

# Archives For All

## Creating More Inclusive Archives in the United States

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Good afternoon. It is such a pleasure to be here today. This is my first time in Japan and I am thrilled to visit your beautiful country and share some of my thoughts about archives.

I'm going to talk today about how archives in the United States have evolved over the past several decades. Archives are going through enormous changes in part because digital technology has altered the nature of records and the way they are preserved and made accessible. But equally dramatic has been a shift in the archival mindset over the past half century in our thinking about who should be documented in archives.

I speak as someone who has worked in archives for four decades. I'm from the Midwestern United States and worked in various archives before I was hired in 1992 as the first curator of the Iowa Women's Archives, a small unit in a major research library at the University of Iowa.

### EVOLUTION OF U.S. HISTORY & OF ARCHIVES

There are thousands of archives in the United States. The National Archives preserves the records of the federal government. College and university archives keep the official records of the institution and document educational and social life on campus. There are also archives in local and state historical societies, in libraries and museums, in churches, and in businesses. In contrast to institutional and government archives, which receive most records by mandate, special subject repositories like the Iowa Women's Archives have great leeway in deciding what to collect. They may document professions, racial and ethnic groups, and other subjects.

For most of history, archives have preserved the history of wars, politics, and "great white men." They have maintained records of government institutions and of politicians, businessmen, and military leaders. In short, they have documented the people who hold power in society—the wealthy, the prominent, the elite.

That began to change with the protest movements that shook American society in the 1960s and '70s. Civil rights, black power, women's liberation, and other social movements had a ripple effect in the academic world. Groups that had been left out of textbooks began to demand their history. "History from the bottom up"—a new social history that examined ordinary people and their daily lives—emerged. But this new history could not be written without sources. As researchers came to archives looking for documents on blacks or American Indians or women, archivists were forced to rethink their beliefs about which documents were historically significant. Over time they revised collecting policies and the way they cataloged and described their holdings to include these groups.

New archives focused on topics like immigration and labor. Sometimes the impetus came from within institutions, spurred by a faculty member studying a subject or group not documented in archives. And sometimes groups who felt marginalized by society decided to create their own archives that they could control.

Until the 1970s only a handful of archives in the United States focused on women's history. But by 1989 there were enough archivists working with women's collections to support a Women's Collections Roundtable in the Society of American Archivists. The Iowa Women's Archives is unusual in that its focus is an entire state. Only one other state, Nevada, has a statewide women's archives.

### IOWA WOMEN'S ARCHIVES

The Iowa Women's Archives came into being because a woman named Louise Noun could not find sources in Iowa for her history of the women's suffrage movement. She had to travel to the East Coast, to the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, to find information about Iowa women's campaign to win the vote. Louise Noun became convinced that the only way to ensure that Iowa women's experiences were preserved was to establish an archives focused on Iowa women.

So she and her friend, Mary Louise Smith, approached the University of Iowa, which agreed to house this archives if funding was secured. In 1991 Louise Noun sold a painting from her private collection—Frida Kahlo's Self Portrait with Loose Hair—to create a \$1.5 million dollar endowment for the Archives.



Fig. 1 Mary Louise Smith & Louise Noun, founders of the Iowa Women's Archives.

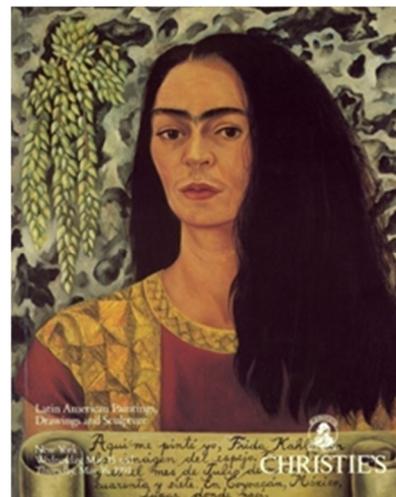


Fig. 2 Frida Kahlo's "Self-Portrait with Loose Hair" was sold by Louise Noun to provide funding for the Iowa Women's Archives.

The Iowa Women’s Archives opened in 1992 in the main library at the University of Iowa in Iowa City. It is part of the Special Collections Department but has its own reading room. This separate space where researchers use the collections and where we teach classes and hold events is “both [a] physical and symbolic space where women’s experiences are valued and preserved.” Though part of a major research library, in many ways the Iowa Women’s Archives functions like a small archives. There are just three staff members, along with student workers and volunteers.



