applied for and received a Canada Community Development Grant to establish the records repository, which they named the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA) Collective.²⁹ The funding enabled the records to be moved into a location with greater accessibility for the public and supported collecting on a larger scale, and by 1984 they described their holdings had grown to represent "over 450 political and cultural women's groups and 246 publications and newsletters."³⁰

As WIC members began to co-ordinate the CWMA, Pat Leslie's initial sense of relief in finding assistance to house and manage her archives was soon replaced by feelings of exclusion from Collective decision-making processes.³¹ The Archives' meeting minutes indicate that Leslie and another member expressed feeling intimidated and silenced by WIC members whose middle-class and academic leanings, were contributing, in their opinion, to a sense of elitism they found uncomfortable and unwelcoming.³² While the members at the receiving end of such criticisms questioned the validity of such accusations, WIC board member Nancy Adamson acknowledged that their relationship had degenerated into one filled with hostility and "deepening anger".³³

²⁸ Becki Ross, *House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 50.

²⁹ Eve Zarembo, "CWMA: Collective," *Broadside* vol 6 no 5, March 1985; 4. Box 296, "FEM-Direct Grant Application to Women's Programme, April 8, 1986," Box 296, CWMA/ACMF.

³⁰ Sylvia M. Brown, "Women and Archiving: Two New Ventures," *Status of Women News*, Winter 1984, 11.

³¹ CWMA Collective Meeting Minutes from September 11, 1984. File: "Collective Minutes 1984," Box 288, CWMA/ACMF.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ CWMA Collective Meeting Minutes from September 25th, 1984. "Collective Minutes 1984" Box 288, CWMA/ACMF.

Amidst increasing tension and a recognition of political differences, Leslie and another member resigned from the Archives Collective in 1984, with Leslie offering to remain a volunteer.³⁴

The new Collective's shared political affiliations and academic background would inform the Archive's structure. Socialist feminism figured strongly within the group, influencing their decision to avoid hierarchical structures in favor of egalitarianism and consensus-based decision-making processes within the CWMA.³⁵ Despite their theoretical stance against hierarchy, the Collective was composed of both paid members and volunteers who shared the workload of generating publicity, organizing records and completing administrative paperwork, with board members most heavily responsible for decision-making about the Collective.³⁶ In addition to being committed to the women's movement, most collective members had academic backgrounds in history, archival or library science: key members in 1985 included Nancy Adamson, who held a PhD in History and had taught women's studies courses at University of Toronto since 1979; Lorna Weir, who held a PhD from York University's Department of Social and Political Thought; Debbie Green, who held a Master's of Library Science and was a member of the Canadian Women's Indexing Group; Luanne Karn, who had a Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies, and Tori Smith, who held a Bachelor of Arts in History and English.³⁷

³⁴ Zaremba, 4.

³⁵ The argument that socialist feminist leanings of influenced the structure of their organization is made in Curnoe, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives," 15. In *Feminist Organizing for Change: the Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), CWMA member Nancy Adamson along with Linda Briskin and Agnes McPhail, articulate their socialist-feminist positions, a feminism that takes into account oppressions from class and ethnicity as well as gender. (98).

³⁶ Examples of decision-making processes are found in the CWMA "Meeting Minutes," Box 288, CWMA Administrative Files, CWMA/ACMF.

³⁷ Listing of CWMA Board of Directors, January 1986. File: CWMA General Info Sheets and Pamphlets. Box 291, CWMA/ACMF. Karen Dubinsky, who in the mid 80s was a PhD student at Queen's, sat on the

Such academic backgrounds likely gave CWMA Collective members an increased sensitivity to the importance sources carry in ensuring that history of a group can be written, and perhaps this experience underpinned their efforts to amass records of the women's movement in Canada.

The impetus to create and maintain the CWMA as an archive independent from established institutions grew from its members' awareness that collecting records for future constructions of the past was a significant task with longstanding implications for the history of the women's movement. The archive, they stated, was closely tied to distribution of power in a given community of society: in an interview with the Canadian Committee on Women's History they stated, "archives are political entities, and collecting and preserving archival material is a political act."³⁸ The critical assessment of archival decision-making processes extended into the work of the CWMA where choices in matters such as subject headings and organization structure of the archives were unavoidably political as well. Accordingly, the CWMA did not attempt to create a value-free repository: they described their archive as "explicitly unobjective," their holdings shaped through choices made in line with their values as feminist activists in order to create an archive whose structure would match the values of the makers of its content.³⁹ Their ideals, grounded in such principles as egalitarianism, equality and collective action, explicitly infused the CWMA beyond its organizational structure, into its collection policies to its subject headings.⁴⁰

CWMA board in 1989. see Linda Curnoe, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives, a Description and Evaluation," unpublished manuscript, 6. "Historic" preamble in CWMA Collection Index, CWMA/ACMF.

³⁸ Anne Molgat, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives," *Canadian Council for Women in History (CCWH) Newsletter/Bulletin du CCHF* (Fall 1988), 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The CWMA defined the parameters of their collection broadly, aiming to collect “material from the contemporary women’s movement.”⁴¹ With its political diversity, including liberal, radical and socialist streams, its attention to multiple issues in both public and private spheres, and its lack of individual leadership or single organizational structure, the “contemporary women’s movement” is undoubtedly difficult to define in concrete, explicit terms.⁴² The CWMA Collective articulated their definition for “women’s movement” in a 1988 article, explaining their collection was concerned with any materials from 1960 onwards, marking its start with the conception of the national feminist and peace organization, Voice of Women.⁴³ Furthermore, they explained their archives were concerned with collecting records from women’s organizations, which they defined as “any group having as one of its principal goals the improvement of women’s social, economic or political condition.”⁴⁴ The CWMA Collective explained they were especially concerned with collecting records of grassroots feminist activity, or, as they described, “feminism which is community-based and emphasizes collective organizing and reaching out to the “woman on the street,” as opposed to academic or major political organizations.⁴⁵

Its creators expressed feeling the CWMA’s purpose extended beyond filling a need to preserve women’s movement records – it was also understood as a means to ensure that the women’s movement would be remembered in a way chosen by women’s movement members themselves. Undoubtedly, the CWMA foresaw their Archive as

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women’s Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7.

⁴³ Jeri Dawn Wine and Janice L. Ristock, eds. *Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada* (Toronto: Lormier, 1991), 5.

⁴⁴ Anne Molgat, “Canadian Women’s Movement Archives,” 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

remedying the absence of serious studies of the women's movement in Canada.⁴⁶ Yet, amassing documentation of women's movement organizations and actions was only part of the momentum propelling their efforts: motivation also grew from wanting to keep control over women's movement history in the hands of its members. As Leslie succinctly summarized in a 1985 article about the Collective: "The archive is about putting women back into history in the way we see ourselves, and through our own eyes."⁴⁷ A continued disregard for saving evidence of the women's movement, felt Leslie, would lead either to superficial future interpretations of their movement's work, or to none at all. Furthermore, without a repository of the work done by previous feminists, future activists would be missing valuable evidence that could be used for their own work, saving them the task of re-inventing the wheel. Grounded in predictions of future research needs, the establishment of the CWMA was to make primary sources accessible for use by those both in and outside the movement, in a way that ensured feminists themselves had control over the construction of their history.⁴⁸

Reflecting both a distrust for established archival policies, and an awareness of the power that comes with evidence of, and ownership over, one's own past, the CWMA Collective envisioned their archive would enrich the women's movement in three ways.⁴⁹ The first was that an archive of women's movement records would help to foster a shared "collective memory" between feminists in Canada.⁵⁰ As well, by holding records in a

⁴⁶ File: "Part II – Project Information (C.E.C. W.I.C. Grant Application, Oct 10/82)," Box 311, CWMA/ACMF.

⁴⁷ Leslie, "Women's Movement," 11.

⁴⁸ File: "Part II – Project Information (C.E.C. W.I.C. Grant Application, Oct 10/82)," Box 311, CWMA/ACMF.

⁴⁹ *Broadside*, Vol 6.

⁵⁰ "Women's Movement Archives: Looking Forward, Reaching Back." [pamphlet] (August 1985) Box 291, CWMA/ACMF Leaflets, CWMA Administrative Files. University of Ottawa Archives and Special Collections.

place open to the public, it would make such items more accessible to activists and researchers, encouraging further study of the movement and its achievements.⁵¹ And finally, it would be a space to recognize and celebrate the movement's accomplishments.⁵² These anticipated contributions allude to a larger vision of shaping or guiding history to reflect the women's movement as experienced by its members, and away from interpretations relying upon outsiders' interpretations.

To fulfill their vision of establishing a repository not just of women's movement records, but of records reflecting the diversity of grassroots feminist activities, the CWMA cast a wide net when soliciting donations. An information sheet prepared by the CWMA for potential donors listed what they were looking for: "documents of all sorts: minutes of meetings, correspondence, pamphlets, reports, newsletters, news clippings, sound recordings, posters, buttons, photographs, log books, scrapbooks, financial records, membership lists, t-shirts, etc."⁵³ Encouraging women's movement members to donate a multitude of record formats, from manifestos and meeting minutes to banners, t-shirts and ticket stubs, opened up the possibility for women's movement members to shape the collection in ways that reflected the diversity of the women's movement. In leaving their collection criteria open, women's movement members could donate what they thought was important, regardless of its form. Furthermore, a flexible collection policy gave donors the potential to shape the collection in ways that would reflect their ideals and experiences, and what they thought was worth remembering about the movement.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ CWMA Collective, "Preserving the Records of the Women's Movement," 1. "Historic" preamble in CWMA Collection Index, CWMA/ACMF.

