

# UC Berkeley

## Journal Articles

**Title**

The Oral Histories of Women of the University of California

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/61n561td>

**Journal**

Chronicle of the University of California, 1(2)

**Author**

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**Publication Date**

1998

Peer reviewed

# THE ORAL HISTORIES OF WOMEN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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MORE THAN FIFTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS have been recorded by the Regional Oral History Office with women faculty, administrators, and regents; spouses of faculty and administrators; and alumnae of the University of California. These tape-recorded interviews, transcribed and made available in bound volumes, bring to life the experiences and document the contributions of women associated with the university since 1891. The following essay gives an overview of the holdings of the Regional Oral History Office at The Bancroft Library, primarily on Berkeley women. Oral history programs at UCLA, Santa Cruz, and Davis have also conducted interviews in the area of university history. Consult the university's on-line library catalog, MELVYL, for oral histories collected by these programs.

For more information, contact ROHO at  
486 Library, UC Berkeley 94720 (510-642-7395).

Or visit the ROHO website and peruse the catalog, at  
<http://library.berkeley.edu/BANC/ROHO>

## WOMEN FACULTY, ADMINISTRATORS, AND REGENTS

The oral history of **Josephine Miles** (1911-1985) documents the life and career of a beloved poet and the first woman to hold a tenured professorship in the Department of English. Her rich memoir recalls fellow English professors from the 1940s to 1978, touches lightly on obstacles faced as a result of her severe physical disability, and gives an insightful portrayal of the Berkeley campus from World War II through the tumultuous but creative sixties and seventies. Jo Miles was a nationally known poet who was designated as Distinguished Teacher and University Professor.

The memoir of **Geraldine Knight Scott** documents a pioneer "lady landscape architect" (as she identified herself in the preface) who began her studies in the field as one of two "girls" in the College of Agriculture at Cal, 1922-1926. Her many contributions include the landscape design for the Oakland Museum and twelve years as lecturer in Berkeley's Department of Landscape Architecture.

Two prominent women faculty from the School of Public Health have recorded their oral histories: **Dorothy Nyswander**, interviewed in 1993 at age ninety-nine, was one of the architects of the School of Public Health on the Berkeley campus, earning a Ph.D. in educational psychology in 1926 and returning in 1946 as a full professor to found the public health education program; **Jessie Bierman**, a pediatrician, served as professor of public health at UC Berkeley from 1947 to 1963, and was a leader in the development of modern standards for early child care and maternal health practices. Other women faculty represented in the ROHO collection also displayed a commitment to social welfare and health: **Agnes Fay**

**Morgan**, professor of home economics and nutrition at Cal, 1915-1954; **Emily Huntington**, a consumer economist and faculty member at Cal, 1928-1961, who served on state and federal committees on old age and health insurance; **Catherine Landreth**, from the Institute of Child Welfare, the first director of the Child Study Center nursery school; and **Mary Cover Jones**, partner with her husband, Harold Jones, in conducting longitudinal studies in the Institute for Human Development.

"The Women's Faculty Club of the University of California, Berkeley, 1919-1982," discusses club history and offers insights on women at Berkeley from eleven women, including Professors **Marian Diamond** (Anatomy), **Josephine Miles** (English), and **Elizabeth Scott** (Statistics). Other interviewees who remember early women on campus include University Archivist **May Dornin** and Campanile bell player **Margaret Murdock**.

Women from the UC Davis campus are represented in ROHO's collection with interviews of **Katherine Westphal**, professor of design and a productive artist who was a leader in the development of fiber arts; and **June McCaskill**, herbarium scientist.