Fig. 3 University students doing research in the Iowa Women’s Archives reading room.

### IWA mission

The mission of the Archives is to preserve the history of Iowa women by gathering personal papers, such as letters, diaries, photographs, scrapbooks, writings, audiovisual materials, and organizational records that document women’s lives. When I was hired in 1992 as the first curator it was up to me to decide how I would define the scope of collecting. I sought papers of a broad spectrum of Iowa women—women of diverse races, classes, ethnicity, occupation, and religious affiliation.

Over time the shelves filled up with wonderful collections ranging in size from a single folder to hundreds of boxes. But it became clear that gathering the history of underrepresented groups—such as African Americans, who make up just 4% of Iowa’s population—would require a focused project. With grant funding, we hired an archivist for three years to gather collections on African American women in Iowa. These collections were rich and varied. The papers of Virginia Harper, for example, focus on her civil rights activism in a small Iowa city, including a 1960s boycott of local businesses that did not hire minorities. Her papers also include a memoir written by her aunt Rosa Dandridge Prior, whose parents settled in Iowa—a free state—after their emancipation from slavery in 1863, during the Civil War. Her memoir—written in red ink on notebook paper—recounts the stories her father told her about his life as a slave on a small plantation.

The Iowa Women’s Archives has also undertaken projects to collect the history of rural women, Latinas, and Jewish women—groups whose history is not well represented in Iowa repositories. For each project we traveled the state and encouraged people to donate their papers. These projects resulted in diverse collections that have been used by scholars, by students, and by the public. Because our collection guides are available online, anyone can learn about these holdings. The

Iowa Women’s Archives is unusual in its deliberate effort to diversify our holdings through focused collecting initiatives. The depth and range of our collections has raised the visibility of the Archives and attracted researchers from around the globe.

Though our focus is on Iowa women, not everything in the Archives is about Iowa—or about women.

A scrapbook kept by Evelyn Corrie documents one of the most shameful episodes in American history. During World War II 120,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes on the West Coast and sent to internment camps for the duration of the war.

Corrie’s scrapbook includes letters written to her by Dick Hayashi, a Japanese-American soldier whose parents were imprisoned in an internment camp. His letters express the ambivalence and anger he felt about serving the country that had taken away his family’s freedom and robbed them of their livelihood.



Fig. 4 Photo of Dick Hayashi, 1942, and letter Hayashi wrote to Evelyn Corrie during World War II. (Evelyn Birkby papers, Iowa Women’s Archives)

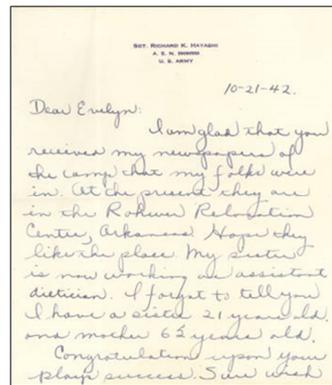


Fig. 5 Letter Hayashi wrote to Evelyn Corrie during World War II. (Evelyn Birkby papers, Iowa Women’s Archives)



Other collections document postwar Japan. Lola Moeller Zook, a journalist, worked as an editor in Tokyo from 1946 to 1951 while her husband directed the American Red Cross here. She sent photos of Japanese sites and scenes home to her family and wrote letters with detailed descriptions of each photo. Here, she described a wartime “safe” that was turned into a home after the war.

Fig. 6 Improved home in postwar Japan. Photograph by Lola Zook, 1948 (Lola Moeller Zook papers, Iowa Women’s Archives)



Fig. 7 The “kami-shibai” man “who comes around and tells stories and shows pictures to the children,” 1950s. (Anna Marie Mitchell papers, Iowa Women’s Archives)

Interestingly, two collections include photographs of storytellers in rural Japan in the post-war period. This photo of a storyteller surrounded by women and children was taken in about 1952 by Anna Marie Mitchell, a Lutheran missionary who served in Japan from 1950 to the 1980s.