Despite constructing loose collection criteria that would accommodate women's movement members' personal ideas of what constituted an important record, convincing women's movement members that their records were worth saving proved to be a central challenge to acquiring records. In an interview published in 1986, Collective members remarked that "many women's groups still don't understand that it's important to keep their own material. So that's really why it's important to have us here, helping people understand that their minutes, their log books, whatever, are important for the future. They tell a story that needs to be saved."⁵⁴ The Collective endeavored to foster a sense of self-importance with regards to women's movement records by creating and distributing to grass-roots women's organizations a handout describing what records were, the importance of their preservation, and proper storing procedures.⁵⁵

The development and encouragement of a unique archival collection strategy, tailored to accumulate records of grass-roots feminist activity in Canada, was another way in which the CWMA's policies veered from traditional archival practices. Playfully described as the "manila envelope theory of archival collecting," the CWMA recruited women across Canada to "pick up leaflets, minutes, whatever they get their hands on, and mail them" to the CWMA for preservation.⁵⁶ Because it was the experiences of every-day feminists they were interested in, such materials in every-day circulation amongst feminists were of particular importance - it was through them that messages of feminism were spread and received within the movement's masses, and it was this process the CWMA wanted to evidence and preserve. Evidently, adherence to archival principles of

⁵⁴ Aisla Thomson, 21; Pat Leslie, "Women's Movement Archives," *Broadside* vol.1 no.1 (Aug 79-Dec); 10.

⁵⁵ CWMA Collective, "Preserving the Records of the Women's Movement," 2. "Historic" preamble in CWMA Collection Index, CWMA/ACMF.

⁵⁶ Thomson, "Interview," 22.

provenance, which emphasize preserving records generated by the same source together and keeping records within their locality of origin, were of secondary concern to ensuring the preservation of as wide a range of records as possible that would document in various forms the women's movement as a whole.⁵⁷ While calling such a strategy "archival collecting" may be debatable within traditional archives, it demonstrates how the CWMA bent traditional archival systems, allowing their subject, grass-roots women's movement activity, to both shape what was "archive worthy" and influence collection methods.

The CWMA Collective's goal to create an archive of women's movement records suitable for both activists and researchers and reflective of women's movement members' experiences and ideals permeated beyond collection procedures, shaping the archive's skeletal framework, or the classification structure. As noted by CWMA volunteer Linda Curnoe in 1989, the collection "contain[ed] documents, not of the heroes, but of the groups."⁵⁸ The nature of grassroots feminist activity was identified by the CWMA Collective as more a group form as opposed to individual action.⁵⁹ Thus, it was believed that researchers would "prefer to access material through groups and not individuals."⁶⁰ Such privileging of subjects addressed by women's movement activities and organization name over individual achievements evidences a transference of feminist values of egalitarianism into the CWMA classification structure.

Organized by subject and organization rather than individual donors, the CWMA's classification system meant that a single donor's collection was often broken up and

⁵⁷ Terry Reilly, "From Provenance to Practice: archival theory and Return to Community." [conference paper, University of Calgary c. 2005] http://www.cst.ed.ac.uk/2005conference/papers/Reilly_paper.pdf [accessed 4 April 2006], 2.

⁵⁸ Curnoe, 1.

⁵⁹ Molgat, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives," 1.

⁶⁰ Curnoe, 14.

placed into many different areas. For instance, a donor's collection of pamphlets she created for various rape crisis centres would be filed with the centre's file as opposed to under her name. Records were also divided according to material form – documents, buttons, photographs and t-shirts donated by the same organization would have been classified in a separate index. A cross-referencing system was in place to enable donation to be re-constituted according to provenance. Anne Molgat, a CWMA Collective member, described their processing procedures as follows:

When an individual donates records to the Archives, we assign her an accession number. That number is stamped onto each piece of paper in the donation and a list is made of each organization represented. The material is then filed by organization. An individual's donation is thus not kept together as in traditional archives, but rather is broken up by component group. The accession number makes it possible to reconstitute a collection at a later time should someone wish to.⁶¹

The CWMA's choices in archival classification were not made haphazardly or in ignorance of their implications. With Collective members who had academic backgrounds in Library Science history, they undoubtedly understood traditional archival practices.⁶² The Collective admitted that their system had "broken a number of traditional archival rules" in choosing to divide records given by individual donors.⁶³ But it was through deviating from traditional archives that they could both assert and exercise their autonomy from larger institutions and allow their ideals to shape the form their classification structure would take, making their collection feminist in both content and form.

⁶¹ Molgat, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives," 2.

⁶² Nancy Adamson held a PhD in History and had taught women's studies courses at University of Toronto since 1979; Debbie Green held a Master's of Library Science and was a member of the Canadian Women's Indexing Group. Listing of CWMA Board of Directors, January 1986. File: CWMA General Info Sheets and Pamphlets. Box 291, CWMA/ACMF.

⁶³ Molgat, "Canadian Women's Movement Archives," 2.

But in a movement marked by its diversity, the CWMA confronted difficulties in capturing what Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail described as the “shifting, amoeba-like character” of the women’s movement in a single, static archive, to the satisfaction of all movement members.⁶⁴ Consequently, not all women’s movement groups were enthusiastic about the CWMA Collective’s ambitious goal to become the national repository for women’s movement records. In a letter to *Broadside* magazine, in response to an article on the CWMA, a lesbian feminist from Kenora questioned the intentions of the CWMA’s desire to form smaller, community-based collections into a “nationally co-ordinated scheme” through a CWMA initiative to create a computerized database listing of women’s movement collections across Canada. While the writer’s discomfort with the CWMA’s proposed database was primarily related to a larger discomfort with computerization, it was also related to issues of control and a resistance to a perceived imposition of hierarchy upon a movement concerned with promoting egalitarianism. The CWMA’s intentions were described as “imperialist reflexes,” with the writer remarking, “it is a sad day indeed when Toronto feminists plan to follow in their fathers’ footsteps.”⁶⁵ Such strong reactions to the CWMA Collective’s efforts from women’s movement members, albeit a minority, lead to questions regarding the “women’s movement” represented in the CWMA collection: were their ideals reflective of those held by all women’s movement members? Furthermore, in a movement marked by its diversity, would it have been possible to settle upon such a set of universal women’s movement values?

⁶⁴ Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7.

⁶⁵ Isabel Andrews, “Computer Control,” *Broadside* Vol 6 no.7 May 1985.

By 1987, administrative files, meeting minutes and pamphlets from over 2 000 women's groups, demonstrations, coalitions and conferences shared space with over 600 feminist periodicals, newspapers and newsletters, and an array of photographs and political ephemera including t-shirts and buttons in the CWMA collection.⁶⁶ Despite its array of sources, The CWMA Collective recognized significant weaknesses in its geographic scope. Rural groups were underrepresented and around seventy per cent of the collection originated from groups in Ontario.⁶⁷ While likely more the result of the CWMA's location and funding difficulties which restricted greater collection efforts, the large amount of urban and Ontario groups represented in the collection, and the absence of other areas, complicates their claim to be the archives of the "Canadian Women's Movement."

By 1991, after struggling to keep up with incoming donations and financially afloat upon grants and philanthropists, the CWMA Collective reached pessimistic conclusions regarding the future of their archives. On May 13 1991, shortly before their closure, collective member Johanne Pelletier presented to the group a discussion paper in which she articulated her perceptions of their main problems, and potential solutions. Besides financial worries, collection policies sat at the centre of her concerns. Having recently completed a thorough sorting of records to be processed, Pelletier observed that much of what had been collected was "published material or reproductions of material held in other women's groups or institutions." Given the lack of funding and volunteer help, having to separate such materials from original, unique records not yet saved

⁶⁶ CWMA Collective, "Looking Forward, Reaching Backward," [pamphlet] September 1987. Box 291, CWMA/ACMF.

