

Report for Collection Assessment and Workshop

Woman's Literacy Union
19 Elm Street
Auburn, Maine 04210
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October 29, 2011

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Anastasia S. Weigle
Consultant
10 Longwood Avenue
Old Orchard Beach, ME 04064
Tel. 207-671-8244
anastasia.weigle@gmail.com

Woman's Literacy Union Historical Notes

The Woman's Literacy Union is a non-profit membership organization established in 1892 and open to those interested in the cultural, intellectual, educational, and civic engagement in our community. W.L.U.'s Clubhouse is located at the former Horatio G. Foss mansion at 19 Elm Street in Auburn. The Horatio G. Foss mansion was constructed from 1914-1917 and is on the register of historic places. The mansion is in the Federal Revival Style with Spanish influence. The owner, Horatio Foss, born in Wayne, Maine, became a successful shoe manufacturer with the firm of Dingley, Foss and Co. His wife, Ella, a Solon native, came to Auburn to work in the shop and married Horatio when she was 24. Ella Foss bequeathed the house to the Woman's Literacy Union after her death in 1941.

The business records of W.L.U. includes their early by-laws and revisions, executive board meetings and reports, financial records, past and current members information, correspondences, photographs, ledgers, journals, scrapbooks and blueprints of the Foss mansion.

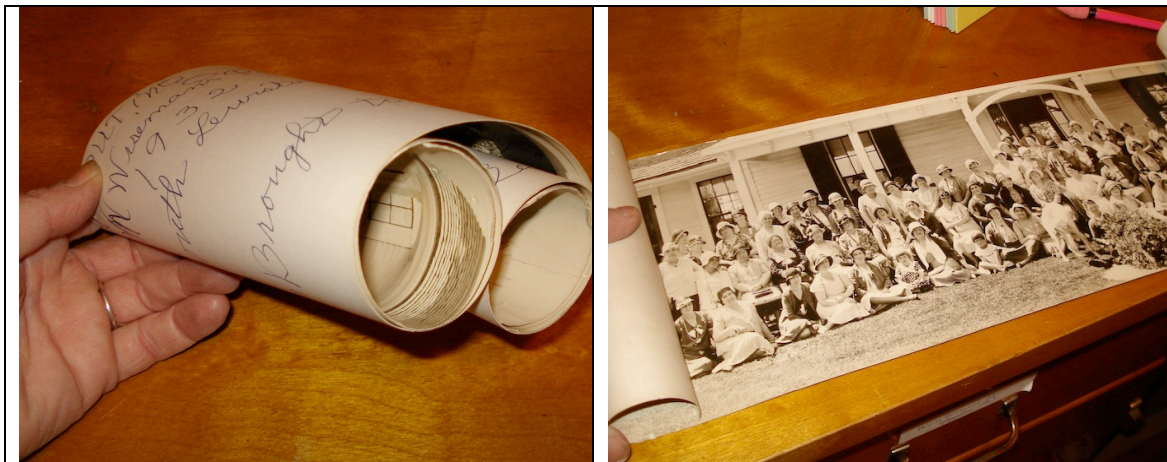
Overall Summary of Assessment with Recommendations

Anastasia Weigle, archival consultant, assessed the Woman's Literacy Union Business Records for preservation and organization purposes on October 22, 2011. The assessment evaluated the business records of W.L.U. and the environment in which they are located. This also included reviewing and discussing current policies, future storage and handling procedures. Observations and recommendations are based on the actual assessment. A full day workshop was given on October 29, 2011 on arranging and describing archives and records.

The collection, overall, was in good condition. I saw very little deterioration. Some of the early journals of board meeting notes have detached spines but the binding is tight. The only materials that have shown deterioration are the early W.L.U. scrapbooks.



The photographs in the collection are in relatively good condition. Most of the photographs are modern prints. There is one landscape format silver gelatin print that should be unrolled and mounted on archival board. Paper clips, old adhesive tapes and staples should be removed. Some minor dirt and dust can be easily cleaned with a soft brush.



The records have been housed in a storage closet. It is evident that this space has some environmental stability as the records show very little deterioration other than a few journals. This is a living collection and will continue to grow. I recommend that these records be removed from the closet and placed in a room where temperature and relative humidity can be controlled.

Requiring immediate action: Create a list of projects and their estimated cost to support annual budget needs. This ensures funds that can be set aside to preserve and make available the W.L.U. records.

Suggested projects may include:

1. The purchasing of archival materials to re-house collections such as phase boxes for fragile ledgers, manuscript boxes, acid free folders and interleaving sheets, basic archival repair tools and materials. An inexpensive hygrometer such as a digital thermo-hygrometer that can measure temperature and relative humidity. I recommend the thermo-hygrometer available through Gaylord Bros. archives division "WW-1546 Digital Hygrometer for \$29.89. This is a reasonably priced device that measures temperature, humidity and current highest and lowest values of both (MIN/MAX function) with an accuracy of +/- 1 degree C (1.8 F)
2. Monitor the environment where the collection is stored using a thermo-hygrometer. Take weekly readings and keep a record of the information. Be

vigilant during the summer and winter months.

3. Review existing access policies and establish new policies in areas of governing authority, appraisal, and preservation policies.

Long-term projects (These projects will require more planning but will ensure the longevity of the records.)

1. Move the records from the current storage area to a larger room where the environment is more stable.
2. Create a separate research room away from collection to ensure security of records.
3. Expand the overall collection development policy to include a more detailed description of collecting focus for the records. Expand this to include appraisal for overall organization.
4. Develop a de-accession policy to eliminate items that have no connection with W. L. U. These guidelines will help determine what types of records should be included in the overall W. L. U. collections.

Lastly, developing a Disaster Readiness Plan would be a project to work towards. For guidance, see NEDCC preservation leaflet 3.4. "Worksheet for Outlining a Disaster Plan," in PLAM3 (www.nedcc.org)

Workshop on Arranging and Describing Archival Records

The workshop was held on Saturday, October 29, 2011. Denise Scammon, Historian for W. L. U. and W. L. U. board members attended. The workshop covered the following items:

- Arrangement and description of archival records (Non-published materials)
- Understanding arrangement and description will help make your archival collection easy for researchers to use.
- If you are dealing with photographs/electronic format/different media--the same principles apply.
- Explained what Provenance/Respect des fonds and sanctity of original order mean.
- Collective description: You use description to make up the weakness of the physical collection. Your description aid will help direct the researcher to where the materials are.
- Levels of control: Work from general to specific. You don't start by describing every item in your collection.

- Understanding your collections. What are the items? What are the inclusive dates? What type of materials in survey: letters, manuscripts, and what subjects?
- Example of Arrangement Hierarchy

1. Institution

2. Record Group

3. Series level

4. File units

5. Item level

I used examples of Levels of Arrangements as well to give the attendees a visual understanding of how collections can be organized. We discussed surveying and storing collections, which included going through and removing foreign objects (i.e., paper clips, rubber bands, staples, tape). Cleaning dusty or dirty papers with soft brush.

This collection has great cultural and historical value and the grant award was a positive step towards preserving this collection.