Finally, we have the papers of Audrey Lockwood and Kittredge Cherry, a lesbian couple who met as students at the University of Iowa in 1975. While living in Tokyo in the early 1980s they edited a newsletter about the international women's movement titled *The Feminist Forum*. Kittredge Cherry, a minister, has written many books on religious themes, but here’s one that might interest you. Published in Tokyo in 1987, *Womansword: What Japanese Words Say About Women*, was translated into Japanese in 1990.

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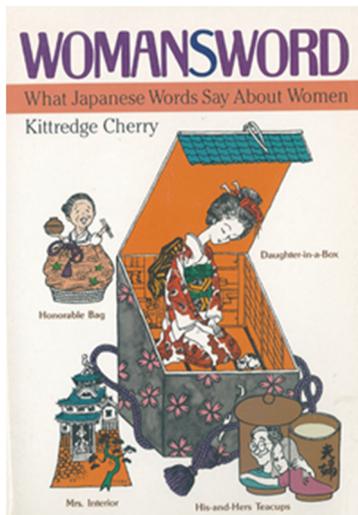


Fig. 8

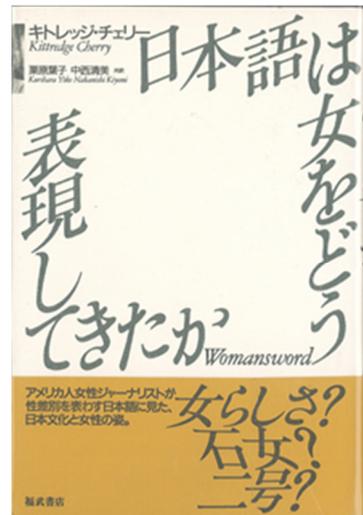


Fig. 9

Books by Kittredge Cherry (Cherry and Lockwood papers, Iowa Women’s Archives)

## USE

Now I’d like to turn to a discussion of how the Archives is used. As a public institution, we are open to anyone who wants to use our collections. Most of our

users are college students writing papers, graduate students doing dissertation research, or independent scholars and writers. Journalists use the archives for historical research on current events and novelists use the collections for inspiration or historical context.

The Iowa Women's Archives is a resource both about the state of Iowa and for the state. Museums borrow items for exhibits. People whose family papers are in the archives come to look at them. Even schoolchildren visit.

This group of girls came to the Archives to look at an exhibit of signs, hats, and photos from the Women's March of January 2017. After looking at the exhibit, the girls learned about several Iowa women who broke barriers to become police officers, basketball players, and other occupations.

The girls drew pictures of these women and pasted them on fabric to make quilt squares. It was a great way to teach these girls some women's history.



Fig. 10 Girls looking at an exhibit of signs and photos from the January 2017 Women's March.

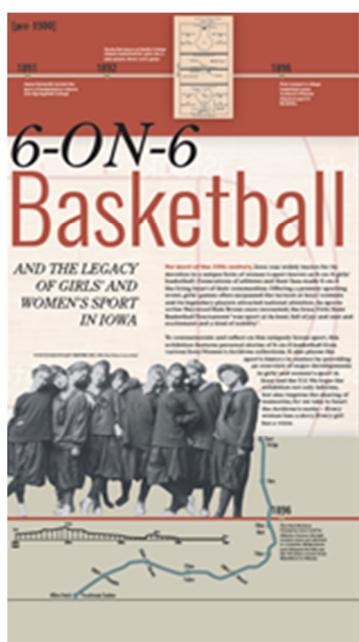


Fig. 11 A panel from the travelling exhibition that toured Iowa in 2018

Many people cannot come to the Archives because they live too far away. So, we take the Archives to them through exhibits. For over a century, Iowa girls played an unusual kind of basketball that had six players on a team rather than five. Small towns were rabid supporters of their girls' basketball teams at a time when athletics were considered a male domain. This beloved sport came to an end in 1993, so we decided to commemorate it with an exhibit called "6-on-6 Basketball and the Legacy of Girls' and Women's Sport in Iowa."

The exhibit has been touring Iowa throughout 2018. We've used the exhibit to reach out to audiences around the state. At each stop, we give a talk about the history of girls' basketball and invite people to share their stories with us. We scan photographs and accept documents that will become part of a website on women's sport history that University students are helping create.