⁶⁷ Margaret Fulford, "Banners, Briefs and Bylaws: The Records of the Canadian Women's Movement," [conference paper to be presented at "The Archival Bridge," May 10, 1991], CWMA Finding aid, "Historic" preface. CWMA/ACMF.

anywhere else or published, which the CWMA was most interested in preserving, was time consuming and frustrating. She warned her fellow members, “[t]he more time and energy we devote to the haphazard collecting of reproductions, the more we become defined as a resource centre and not an “archives,” which, it was predicted, would reduce the likelihood of funding sources approving grant applications.⁶⁸

Flexibility, originally one of the CWMA’s strengths, had become, in Pelletier’s assessment, a point of weakness. Pelletier’s criticism of the CWMA holdings included what she called “robin-hood” style acquisition strategies. In addition to donations from women in the movement, the Collective would “‘raid’ the records of other institutions or women’s groups for records” deemed pertinent to the CWMA collection. While a useful strategy in the sense of accumulating confidential documents that are of importance and could perhaps in the future be destroyed, Pelletier predicted that if relied upon as the main collection strategy, “eventually the collection will be comprised of bits and pieces culled or copied from other sources.” This was in opposition, she continued, to “the value in archiving, especially for women’s records,” which “lies in getting the originals and not only what we consider to be the selected treasures of another collection.” She went on to define in clear terms the difference between the CWMA and other institutions, and what she saw were the implications of these differences upon decisions of collecting and the Archives’ potential to survive:

The future of our collection and its unique qualities depends on establishing ourselves – upfront – as the official repository of the women’s movement. We should be able to approach women’s groups to make regular deposits of their records at the archives and use this kind of arrangement as leverage for more solid funding from either women’s groups or provincial/federal ministries. Resource centres and

⁶⁸ Report by Johanne Pelletier to CWMA Collective, File: “Discussion on the Future of the Archives, May 13 1991,” Box 314, CWMA/ACMF.

libraries are suitable homes for these copies – I think we alone have the expertise and the responsibility to provide a place for the original documentation.⁶⁹

Pelletier's comments suggest she felt that if collection strategies were altered to concentrate on original records as opposed to accumulating published materials or those held in other places, they would define themselves more clearly as an Archive, in turn legitimating their existence in mainstream eyes and increasing the likelihood of gaining funding to keep them afloat. Such a turn would not take them away from their mandate of collecting women's movement records but rather streamline their collection to original documentation only. However, would this still be representative of the grassroots movement, in which published documents circulated widely and played an important role in getting the message of feminism out amongst women?

Such issues never became of central concern; matters of collection policy and acquisition strategy, while a potential site of hope for the Archives in the eyes of Pelletier, fell to the wayside as finances dwindled and an uncertain future of the archives itself grew. Members were overwhelmed by an abundance of records they could not process and make accessible to users - which had always been a key component of their mandate - due to a lack of funds and a limited volunteer base. Collective member Nancy Adamson, who had been enthusiastically involved with the CWMA since its inception, grew discouraged that it could remain financially afloat on its own.⁷⁰ As financial realities collided with ideals, the CWMA began to consider finding the Archives a new home.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Report by Johanne Pelletier to CWMA Collective, File: "Discussion on the Future of the Archives, May 13 1991," Box 314, CWMA/ACMF.

⁷⁰ Letter from Anne Molgat to Collective, 24 May 1991. File: CWMA – Future of Archives Discussion 1991-91, Box 314, CWMA/ACMF.

⁷¹ Ibid.

After careful consideration, in 1992 the University of Ottawa's bid to obtain the CWMA collection was successful and they were moved to the Archives and Special Collections at Morriset Library, where they remain today.

The University of Ottawa's acquisition of the CWMA collection was secured upon an agreement to keep their holdings within their original subject headings and classification structures. Today they are an archive within an archive, preserved in the archival structure created by the CWMA Collective.⁷²

III. Acquiring and Classifying: The CWMA Political Button Collection

Pin-back buttons found their way to the CWMA from 1972 to 1992. By the 1980s the CWMA had amassed a collection of over 200 feminist political buttons, and by 1992 that number had climbed to 465.⁷³ The buttons' slogans and symbols articulate a myriad of voices found within the women's movement, their messages ranging in theme from the universal to the specific. Widely-known feminist activities such as International Women's Day celebrations are represented on buttons, alongside a number of events related to social movements besides just feminism, such as union solidarity.⁷⁴

Despite their abundant offering of visual representations of the women's movement causes and ideals, when we begin to look at the CWMA button collection for more specific, contextualized evidence of the women's movement's composition in

⁷² This was a condition of the decision to house the CWMA collection at the University of Ottawa. Personal interview, University of Ottawa Special Collections archivist Lucie Desjardains.

⁷³ Luanne Karn, "Do You Recognize These Buttons?" *Broadside* vol 6 no 5, March 1985, 5.

⁷⁴ For examples, see CWMA Objects Collection, x10-1-8-99, x10-1-8-82

Canada, a number of methodological challenges for historical research emerge. While an Object Index accompanies the button collection, containing space for a description of each button, including date of creation, name of maker, or name of donator, many of the buttons have no accompanying details – more than half are missing information on donator, year of creation, and maker. Furthermore, the CWMA button collection lacks a detailed classification structure. Each button's individual number does not have relevance other than to link each button to its description in the Objects Index. There is no correspondence between each number to a particular theme, era of creation, or provenance. In addition, there is no standard classification system, to my knowledge, for political button collections.⁷⁵ This section will seek to explore how, despite the impediments stemming from a lack of contextual data, the CWMA button collection still has potential to offer researchers with insights into the women's movement.

Selected aspects of material history methodology serve as useful guides for thinking about how to approach political buttons as historical sources. While varying in complexity and amount of value placed on sensory response or secondary sources, all aim to provide systematic observation of characteristics and offer standardized methods of artifact analysis. Such methods encourage the clear articulation of steps taken in the analysis, and serve essentially as tools to ensure, as material historian E. McClung Fleming stated, that when “reading the content of the artifact, the scholar using the non-verbal document is proceeding through the same operations employed by the scholar using the verbal document.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The closest system to my knowledge is a methodological framework for analyzing individual buttons created by Phillip Rose. See Phillip Rose, “The Material Culture of Political Buttons,” December 2003 <http://individual.utoronto.ca/red_roses/politicalbuttons.html> (7 April 2005).

⁷⁶ E. McClung Fleming, “Artifact Study: A Proposed Model,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 9 (1974), 160.

Databases offer a means of identifying similarities and patterns between sources, both from the same time period and those created over a given span of time. When items are ordered in a database, absences of information can be more easily identified, depending on the chosen fields for data entry.⁷⁷ As such, databases have been used successfully to explore collections of artifacts, acting as tightly constructed frameworks bestowing order upon the seemingly limitless quantity of observable data objects offer. For example, historian Joanne McCutcheon, in her study of twentieth-century Canadian gender constructions and children's clothing, found the use of a database allowed for comparisons that "tease[d] out the conflicting evidence from all primary sources" relating to her research questions.⁷⁸

For the database constructed to order the CWMA button collection, a description of both the text and symbols on each button, accompanying information about its date of creation if available from either the button itself or the CWMA Object Index, and a general theme to which it related was entered. As well, colour of text, background and image were entered. The database allowed for identification of patterns such as buttons whose messages contained identical words and symbols. From this, quantitative data could be gleaned that enabled a greater understanding of the buttons as an entire collection.

Working from Bowker and Star's assertion that classification structures are necessary to create knowledge by revealing patterns, the potential of a database

⁷⁷ For an example of how new systems can increase access to archival sources, see Peter Baskerville and Chad Gaffield, "The Automated Archivist: Interdisciplinarity and the Process of Historical Research." *Social Science History*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1985): 167-84; Chad Gaffield, "Les perspectives des chercheurs sur les archives électroniques." *4th Symposium du groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche en archivistique (GIRA)*, Université de Montréal, 2002.

⁷⁸ Jo-Anne M. McCutcheon, "Clothing Children in English Canada, 1870-1930." (Ph.D. diss., University Of Ottawa, 2001), 30.

classification system to reveal patterns within the CWMA collection was employed as means of finding how such a collection of political buttons, despite missing dates and issues of provenance and shaped by makers' intents, might be used to interpret the history of the women's movement in Canada. After a brief description of the history of pin-back buttons, an analysis of the collection's prominent themes and possible uses for research will be offered.

According to one button created by Ryerson University's Women's Centre during this exciting time in feminist history, button-wearing appears to have been a part of the

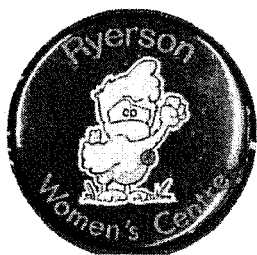


Fig 2: X10-1-8-358,
Ryerson Women's Centre
CWMA/ACMF Objects
Collection.

women's movement aesthetic. It depicts a cartoon bird, left fist raised, sporting a pink button with a woman's symbol. Although no reference to a specific date of production is found with the button, it was collected sometime between 1970 and 1992. That button-wearing made its way onto a Women's Centre button, existing as a symbol in itself of feminism, hints at the extent to which pin-back buttons managed to push their way onto the t-shirts, hats and shoulder-bag straps of feminists, and into the culture of the Canadian women's movement.

The history of pin-back buttons reflects their long-held place within social movements. The glossy pin-back buttons with which people today are most familiar are thought, at least in the United States, to have evolved from cast-metal adornments popular in the late 18th century. With photographic advancements in the mid 1800s came the ability to place images on pins made from brass and by 1892 a New Jersey-based company, Whitehead and Hoag, created the technique of attaching a cellulose-covered

piece of paper to a metal base, which was mounted on backing, or *collet* with a pin.⁷⁹ By 1940 acetate film replaced the previously-used celluloid as the laminator of choice.⁸⁰

Along with banners, t-shirts, bumper stickers and broadsides, pin-back buttons have long been popular conduits for expression of social and political rhetoric. First used to promote candidates in late nineteenth-century American political campaigns, by the 1920s these wearable mini-billboards increasingly found use outside the political realm, as giveaways made by manufacturers of candy, chewing gum and tobacco to advertise their products. Over the next few decades the widespread use of pin-back buttons waned in the marketplace but continued to be used to carry political messages on a small scale, employed to promote American nationalism during and after World War II.⁸¹

It was not until the 1960s' social movement explosion that pin-back buttons with politically-charged messages would re-appear in large numbers in North America.⁸² Cheaply made, durable and easier to carry than banners, pin-back buttons were a practical tool for activists on a number of grounds. Undoubtedly, they were an easy means for 1960s social movements to disseminate their dissensions and recruit supporters.⁸³ Pinned to clothing, backpacks, or purse-straps, their value as fashion items created a fad-like

⁷⁹ Paul Storch, "Care and Conservation of Political Campaign Buttons," *Tech Talk*. March 1998. Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society, 3.