The office of Cal's Dean of Women is well documented over a sixty-year period during which mores, aspirations, and women's role on campus underwent drastic changes. An oral history with the first dean, **Lucy Sprague Mitchell**, appointed in 1906, recalls the efforts of the twenty-eight-year-old transplant from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to establish women's organizations and facilities in a coeducational public university setting. Dean of Women **Mary Blossom Davidson** recalls the office from 1911, when she was hired as assistant to the dean through her tenure as dean, 1940-1951. **Katherine Towle**, dean of women, 1953-1961, and dean of students, 1962-1965, gives a candid portrait of the administrative response to the Free Speech Movement and exhibits a sympathetic understanding of women students during the beginnings of campus protest movements of the sixties. Other women campus administrators represented in the ROHO collection include **Agnes Robb**, longtime secretary to Robert Gordon Sproul; **Ruth Donnelly**, who oversaw the campus housing program, 1946-1970; and **Grace Bird**, who recounts her student days, her leadership in junior college education, and her service in Berkeley's Office of Relations with Schools, 1950-1960.

Two women regents have oral histories that discuss their roles as members of the university's governing board, as well as their broader lives and careers: **Elinor Heller**, Democratic political leader, community volunteer, and regent from 1961 to 1976, was the first woman chair of the board of regents. **Theodora Kroeber-Quinn**, perhaps better known as the wife of anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, author of *Ishi in Two Worlds* (1961), and mother of Ursula Le Guin, was a regent, 1977-1978.

## FAMILY MEMBERS' PERSPECTIVES

Spouses of faculty and campus administrators over the years provide insight into their husbands' careers, their own independent lives, informal social networks on campus, and the contributions of faculty and administrative wives to the life of the university. **Ida A. Sproul**, wife of the president from 1930 to 1958, fills in a picture of the university from the Wheeler era forth, with memories of both Berkeley and UCLA, regents, prominent visitors, family, and friends, in her oral history, "The President's Wife." Similarly, the wives of two chancellors, **Esther Heyns** and **Gertrude Strong** were asked to record their perspectives as part of the chancellors series; **Frances Brown Townes**, **Ruth Arnstein Hart**, and **Carrie Maclay Grether** also have insightful viewpoints as faculty wives with full lives of their own.

**Ella Barrows Hagar** was the daughter of President David P. Barrows (1919-1923), a student at Berkeley 1915-1919, the wife of Regent Gerald H. Hagar, and an active member of the university community for her entire life. A prime mover in the University YWCA, prominent in alumni affairs, and a perceptive participant in Berkeley social and cultural life from the teens through the seventies, Ella Hagar has contributed a rich source of university lore in her oral history.

## STUDENT LIFE REMEMBERED

In an interview conducted in 1963 when she was 90, **Mary McLean Olney** recounted her student experiences at Cal, 1891-1895, ROHO's only recorded recollection by a coed in the nineteenth century. **Jessie Harris Stewart** attended the university from 1910 to 1914 and recalls her studies, her sorority, campus women's organizations and the indomitable Benjamin Ide Wheeler and Phoebe Hearst. In this same decade, **Ida Jackson**, one of the few African American women on campus, arrived at Cal. Her oral history, "Overcoming Barriers in Education," describes the obstacles encountered as she pursued higher education and founded the first sorority in the western United States for black women (1921). Ida Jackson became the first African American school teacher in Oakland, California, and later served as dean of women at Tuskegee Institute. An oral history with historian Thomas Chinn is accompanied by a short interview with his wife, **Daisy Lorraine Wong Chinn**, class of 1931, who gives a glimpse of student life for the six Chinese American women on campus in the late twenties.

The Class of 1931 Endowment series, "University of California, Source of Community Leaders," documents the lives and careers of several outstanding Berkeley alumnae, capturing their recollections of student days as well. In this series are **Mary Woods Bennett '31**, dean of Mills College; **Anne Degruchy Low-Beer Dettner '26**, scientist; and **Marion Devlin '31**, journalist. Another source for the study of women at Cal is *The Prytanean: An Oral History of the Prytanean Society*, the women's honor society founded in 1900. Three volumes of interviews document the class years from 1901-1935 in the remembrances of **Prytanean alumnae**.