## MUJERES LATINAS PROJECT

I'd like to spend these last few minutes talking about our effort to gather Iowa's Latina history. When we began the Mujeres Latinas Project in 2003, there was almost no information in Iowa archives about Iowa's Latino history, even though Mexican-Americans had lived there since before 1900. Over several years, we conducted more than 100 oral history interviews and acquired photos, letters, scrapbooks, memoirs, and other sources.

The Project has had a deep impact on Latina students at the University. Most of them have been taught an American history that never mentions Latinos. To see their families' experiences reflected in the Archives' collections is both moving and empowering.

We have had various public events in the Iowa Women's Archives to highlight these collections. Through programs like this open house, community members have a chance to see their history as part of the archival record, no longer erased from memory. These women are looking at a display of their family's papers. We also created a traveling exhibit on Iowa's Latino history that has been displayed at community centers, at festivals, at national conferences, in schools, and at the state capitol building.



Fig. 12 Open house in the Iowa Women's Archives, 2016.

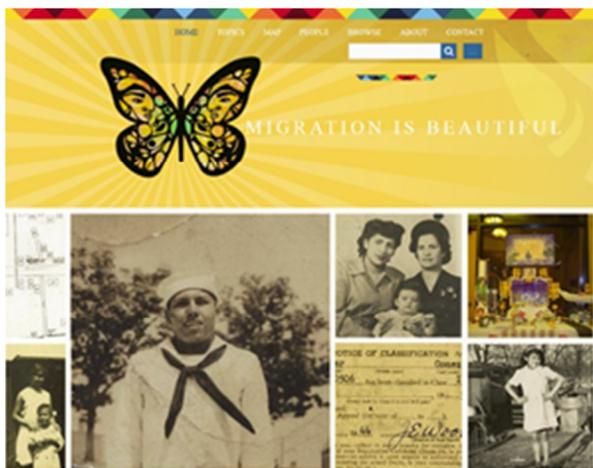


Fig. 13 Migration is Beautiful website, featuring photos, documents, and stories of Iowa Latinas and their communities.  
<http://migration.lib.uiowa.edu/>

Our website Migration is Beautiful makes the documents and stories gathered through our Mujeres Latinas project accessible to people any time, anywhere. It includes scanned photos and documents, vignettes drawn from oral histories, and a map tied to census data that shows the growth of the Latino population in Iowa since the 19th century. Brief historical essays provide context for the scanned documents. This year, three school districts with Latino populations are creating curriculum that uses the website.

## THE DIGITAL WORLD

The Migration is Beautiful website is a good example of the power of digital technology. It extends the reach of archives, making it possible for anyone with access to the Internet to use this material. And it includes some digitized documents that are still in private hands. Through websites like Migration is Beautiful digital technology helps advance a more nuanced and inclusive history that embraces voices often absent from historical narratives.

At the same time, digital technology has profoundly altered the types of sources that are being created. We are in a strange time, when we are overwhelmed with information, but we have fewer and fewer of the kinds of documents that historians have traditionally relied on—letters, diaries, scrapbooks, other paper records. People sometimes wonder whether digital repositories will take the place of physical archives. But traditional repositories are not going away. There will always be a need for the tactile, visceral experiences of physical documents and artifacts. And it will be a long while before we can make all of the massive quantities of material in archives available digitally.

## CONCLUSION

We launched the Mujeres Latinas project, and the African American, rural, and Jewish women's projects, to diversify the holdings of the Iowa Women's Archives and to make possible a more inclusive history of our state and its people. Although more archivists are coming to see this work as vital, many repositories do not have the resources (or the inclination) to do this kind of work. At the same time, some groups are taking it upon themselves to preserve their own history, and to keep it within their communities rather than donate the records to a mainstream archives. The resulting "community archives" may be physical spaces in community centers, church basements, or storefront museums. Or they may be virtual, online archives. Together, they are broadening the definition of "archives."

I began by talking about the shift in the archival mindset about who should be documented in archives. Archives are windows into different times and places. But they are also a means to promote a more just and equitable society. Our motto at the Iowa Women's Archives is "Every woman has a story; every girl has a voice." Our challenge as archivists is to be aware of the voices that are missing from our archives and to encourage their preservation, both within our repositories and in whatever new forms archives may take. Only then will these stories be told, and heard, and preserved so that all people will see themselves in history.

Thank you.

**HP**

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<http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/iwa/>