⁸⁰ Storch, "Care and Conservation," 4., and Freeman, "Say It With Buttons," *Ms. Magazine* (August 1974), 48.

⁸¹ Ted Hake and Russ King, *Collectible Pin-Back Buttons, 1896-1986* (Iola: Krause Publications), viii.

⁸² *Ibid.* Growing from the U.S. civil rights movements, this explosion was made up of mostly white, middle-class student activists concerned with issues such as women's liberation, peace, and advocating socialism, all revolving around "a general critique of American society and concomitant action." Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson, eds., *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 12.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

demand which enabled them to be sold by organizations for fundraising. Their abundance led one former activist to label this era the “button craze.”⁸⁴

Despite technological advances providing contemporary activists with additional platforms for self-expression, such as the Internet, pin-back buttons remain a staple means of expression for present-day social movements. In addition to ones with feminist messages such as “I said Anarchy not Manarchy” and “Riot Don’t Diet”, pin-back buttons with slogans such as “Resist” and “Axis of Oil” are distributed and eagerly collected by protestors at anti-globalization and anti-war movement rallies today.⁸⁵

Although their historical significance has been recognized by some, pin-back buttons have received more attention from collectors than scholars.⁸⁶ Of the limited historical attention paid thus far to pin-back buttons, those made for American political campaigns have received the most scrutiny with discussion centering on their roles as propaganda devices in elections.⁸⁷ The notion that artifacts generated by social movements are useful sources for analysis is supported by Luanne Hudson, who has argued that such objects, as remaining concrete conduits through which members of societies communicate with each other and understand their culture, are valuable sources for present-day researchers to glimpse social dynamics.⁸⁸ Political buttons have been used to study China’s Cultural Revolution, and have been recognized as having the potential to

⁸⁴ Jo Freeman, “Say it With Buttons,” *Ms. Magazine* (August 1974), 48.

⁸⁵ Personal interview with Melissa Hennin, who attended the School of Americas protest in Georgia, November 2005.

⁸⁶ See Edmund Sullivan, *American Political Badges and Medalets, 1789-1892* (Massachusetts: Quarterman, 1981), and Ted Hake, *The Encyclopedia of Political Buttons 1896-1986* (PA: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1991).

⁸⁷ Ed Koch, *Congressional Record* Feb. 22, 1977, as quoted in Fischer’s *Tippecanoe and Trinkets Too: The Material Culture of American Presidential Campaigns 1828-1984*. (Chicago: U of Illinois Press, 1988); 302.

⁸⁸ Luanne B. Hudson, “Modern Material Culture Studies: Anthropology as Archaeology,” *American Behavioural Scientist* 28 (1): 36.

“offer great insight into the historical and political landscape of twentieth-century America.”⁸⁹

Feminist pin-back buttons are held in other feminist historical collections. Former members of the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union (CWLU), a feminist group who worked on feminist concerns at the grassroots level from 1969-1977, maintain a “herstory” website. It invites viewers to explore feminist activism in the second wave through music, members’ biographies, images of posters and political buttons. In 2004, Lou Nelson, a Canadian active in the Canadian lesbian and women’s movements donated her fonds to the University of Ottawa Archives and special collections, which, in addition to textual documents and posters, contained 59 buttons.⁹⁰ That others have collected feminist political buttons for archives adds weight to the idea that they were important to the movement and understanding its history.

The CWMA button collection evidences a variety of events, voices, and concerns from within the women’s movement in Canada, all aspects important to its history. In addition to events organized and attended by women’s movement members such as International Women’s Day and Take Women’s March Against Poverty are represented in the collection, buttons in the collection advertise women’s bookstores, shelters, feminist organizations such as the McGill University Women’s Union. Some ask questions: “Pornography: Entertainment or Abuse?” while others make demands: “Come Out!” Slogans vary in tone, from the tantalizing - “Dip Me in Maple Syrup and throw me to the Lesbians” - to the confessional - “I Like Older Women” - to the confrontational -

⁸⁹ Robert A. White, “Mao Badges of the Cultural Revolution: Political Image and Social Upheaval,” *International Social Science Review* vol.69 no.3&4 (1995); 53-70.; Phillip Rose, “The Material Culture of Political Buttons,” http://individual.utoronto.ca/red_roses/research.html (Accessed 10 July 2005)

⁹⁰ X10-34 Lou Nelson Descriptive Inventory, Archives and Special Collections/University of Ottawa, prepared by Lucie Desjardins, 2006.

“What Part of NO Don’t You Understand?” Some have no words at all, relying instead upon symbols such as the woman’s symbol or the coat hanger to express meaning.⁹¹

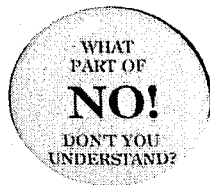


Fig 3: X10-1-8-420,
Toronto Rape Crisis
Centre,
CWMA/ACMF
Objects Collection.

Buttons might speak for the wearer or for the group to which the wearer belongs, such as "I Support Saskatchewan Women" or "we are a gentle angry people." Others carry messages that could be

read as intended to reach both feminist and non-feminist audience -

"Ask Not What a Lesbian Can Do For You - But What You Can Do For a Lesbian." In their function as speaking for the wearer, the

buttons can be understood as a form of communication between members of the women’s movement itself and to reach those outside of the movement.

Issues at the centre of second-wave feminist activism and social movements in general dealt with upon the buttons include anti-abortion, pro-choice, anti-rape, anti-porn, body image. Additionally, buttons that could be understood as generated in support of issues outside common ideas of feminist activism, touching the lives of both men and women, such as supporting gay liberation, unions, peace, anti-war, environmentalism and student rights are represented in the collection.

To explore in greater detail the avenues of button’s historical importance through the CWMA button collection, a database was created, into which the symbols and slogans on the pin-back buttons were classified according to attributes such as purpose, linguistic/symbolic tools, and theme. The data on each button was found both in the Object index and on the buttons themselves. The database assisted in the identification

⁹¹ "Pornography: Entertainment or Abuse?" X10-1-8-18; "Come Out!" X10-1-8-26; "Dip Me in Maple Syrup and throw me to the Lesbians" Lesbian Studies Coalition of Concordia, X10-1-8-267; "I Like Older Women" X10-1-8-59; "What Part of NO Don’t You Understand?" Toronto Rape Crisis Centre, X10-1-8-420, all from CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.

Table 1. CWMA Buttons: Location of Origin

Canada :		9	
Provincial:	Ontario	11	
	Toronto	107	
	Kingston	5	
	Ottawa	28	
	Sudbury	4	
	James Bay	1	
	S.S. Marie	1	
	Barrie	1	
	Waterloo	1	
		159	
	Quebec	2	
	Montreal	15	
	Hull	2	
		19	
	British Columbia	3	
	Vancouver	15	
	Victoria	2	
		20	
	Manitoba	0	
	Winnipeg	4	
	Thompson	1	
		5	
	Saskatchewan	2	
	Saskatoon	2	
		4	
	Alberta	1	
	Edmonton	4	
		5	
	Nova Scotia	0	
	Sydney	1	
	Halifax	3	
	Dartmouth	1	
		5	
	New Brunswick	0	
	Moncton	2	
	Saint John	1	
		3	
	Northwest Territories	0	
	Yellowknife	1	
		1	
	Newfoundland, P.E.I., Yukon	0	
American:			
	New Jersey	8	New York 5
	Illinois	2	California 2
	Minnesota	1	
England		1	
Spain		1	

of general trends within the CWMA button collection regarding date and place of creation, language and theme, which contribute to understating the collection's geographic and thematic scope and in turn, thinking about its potential as a source for historical inquiries into the women's movement in Canada.

Within the CWMA button collection, a year of creation can be traced for 183 of the 465 buttons, or around 40%, either through a date written on the button itself or by a year of production mentioned in its index. Of these, 155 were created between 1980 and 1990, and the year most represented is 1983, with 27 buttons. From this it appears that although the CWMA aimed to amass holdings from 1960 onward, in reality the button collection is largely from the 1980s, at least in buttons with dates on them. It is possible that because the CWMA were active

during this period they were able to collect many buttons shortly after their creation and thus document their dates. Buttons from earlier years may exist undated in the collection,

perhaps acquired from donors who had forgotten when they had been created or collected. The possibility of acquiring the years of creation for buttons could be pursued through consulting collection books, records of organizations that may have created the buttons of interest, as well as talking with women active during the women's movement who collected buttons.

Over half of the buttons in the CWMA collection have no documented place of origin. Twenty buttons are documented as coming from countries other than Canada, with eighteen from the United States, one from England and one from Spain. The four cities represented most amongst buttons whose locations are known are Toronto with 107 buttons, followed far behind by Ottawa with twenty-eight, and Montreal and Vancouver each with fifteen buttons. No buttons are documented as originating from Newfoundland, P.E.I. or the Yukon. The high representation of Toronto-based events and organizations may be suggestive of how the CWMA Collective's geographic location may have influenced the content of their archive, or it could reflect that a particularly vibrant feminist community existed in Toronto during the women's movement (for a more detailed listing of origin locations see Table One).

