The Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives

“It is not surprising that archives became the concern of those preoccupied with women’s collective identity, a preoccupation that took the form, in the early years of the twentieth century, of a movement for education, employment, and the vote.”

—Joan Wallach Scott, (1986)

The Pembroke Center has long pursued the archiving of the history of Brown and Rhode Island women – who have been extraordinary agents for social change on multiple fronts – in the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives. Housed primarily in the John Hay Library, this collection focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Brown and Rhode Island women and their organizations. The collection was named in memory of Christine Dunlap Farnham ’48.

Discovering Women’s History

The history of Brown and Rhode Island women is a rich one, filled with impressive accomplishments and activism for social change. The letters, publications, photographs, and other objects in the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives do much to illuminate these moments in time.

Beginning in the 1880s, the women of Rhode Island, individually and through their clubs and associations, took on the task of creating the first women’s college in the state. Women’s colleges were being founded elsewhere in the Northeast, and following the examples of Vassar (1865), Wellesley (1873), Radcliffe (1879), and Barnard (1889), women in Rhode Island were eager to establish their own institution.

The campaign was led by Sarah E. Doyle, the Girls’ Principal at Providence High School. She worked with Brown’s new president, E. Benjamin Andrews, who in 1891 finally convinced the Corporation to permit women to stand for a degree. That year, six women entered as undergraduates; four years later, one hundred women were enrolled in the Women’s College. They were taught by Brown faculty and received Brown degrees, but the College was self-financing.

By 1895 the rented Benefit Street building that housed the Women’s College had grown cramped. The founders of the College recognized that without a building, the Women’s College was a temporary and unstable institution. Rallying resources from far and wide, Sarah Doyle and her associates embarked on a massive fund-raising effort, and the Women’s College celebrated the dedication of Pembroke Hall in 1897. The Women’s College was renamed Pembroke College in 1928.

Pembroke College merged with the men’s college and Brown University became fully coeducational in 1971. Many feared that the absorption of women into the university would obscure the difficult path that brought them there. The Pembroke Center, founded ten years later, took its name as part of an effort to bring women’s experience, their accomplishments, and their struggles into community consciousness.

The Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives includes:

- letters, dissertations, diaries, manuscripts
- photographs from the 19th century to the present
- museum objects such as pins and pendants
- yearbooks, scrapbooks, newspapers
- shoes, hats, gym suits, ball gowns
- oral histories of alumnae and Rhode Island women

To view online exhibits from the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives, please visit: www.pembrokecenter.org/archives

For more information about donating or accessing material, please contact the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives at pembroke_archives@brown.edu or (401) 863-6268.

A delegation from the Sarah Doyle Center march in support of the Equal Rights Amendment, c. 1980

The Black students’ walkout of 1968 was inspired and initially led by African American Pembroke women.