Of the buttons that have textual messages, the majority, 385, are in English text only. Thirty-one contain only French text. Thirty-eight buttons contain both English and French text. One button contains English and Spanish. Of the buttons that are only English or French, six pairs of duplicates exist, or, both an English and French version of the same button exist in six instances.

Table two lists the number of buttons relating to selected issues. A number of buttons in the collection reflect concerns of the gay and lesbian liberation movement.

Twenty-eight buttons contain messages in support of the Gay and Lesbian rights

movement, and sixteen buttons

Issue	No. of buttons
Abortion	29
Gay Liberation Movement	28
Feminist Movement, general	26
Violence against women	18
Lesbian Feminism, Lesbian Movement	16
Peace Movement	16
Anti-rape	15
Anti-racism	9
Child care	9
Safe sex, birth control	8
Anti-porn	7
Body image	2

relate specifically to a lesbian-

feminist theme. Listed

separately, Gay and Lesbian

rights appear to be the second

most highly represented issue in

the button collection, second only to abortion.

However, if lesbian feminist- themed buttons are listed

in the same category as Gay and

Lesbian liberation, their total, forty-four

buttons, surpasses abortion and appears to be the issue

represented most often on buttons in the CWMA

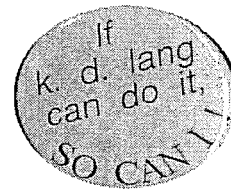


Fig 4: X10-1-8-449, producer unknown, CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.

collection.⁹² While gay and lesbian rights certainly had a place on

women's movement agendas, such a high number of buttons is

interesting in light of hostilities between lesbians and heterosexual

women within the movement. As Becki L. Ross' interviews with

lesbians involved in Toronto's feminist movement revealed,

"relationships between straight feminists and lesbians who identified as feminists during the late sixties and early seventies in Toronto - and elsewhere - were fraught with tension,



Fig 5: X10-1-8-314, Carleton University, 1983. CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.

⁹² Gay and lesbian liberation, lesbian-feminist, and feminist themed buttons were listed separately because the three movements have been defined by scholars as interrelated, but separate. See Becki L. Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 4, 10; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (New York: Longman, 1981), 98.

suspicion, and confusion.”⁹³ At least two of the early CWMA Collective members identified as lesbians and were actively involved in the Toronto lesbian-feminist movement and perhaps their involvement, bringing with it the ability to gain donations through close ties, shaped the button collection’s predominant theme.⁹⁴

Six buttons in the CWMA collection contain the word “feminist” or “feminism.” The terms “woman” or “women” are found on 154 buttons. Given the absence of direct textual reference to feminism on buttons themselves, and knowing that the CWMA’s criteria for collecting centered on the women’s movement in Canada, there must have been other ways that buttons signified themselves as feminist, or concerned with women’s issues. One such place to search for such producers of meaning would be in the symbolism found on the buttons

Table three presents the number of times the top five recurring images and symbols appearing on buttons in the CWMA button collection. Some symbols are linked to some specific movements - for example, the coat hanger appears on buttons related to

Symbol	No. of occurrences
Women’s symbol	101
Woman – profile, silhouette, photo, etc.	44
Triangle, regular and inverted	19
Dove	15
Coat hanger	4

abortion and doves appeared most often on buttons related to the peace movement. The women’s symbol appears more than any other, over double the

number of times an actual image of a woman appears.

⁹³ The issue is much more complex than I have articulated. See Becki L. Ross, See Becki L. Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 23-40.

⁹⁴ Nancy Adamson and Lorna Weir were members of the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT). Becki L. Ross, *The House That Jill Built*, 52.

Besides textual slogans, symbols are a key method of expression found on buttons. Symbol-making, as argued by Freeman in her article on feminist political

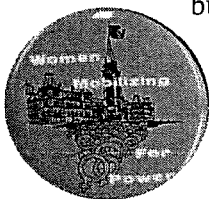


Fig 6: Women's symbols appear on 101 buttons in the CWMA Collection. X10-1-8-207 NAC, 1985, CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.

buttons, "is a necessary part of any social movement; it provides a quick, convenient way of proclaiming one's views to the world."⁹⁵ Her

observation is supported by theoretical work on visual rhetorics, or the

ways in which symbols communicate meaning to mass-audiences. It

has been noted that they "resist individualistic interpretation

because they are overdetermined by customary usage, embedded so

frequently in conventional discourse that they rarely take on a reflective, individual meaning."⁹⁶

Furthermore, symbols can affect viewers more directly than language. Images appeal directly to emotion, engaging viewers whether or not they consent intellectually: they can "evoke involuntary reactions –



Fig 8: X10-1-8-70, producer unknown, CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.

reactions that must be consciously countered by

the recipient if their power is to be at all

defused."⁹⁷ As communicative devices created

during the women's movement to speak for wearers and to viewers,

both slogans and symbols found upon buttons in the CWMA

collection offer insights into the production of discourse surrounding various women's movement issues. Using a database assisted in tracking and quantifying of symbol-use on buttons. Such data might be useful to pursue questions surrounding the uses of



Fig 7: X10-1-8-90, producer unknown, CWMA/ACMF Objects Collection.

⁹⁵ Freeman, "Say It With Buttons," 50.

⁹⁶ Barbara Stafford Maria, *Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 4.

⁹⁷ J. Anthony Blair, "The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments," in eds. Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers, *Defining Visual Rhetorics* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc, 2004), 54.

symbolism in producing discourse that contributed to establishing and maintaining a collective feminist identity and memory.⁹⁸

If “[t]he objects people surround themselves with form the alphabet with which they make sense of the world,” then undoubtedly, tools are needed to read the language of collections, to understand the meanings objects had to their collectors, and to give them new meanings ourselves.⁹⁹ The construction of a database was a method employed as a step toward this goal. Using a database to overcome the absence of a detailed classification structure, the CWMA political button collection was explored in order to gain a better understanding of how buttons, as feminist and button-collector Jo Freeman stated, “reflect the Movement’s history and development with greater consistency than its political tracts.”¹⁰⁰

While individual buttons offer researchers starting points from which to locate previously forgotten women’s movement organizations or activities, the CWMA political buttons collection as a unit also offer research potential. Given knowledge about the CWMA Collective’s Toronto location and close affiliation with the lesbian feminist movement, patterns regarding theme and place of origin reveal that many buttons in the collection reflect CWMA members’ personal interests. The interests reflected were undoubtedly those related to the women’s movement, yet their close relation to Collective members, given the range of issues and themes that could have predominated

⁹⁸ Using symbols as a starting point to explore connections between memory, history and the past is explored by Glen Banks in “Mining the Environment, and Indigenous Development Conflicts” [review], *American Anthropologist* vol.4 (2), 273.

⁹⁹ *Ephemera Canada*, Vol 4 no.3 Winter 1995, p5 “By collecting we gain a sense of our own history and therefore offer some control over our own destiny.” And can “help us interpret our culture, our history.” (*Ephemera Canada*, Vol 4 no.3 Winter 1995, p5.)

¹⁰⁰ Freeman, “Say it With Buttons,” 48.

due to the movement's diversity illustrates how collections carry with them their makers' subjectivity.

IV. Acquiring and Classifying: The CWMA Photograph Collection

In 1984 the CWMA planned to place priority on increasing their burgeoning photograph collection, because, as they stated in an interview, "photographs often represent a lot of activity that is never written about."¹⁰¹ The CWMA's recognition of the potential for photographs to preserve the memory of experiences not found in written sources reflects their larger goal of preserving aspects of the women's movement at risk of being lost to future feminists and researchers seeking to trace the history of the women's movement. However, despite ambitions to expand it, in a 1988 letter sent by the CWMA to women's movement members, they explained that their photograph collection was one of their archive's "areas of weakness." It was described by the CWMA themselves as "small and mostly focused on the Toronto women's movement." In light of its limitations, the letter asked readers, "Do you or your friends have any photographs, old or new, of events or women to send to us?"¹⁰² While perhaps never as diverse a pictorial collection of the Canadian women's movement as had been initially envisioned, the final collection would contain approximately 1400 photographs.

¹⁰¹ Sylvia M. Brown, "Women and Archiving: Two New Ventures," *Status of Women News* (February 1984), 11.

¹⁰² Donations letter by Megan J. Davies, "Collective Minutes 1988 CWMA/ACMF WIC" Box 288, CWMA Administrative Files.

Photographs are a crucial source for the study of aspects of history not documented in the written record.¹⁰³ Yet, information about the photograph itself is most important to a historian who wishes to use it as a source, because photographs may appear to present a picture of reality which is in fact staged, with certain elements hidden from the viewer's eye.¹⁰⁴ Accompanying information about a photograph may come from the photographer or a researcher, in the form of the date and place of creation and names of individuals whose image has been captured. However, when photographs enter archives with little or no accompanying descriptive data, the subject headings under which photographs are placed become of central importance to the construction of its meaning, or, to what it will represent to researchers.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, not only are interpretations of photographs shaped by the photographer, who chooses the point of view and may assemble subjects to express a message through the image, but their interpretation is also shaped by the headings archivists create to sort them. As Richard J. Huyda stated, "[t]he archivist must protect the photograph from such misinterpretation by the user in whatever ways possible.¹⁰⁶ Bearing in mind the usefulness of photographs, and

¹⁰³ For instance, Diana Pederson's study of late nineteenth to early twentieth century photographs from the YWCA showed how "the snapshot helps to compensate in some significant ways for the deficiencies of the written record and suggests the potential of the photograph as a document that may further our understanding of the lives of anonymous women whose experiences and concerns were not preserved in more traditional sources." Diana Pederson, "The Photographic Record of the Canadian YWCA, 1890-1930: A Visual Source for Women's History," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 31.

¹⁰⁴ For a more detailed discussion of potential problems with using photographs as historical sources, see J. Robert Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye: The Historian's Use of Photographs," *B.C. Studies* no.52 (Winter 1981-82): 18.; Monique Berlier, "The *Family of Man*: Readings of an Exhibition," in eds. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, *Picturing the Past: Media, History & Photography* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 207.

¹⁰⁵ The literature on ways that photographs are shaped by photographer's intentions is large, involving work in history, communications, and art history. See J. Robert Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye: The Historian's Use of Photographs," *B.C. Studies* no.52 (Winter 1981-82): 18; Robert L. Craig, "Fact, Public Opinion, and Persuasion: The Rise of the Visual in Journalism and Advertising," in eds. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, *Picturing The Past: Media, History & Photography*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 36-59.

¹⁰⁶ Richard J. Huyda, "Photographs and Archives in Canada," *Archivaria* (Winter 1977-78): 12.

the implications of subject headings upon the interpretation of photographs, the CWMA photograph index will be described and explored in order to posit how it might reflect its makers' perspectives, concerns of the women's movement, and in turn shape research possibilities.

In essence, this exploration will attempt what Bowker and Star describe as a "finer-grained analysis" of selected subject headings within the CWMA photograph classification system. It involves questioning why subject headings were chosen, and how they shape the collections' form and content. Given that subject headings, and classification systems in general, do not reflect to users the "natural" order of contents but rather are constructions bearing its makers' preferences, perspectives, leaving out other items, thinking about why they were chosen will provide the context for tracing the contours of the image, or what Bowker and Star call the "standard narrative" they support about the women's movement in Canada.¹⁰⁷

The CWMA Collective indexed each of its photographs in four inter-related parts. The first part is a binder in which the photograph accession numbers are sorted according to individuals, groups, events appearing in the photos themselves, as well as according to photographer.¹⁰⁸ The next part is a numerical index containing written descriptions for each photograph, listed in ascending order according to their accession numbers. Each description page contains space for the following information: photo number, photo size, condition, date of creation, information on the back of photograph, copyright permission, information collected by collective members, information from other sources, and subject headings. At the bottom of the description page, space is provided to assign the

¹⁰⁷ Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 41.

¹⁰⁸ *X10-1 Canadian Women's Movement Archives Collection – Photos Proper Name Index*, p.2. CWMA/ACMF.

photograph the subject to which it relates.¹⁰⁹ The third part holds reproductions of the photographs themselves, accompanied by their accession number, according to the subject, or subjects, assigned to them in their description.¹¹⁰ The fourth component is a binder containing reproductions of each individual photograph.¹¹¹

The system's structure was intended to enable users to search for photos by both subject and the individual and reflects the CWMA Collective's intention to accommodate varying research needs. However, the system itself requires constant cross-referencing between its related parts to locate a photograph related to a given subject and its description. As is true of any group of archival holdings, the usefulness of a finding aid or index can affect the likelihood that users will use the photos in the collection and find their desired images.¹¹² Currently, the University of Ottawa's Archives and Special Collections Division is in the process of revising the photograph descriptions, bring them into accordance with the standard Rules for Archival Description. Such revisions will also produce an electronic format of the photograph collection index which will allow researchers to search the entire photograph collection index for specific names of terms. The subject headings originally created by the CWMA Collective will remain. Despite the benefits a new, electronic-formatted system may bring to users, given that many photographs in the collection lack accompanying contextual information or dates of creation, the subject headings will remain as crucial data to help users contextualize some photographs in the collection.

¹⁰⁹ "Canadian Women's Movement Archives Photo Collection, Photo number 1301," *ACMF/CWMA descriptions des photos par ordre numérique*, Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa.

¹¹⁰ *CWMA/ACMF Photos – Sujet/Subject International Women's Day*, CWMA/ACMF.

¹¹¹ *CWMA/ACMF Photos*, 1-99. CWMA/ACMF.

¹¹² For an example of how changing a finding aid to find clientele needs can greatly enhance the usefulness of a photograph archive, see Linda Johnson, "Yukon Archives Visual Photograph Finding Aid," *Archivaria* no.5 (1977-78): 112-117.

The photographs are sorted under forty-nine subject headings (Appendix 1). Some headings are what could be thought of as issue-based, referring to a specific issue commonly addressed by the feminist movement. Such headings include *Abortion*, *Childcare*, *Contraception*, *Employment Equity*, *Health*, *Pornography*, *Poverty*, *Racism*, *Sexual Assault*, and *Violence*. Other headings are more general, such as *Bars*, *Education*, *Film*, *Libraries*, *Media*, *Music*, *Performing Arts*, *Sports* and *Visual Arts*, suggestive of places, spaces, and modes of communication in the public sphere touched by the women's movement, or used as conduits to engage with public audiences. In addition to *Work*, *Non-Traditional Occupations*, *Homemaking*, and *Pregnancy* are represented. Space was set aside for photographs representing related movements – *Gay Liberation Movement* and *Peace Movement*. Others, such as *International Women's Day*, *Demonstrations*, *Conferences*, and *Retreats and Festivals* are event-specific, referring to events within the women's movement itself. Multiple subject headings exist to sort photographs of women, categorizing them according to aspects of their identity, highlighting age, ethnicity, location, and sexuality: *Women with Children*, *Older Women*, *Women of Colour*, *Native Women*, *Rural Women*, *Lesbians*, *Lesbian Mothers*, *Heterosexual Women*, and *Miscellaneous Images of Women*.

In light of the implications subject headings have in denoting meaning on to photographic records, and bearing in mind that subject headings are influenced by the perspectives of those who choose them, what can be made of the CWMA's classification system? If we take the subjects in the Index to reflect concerns and activities of the women's movement, we see attempts to represent activities in both public and private spheres, and to document the involvement of a diverse range of women. Some headings

would perhaps be unsurprising to a researcher familiar with the women's movement, such as *International Women's Day Celebrations*. Others such as *Housing*, suggest an attempt to document women's lives beyond traditionally feminist topics, although they very well could be subjects of concern to feminists. When juxtaposed with other categories, we see space provided for a multiplicity of roles for women, and a multiplicity within feminism itself that might not be seen in an archive classification system which grouped all of the photographs under the heading "Canadian feminism."

In order to explore how subject headings are not objective reflections of reality, but order the world according to certain perspectives of reality, several subject headings can be explored in greater detail. One subject heading of interest is *Pornography*. The very inclusion of *Pornography* as a subject heading might be taken to reveal the collection's purpose of ensuring the memory of certain women's movements' issues, whose erasure from future histories may have been desired by those who benefit from the invisibility of its implications. It holds three photographs, two of which are images of advertisements for exotic dancing. One is a poster containing text, "Exotic Dancers Perform a Completely Nude Strip Tease," surrounded by seven images of dancers.¹¹³ The other is a photo of the words "Relax With One Of Our Lovely Nude Models in Private" written on the wall on the outside of Starvin' Marvin's Burlesque Palace.¹¹⁴ The third is of a "Stop Rape Week" poster taken at McGill University in March 1985.¹¹⁵ From the sparse number of photographs under the subject heading it is difficult to use them as a

¹¹³ P-134, "Pornography" section, ACMF/CWMA Photographs Sujet/Subject O-R. Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa.

¹¹⁴ "Photo Print Information Form: Rough Copy, Photo Number 135," *ACMF/CWMA descriptions des photos par ordre numérique*, Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa.

¹¹⁵ "Photo Print Information Form: Rough Copy, Photo Number 960," *ACMF/CWMA descriptions des photos par ordre numérique*, Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa.

definitive means to understand a particular perspective taken by the CWMA on the women's movement's position on pornography, yet the inclusion of the anti-rape poster in the *Pornography* section suggests a stance against pornography which connected it to the larger issue of violence against women.¹¹⁶

The CWMA's *Pornography* subject heading and its contents could be interpreted as evidencing how archivists' perspectives reside in classification structure. Second-wave feminists are often characterized as having general agreement on the exploitative and harmful nature of pornography, which stands in contrast to the much broader and divergent views on pornography expressed by contemporary feminists.¹¹⁷

While the limited contents within the *Pornography* heading suggest the CWMA may have seen connections between pornography and violence, the inclusion of separate photograph headings for *Pornography*, *Sexual Assault* and *Violence* indicates a view of these issues as distinct from one another – the subject headings suggest that the CWMA collective did not see pornography and violence against women as analogous issues. Considering the contents alone, then, offers a limited interpretation, and the incorporation of contextualizing such interpretation in light of the subject headings offers more complexity.

¹¹⁶ For examples of this position on pornography, often associated with radical feminism, see Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. (London: The Women's Press, 1981); Catharine MacKinnon, *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Robin Morgan, "Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape" in *Going Too Far: The Personal Documents of a Feminist* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978, c1977), 169.

¹¹⁷ Comparisons between second-wave feminist stances on pornography and current feminist acknowledgement of multiple, at times contradictory, perspectives on pornography can be found in Ellen Willis, "Feminism, Moralism, and Pornography," in ed. Jeffrey Escoffier, *Sexual Revolution* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003): 435-443; Phyllis Chesler, *The Death of Feminism* (New York: MacMillan, 2005), 1. See also Christine Laffer, "Grrrl Power and the Structures of Feminism," *Electronic Gender* no.9 (1998) [online journal. Accessed 28 March 2006]. Linda Williams, ed, *Porn Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

Another subject heading of analytical interest is *Racism*. The information accompanying the six photographs in this section indicate that every photographs under the heading of *Racism* was taken at single event, the 1981 Riverside Action Committee Against Racism (RACAR) festival. All photos under the subject heading *Racism* were filed under the heading *Retreats and Festivals* as well.¹¹⁸

A look through the description index indicates that additional photographs taken at the RACAR festival were classified under *Retreats and Festivals* only, and not *Racism*.¹¹⁹ What informed these choices? Upon viewing the photographs, it appears that those classified under *Racism* contain some sort of visual cue that refers to issues surrounding race, or include a person of colour, which is not as apparent in the others. For example, one photo captures a sign with the slogan “Smash the Clan” written upon it.¹²⁰ Signs with the messages “Racism Divides People” and “The Klan is Rabid” are also captured on photographs filed under the subject heading *Racism*.¹²¹

Why were some photographs taken from the RACAR festival filed only under *Retreats and Festivals*, while others were filed under, and constitute the entire content, of the subject heading *Racism*? Using the photographs themselves to explore this question, it appears that the photographs taken at the RACAR festival which were filed only under *Retreats and Festivals*, contain little no explicit textual reference to the issue of racism. They capture white women sitting and standing on grass, people carrying banners, upon which the word “racism” can barely be read, a large gathering of people sitting on the

¹¹⁸ P-149, P-150, P-151, P-159, P-644, P-654. *ACMF/CWMA descriptions des photos par ordre numérique*, Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa.

¹¹⁹ Images P-152, P-153 were filed under *Retreats and Festivals*

¹²⁰ P-644, CWMA/ACMF Photograph Collection.

¹²¹ P- 151, CWMA/ACMF Photograph Collection.

ground outdoors and an outdoor stage upon which a woman of colour can be seen in the background.¹²²

However, textual references must not have been the only deciding factor in sorting the RACAR festival photographs, because three photographs under the subject heading *Racism* do not capture text that explicitly articulate slogans relevant to discussions about racism. Two photographs from the RACAR festival without textual content that were filed under *Racism* capture the participation of women of colour at the festival.¹²³ The sixth image captures white feminist Sheryl Pollock speaking on behalf of the International Women's Day Committee at the RACAR festival.¹²⁴

Furthermore, on the topic of racial identity within the photograph subject headings, it is worth noting that *Women of Colour* exists as a heading, as well as *Native Women*, yet a subject heading for *White Women* was not created. Such heading choices are of interest in light of the movement's criticisms for being generally constructed around issues central to remedying white women's oppressions and lacking a sensitivity to the interlocking oppressions affecting the lives of working class women and women of colour.¹²⁵ The CWMA photograph headings render whiteness invisible as a racial category through not providing a space to document it, as they did for women of colour.

Two other subject headings explored together suggest the ways the CWMA Collective subject headings made another aspect of identity visible. Subject headings

¹²² Photographs discussed, in order, are P-152, P-156, P-157, P-158

¹²³ P-149, P-150. *ACMF/CWMA descriptions des photos par ordre numérique*, Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa.

¹²⁴ P-654, "Photo Print Information Form: Rough Copy," *ACMF/CWMA descriptions des photos par ordre numérique*, Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa.

¹²⁵ Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack, "The Race to Innocence: Confronting Hierarchical Relations among Women," *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice* 1&2 (Spring 1998): 336; Nathani Wane, Katerina Deliovsky and Erica Lawson, *Back to the Drawing Board: African Canadian Feminisms* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2002), 32.

were created to hold photographs of both *Lesbians* and *Heterosexual Women*. Unlike other subject headings whose terms refer to actions or things that are often perceived visually, and thus similarly perceptible through photographs such as *Demonstrations*, *Bars*, or for that matter, aspects of identity such as *Women of Colour* or *Older Women*, one's sexual orientation is not. Such observations gleaned from the subject headings lead to questions regarding the content within subject headings based upon invisible aspects of identity, and how they represent such aspects visually.

Images in the CWMA photograph collection's *Lesbian* subject heading largely appear to be similar in content to those placed under the *Heterosexual Women* subject heading, both captured moments of women engaged in activities together – the subject heading under which they were placed is generally the only way viewers would know the sexual orientation of the photographs' subjects. A close comparison between both subject headings indicates that some photographs have been filed under both *Lesbian* and *Heterosexual Women* headings. The photographs appearing under both headings were taken at “A Fine Kettle of Fish,” a 1979 forum organized for feminists to discuss festering tensions surrounding the issue of lesbianism within the women's movement.¹²⁶

The existence of such subject headings suggest that the CWMA saw sexual orientation as an aspect of identity or issue important within the women's movement. The inclusion of *Lesbians* suggests the CWMA Collective lesbians merited a visible presence within the movement's memory. It could be understood as the manifestation of CWMA Collective's goal to preserve the history of the women's movement in a way that included lesbian women's contributions, in opposition to social forces, including those within the

¹²⁶ Becki L. Ross, *The House That Jill Built*, 184. See *Lesbians and Heterosexual Women* in CWMA/ACMF Photograph Index.

movement, working against this.¹²⁷ The CWMA had, from early on, been sensitive to ensuring the visibility of lesbian feminists in their collection, and at least two of the early CWMA Collective members openly identified themselves as lesbians and were actively involved in the Toronto lesbian-feminist movement.¹²⁸ Perhaps these subject headings reflect how the personal perspectives of CWMA members shaped the Photograph Index subject headings. Furthermore, the heading *Heterosexual Women* adds to this – it works to problematize any assumptions about the sexual orientation of women appearing in other photographs. Yet, attention to sexual orientation ends at the elucidation of the presence of lesbians within the movement: categories that might merit inclusion in a set of subject headings referring to sexual orientation, such as *Bisexual Women*, are absent.

In terms of classification systems, this analysis shows how questioning the “objectivity” of subject headings can lead to more questions that, upon exploration, lead in the direction of uncovering invisible categories. The identification of such aspects of ordering things is an important step towards understanding how, as Bowker and Star state, “each standard and each category valorizes some point of view and silences another.”¹²⁹ These observations are made in no way to suggest that the CWMA intentionally masked hierarchies or exclusions within the women’s movement. Decisions made on which subject headings to create were undoubtedly also influenced by the sorts of donations received. However, this analysis has brought into question the ways that

¹²⁷ Ibid., Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada. Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 173.

¹²⁸ Nancy Adamson and Lorna Weir were members of the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT). Becki L. Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 52.

¹²⁹ Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 5.

CWMA's own perspectives and positions as white women, some of whom identified as lesbians, may have factored in to its ultimate shape.¹³⁰

As representations of issues and topics important to women's movement members, the subject headings could be used as starting-points for inquiry into feminist organizing in Canada, as insider-directed manifestations of aspects of the women's movement rendered invisible by general mainstream descriptions constructed by outsiders. For example, the photograph subject heading *Housing*, contains few photos, all of which were taken at the co-operative home of Collective members. As limiting as this is – and perhaps revealing of the large presence the CWMA Collective members' own experiences in the women's movement had in their archive - the photographs and the heading itself make visible the alternative living arrangements adopted by some Canadian feminists.¹³¹ The connection between feminism and co-operative housing is supported by a 1975 *Toronto Star* article in which a local feminist discusses her decision to live in a co-op.¹³² Similar explorations towards understanding the reasons behind the inclusion of other subject headings that appear either very general or very specific, such as *Bars* or *Lesbian Mothers*, could reveal other aspects of the women's movement that received minimal attention by historians and journalists outside the movement itself, expanding how it might be remembered.

¹³⁰ I am drawing here from Vron Ware's discussion on whiteness in "Moments of Danger: Race, Gender, and Memories of Empire," *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* (Beiheft 31 December, 1992): 118.

¹³¹ "Housing" – (P-869-P-873, P-876, P-877, P-896-P-98, P-905, P-906, P-908, P-1084); P-869-P-872 – "collective house", P-73- cottage; Most are with : Amy (Gottlieb), Maureen (FitzGerald), Sandy (Fox), Nancy (Adamson), Diana (Meredith); P-905 – "15 Washington Avenue " – photograph by Nancy Adamson; P-1084 – not from the collective house.

¹³² "Women of our time: Young feminist utterly rejects traditional role," *Toronto Star* Friday October 3, 1975, E01.

IV. Conclusion

That history could, and often was, written in such a way that validated present-day values and strengthened the power of the history-makers themselves, lay at the heart of the CWMA Collective's impetus to save records of the women's movement. In explaining how History often takes a back seat to political motivations, historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg supports this idea in her position that "individuals, social groups, entire societies use the illusion that history preserves the realities of past memories, not so much to understand the past as to provide themselves with a sense of continuity, identity, and order through a connection with a perceived and mis-remembered past."¹³³ While the past, History, and memory may all be different, and at times offer distinct interpretations of the same events, they share a reliance, to varying degrees, on records or sources for their construction and validation. Given the importance a collective memory and a history serve in maintaining a social movement, or any group, and that access to the sources needed to create them is determined by what gets saved and how it is sorted, classification practices can be understood to impact the creation, and to influence the possibility of having a memory and creating a history.¹³⁴ The examination of selected aspects of the CWMA collection has offered a window through which such issues could be explored.

¹³³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Misprisoning *Pamela*: Representations of Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century America," *Michigan Quarterly Review* vol. 26 no. 1 (Winter 1987, Women and Memory Special Issue), 9.

¹³⁴ I am extrapolating here from Bowker and Star's assertion that "memory – individual and organizational – is in general filtered through classification systems." *Sorting Things Out*, 267.

Dynamics of visibility and invisibility, and the ways they shape history, emerge strongly from this exploration. Aware that established archives had not been successful in amassing documents reflective of women's experiences, the CWMA Collective was unwilling to trust others with the duty of saving records of their women's movement, of their history. The CWMA Collective believed there was a need to collect and preserve grassroots feminist activities, since they strongly felt that the efforts of grassroots women's organizations, and lesbian feminists, were not garnering sufficient recognition within established archives. Furthermore, they predicted future histories would omit them due to a lack of sources evidencing their involvement in women's movement activism. Their archives were, in a sense, an effort to re-classify grassroots and lesbian feminist activities back under the heading of the "women's movement," or, as Bowker and Star state, making 'invisible work' visible.¹³⁵

Yet, in the process of doing so, classification methods had to be chosen. And since all classification systems privilege some perspectives over others, the CWMA collection itself carried with it ideas of what sources were valid, and what the women's movement was - ideas that shaped their collection and in turn its uses for researchers. The analysis of both its the button collection and photograph headings suggests how such dynamics played out within the CWMA collection.

The CWMA collection as a whole suggests an acceptance that historical evidence would be needed to build arguments and substantiate claims of reality and truth. Without records, future researchers would have no sources from which to build histories about grassroots feminist activities. The CWMA saved items that they felt could tell a story

¹³⁵ Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 253.

about the women's movement that would not be told by other sources. Taking into consideration the CWMA Collective's objective of preserving the history of the grassroots women's movement, both the pin-back button collection and the photograph subject headings can be read as evidence of the myriad concerns and activities of grassroots feminists, such as International Women's Day rallies and Take Back the Night marches.

The analysis of the button collection illustrates the larger theme of how classification structures can both bring to light and obfuscate aspects of archival collections. In attempting to construct for future researchers a repository of the women's movement reflective of its members' experiences, the CWMA Collective had to decide what to include in their archive and how to order it. Examples of the CWMA Collective's ideas of the women's movement embedded in subject headings, support Bowker and Star's assertion that all classification systems are not "ethically neutral," but are in fact the resulting product of decision made by its makers, the results of which evidence their perspectives and understandings of reality.¹³⁶

Interpreting the CWMA holdings with the help of the CWMA's mandate leads to the conclusion that their archive indeed reveals the diversity of grassroots feminist activity in Canada. We find political buttons from grassroots feminist activities and photographs documenting activities and actors within and across the Canadian women's movement. And because members of the women's movement and academic circles saw and anticipated that established archives would not collect the full variety of records needed to evidence the movement's richness from the perspective of its members, the

¹³⁶ Other factors that might influence a classification system's structure include financial limitations and the larger social context from which it grows and the needs of its intended users. Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 7.

CWMA Collective made a conscious effort to collect as wide a range as possible of records, which they thought would fall through the cracks of traditional archives collection practices. Their contents, viewed in such a way, could then be read as adding to our understandings of the diversity in the women's movement.

Yet, such a reading would avoid significant features of the archival process. Criticisms of the North American women's movement have focused on its exclusions, noting that while the women's movement claimed to be working for the equality of all women, in fact, "their erasure and denial of the significance of race, class, and disability had generated a narrow discussion of oppression," leading women's movement members to act upon issues that "spoke only to middle-class white women."¹³⁷ The CWMA button collection and photograph subject headings offer evidence that, in fact, such issues did have a presence, though limited, in the women's movement. Selected buttons and photographs within the collection offer starting points to explore the boundaries and limits of such involvement further. At the same time, the photograph index subject headings chosen by the CWMA Collective provide examples of how classification systems are one site where the dynamics of oppression simultaneously render visible some aspects of the world while removing others from the researcher's line of vision. As such, the CWMA photograph subject headings illustrate not only how the CWMA Collective were able to use the archive as a tool to preserve the memory of grass-roots feminist activity, also one of what Cassidy, Lord and Mandell describe as the "social patterns and processes by which differently located women are marginalized within

¹³⁷ Barbara Cassidy, Robina Lord, Nancy Mandell, *Feminist Issues: Race, Class, and Sexuality* (Toronto: Pearson Education Canada, 2001), 75.

feminism.”¹³⁸ Recognizing such dynamics leads to a sensitivity to the ways that the CWMA’s Collective’s choices in collection and classification, while created with the aim of preserving the memory of women’s experiences, preserved records that would reflect to varying degrees the women’s memories depending on their race, class, and sexual orientation.

Such residues of oppressions – manifested unconsciously or consciously – are not reason to discount the research potential of the CWMA collection, or any archival collection. The examination of selected aspects has identified some ways that the collection might be useful for researchers. The CWMA collection can contribute to research endeavors as its makers had envisioned through its wide array of sources through which histories of the women’s movement could be built. Creating database-driven classification systems for non-documentary sources in the collection, such as t-shirts and banners, will further assist in opening up their use as historical sources.

As well, the CWMA’s classification structures and collection practices, some of which were explored in this study, hold research potential as well. They could be understood as evidence, or a record of sorts, unintentionally saved by the CWMA Collective. Exploring ways to identify such unintentionally saved evidence within an archive can contribute to future research on the women’s movement which seeks to understand how underlying dynamics tied to ethnicity, class and sexual orientation reside in collections and implicate research.

Women’s history has been criticized for its lack of attention to racial and cultural difference. As Vron Ware asked, “has ‘women’s history’ provided feminism with

¹³⁸ Ibid., 76.

sufficient theoretical or historical evidence to make sense about racial and cultural difference today?"¹³⁹ Such critical questions echo comments by second-wave feminists about established archives, regarding their weak collection practices and inattention to saving women's documents. The study of the CWMA collection suggests that one means of overcoming a lack of sources to explore such issues may be to look at collection practices and classification structures of self-defined "women's" or "feminist" archives. In identifying both why certain sources were saved and what categories were created to classify them, researchers can begin to identify, in small pieces, boundaries of racial and cultural inclusion and exclusion within feminism. Moreover, through studying classification structures, researchers begin to find what lay outside the invisible boundaries created to hold records of the women's movement. Such research supports historical interrogations of terms such as "women's movement" or "feminist issue" as unfixed categories, assisting in identifying how their meanings have been produced, sustained, and altered through classification systems.¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, in order to understand the ever-subjective nature of classification systems, other researchers may wish to create their own analysis of the CWMA collection and compare it to the one presented here. Such an endeavor might identify the biases unavoidably embedded in the database created to analyze the CWMA pin-back button collection, or re-read the photograph subject heading in a way that brings to light very

¹³⁹ Ware, "Race, Gender, and Memories of Empire," 117.

¹⁴⁰ For examples of the growing body of scholarship situated at the nexus, of historical and philosophical pursuits, see Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Kathleen Canning, "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," in eds. Barbara Laslett et. al., *History and Theory: Feminist Research, Debates, Contestations*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 416-452; Diana, Fuss, "The 'Risk' of Essence," in eds. Wendy Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, *Feminist Theory: A Reader*. (Toronto: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000): 423-432; Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

different observations. As we reach backward through sources to produce histories and to remember the women's movement, and look forward, using the past to understand ourselves and the world around us, it is crucial to consider how the sources we use came to be privileged with preservation, how their classification affects our research, and how our own perspectives shape our interpretation of these sources. Such considerations both sensitize us to our own positions as researchers and open up the potential to see and question classification systems. An alchemic endeavor, considering collection practices and classification structures render visible, and make possible the study of, previously hidden elements that shape how and what we know.

Appendix 1
CWMA Photograph Index – Subject

Abortion
Bars
Books and Publishing
Children
Childcare
Children with Women
Conferences and Meetings
Contraception
Crafts
Demonstrations
Education
Employment Equity
Film
Gay Liberation Movement
Health
Heterosexual Women
Homemaking
Housing
International Women's Day General (classified annually 1978-1991)
Labour Movement
Lesbian Mothers
Lesbians
Libraries and Archives
Media
Miscellaneous Images of Women
Music
NAC
Native Women
Non-Traditional Occupations
Older Women
Parties and Dances
Peace Movement
Performing Arts
Pornography
Poverty
Pre-1960
Pregnancy
Racism
Retreats and Festivals
Rural Women
Self-Defense
Sexual Assault
Sports
Violence
Visual Arts
Women of Colour
Women's Centres
Un-labelled Women's Marches
Work

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