Planning Continues for the National Founding Convention

Sybil Weir
PLANNING CONTINUES FOR THE NATIONAL FOUNDING CONVENTION
by Sybil Weir

On June 9, and intermittently throughout the Berkshire Conference at Bryn Mawr College, a Continuations Committee met to plan further aspects of the Founding Convention of the National Women's Studies Association. Each of the regions was represented by at least one person, and in a few cases, two. Despite a heat wave and everybody's end-of-the-semester exhaustion, the good feelings generated at Philadelphia in March continued to sustain us as we realized that the convention and the National Association were indeed becoming a reality.

Date of the Convention. In response to requests from regions for more time to organize themselves and to arrange for inexpensive plane fares, the Committee decided to move the convention date from November to January. Circle the dates on your calendar: January 13 through 16, 1977—the Founding Convention of the National Women's Studies Association will take place in San Francisco, California.

Feminist Travel Fund. A working sub-committee of the Continuations Committee has proposed the following scheme: each delegate will pay a sliding registration fee, depending on her or his proximity to San Francisco. For those within a 750-mile radius, the fee would be $35; for those who live 750- to 1500- miles away, the fee would be $25; for those 1500- to 2500- miles away, the fee would be $15; for anyone further away, the fee would be $5. The total sum of registration fees collected—about $10,000—would be used exclusively to grant travel stipends to delegates who could not otherwise attend the meeting. The San Jose conference committee would decide, on the basis of equitable and clearly enunciated guidelines, who qualifies for travel stipends.

In addition, each region is expected to raise funds to help send its delegates to the convention. Every effort should be made by regional chairpersons to reduce travel costs through group fares and charter flights. Free housing will be available at San Francisco for those who request it.

GRASS ROOTS WOMEN'S STUDIES:
THE NASHUA, NEW HAMPSHIRE AREA
by Jeannine Dobbs

While the rest of the state is still dependent on tourists, textiles, apples and chickens, southern New Hampshire looks and sounds more like Massachusetts, especially suburban Boston. Nashua, New Hampshire exemplifies the border communities: Massachusetts is a ten-minute drive from downtown; 20 percent of Nashua's labor force commutes to jobs in Massachusetts (most to Lowell, Boston, the Route 128 industrial belt or Boston suburbs); another 20 percent commutes to Nashua jobs from homes in Massachusetts.

Nashua is the state's second largest city (population 63,000), and it is growing rapidly. A number of bedroom communities (Hudson, Amherst, Hollis, Merrimack and Milford) ring Nashua, swelling the population of the immediate area to over 100,000. With no state sales tax and no state income tax, New Hampshire attracts many transplants from "Taxachusetts." Once primarily a textile mill/shoe factory town, Nashua's largest employer is now an electronics firm, Sanders Associates. Sanders has been responsible in the last ten to fifteen years for bringing a number of "outsiders"—Midwesterners, Southerners, Westerners—into this New England melting pot. Dubbed "EthniCity" in a bicentennial promotion by the public library, Nashua's inhabitants include not only the more traditional British-extract Yankee, but French Canadian, Lithuanian, Greek and other nationalities as well.

Located in the Merrimack and Nashua River valleys, Nashua's 34 square miles are gently rolling. To the north, the state becomes rugged, picturesque and sparsely populated. In spite of its overall low population (New Hampshire ranks forty-first), it has the nation's largest state government. Of its 400 state legislators, 103 are women; but only 2 of its 24 state senators are women. (New Hampshire has never sent a woman representative to national government.) About 40 percent of the work force is female, but less than 4 percent of these women hold management positions. New Hampshire was the fourth state to ratify the national ERA (1972), and its voters approved
Delegates to the Convention: Regional Responsibilities.

Another concern of the Continuations Committee at Bryn Mawr was that the 12 regions make every effort possible to reach those interested in becoming delegates through the regional lotteries (for full description see the *Women's Studies Newsletter*, Spring 1978). Regional and/or state coordinators will be sending flyers to women's studies programs, women's centers, continuing education programs and women's re-entry programs at every institution in each state and region; announcements will appear in the newsletters of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, and efforts should be made to place announcements as well in local teachers' papers and newsletters. Announcements will be sent as well to women's and minority caucuses and commissions within the academic disciplines, to professional women's organizations and to all other groups involved in feminist education and/or research. All persons committed to women's studies—at any educational level, inside and outside educational institutions—may submit their names for a regional lottery. Individuals may also designate themselves as eligible for one or more special lotteries: as a student, an elementary or secondary school teacher or a member of a minority group.

Delegates to the Convention: Women's Studies Programs.

Women's studies programs which have so identified themselves by writing to their regional coordinator and the Clearinghouse on Women's Studies by October 15, 1976 are eligible to send one representative to the convention. Each program is free to choose this delegate as it will. But it is important to note that students, staff and faculty in all women's studies programs are also eligible to enter the regional lotteries, in general or special categories as described above.

Before the national convention, each program is expected to complete a standardized self-description now being prepared. This information will be critical to the establishment of a national network, since it will allow the association to describe the achievements of mature programs as well as their problems and those of programs still in the process of formation.

The Convention Schedule. In line with the spirit of the Association, we felt it was better not to have a keynote speaker. Instead, on the first evening, each region will present a short (five minutes maximum) coherent report, outlining statistical information about women's studies in the region and focusing on one issue of regional concern. To insure variety among the reports, each regional committee should send a letter indicating the focus of its report to Sybil Weir (Women's Studies, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA 95192).

Three morning sessions will be devoted to the discussion and adoption of the proposed Charter of the Association, to be circulated well in advance of January. Two of the regions—the Gulf (Jeanne Ford, Women's Studies, University of Texas/Arlington) and the Rocky Mountain (Myra Dinnerstein, Director of Women's Studies, University of Arizona) will be responsible for organizing these sessions. Ford and Dinnerstein will circulate the proposed Charter and invite comments and proposed changes well in advance of January.

Afternoon sessions will be devoted to aspects of the Association's national program. Ten of the 12 regions (all but the Gulf and Rocky Mountain) have been assigned responsibility for organizing a series of panels and workshops on aspects of the Association's program.

The Proposed Program of the National Women's Studies Association—and the Regions Assigned to Prepare Convention Panels and Workshops.

1. To establish a national communications network through a newsletter, an annual conference and other appropriate means; and through the establishment of a national index of curriculum resources and program information to which members may have rapid access. MID-ATLANTIC REGION: Elsa Greene (Women's Studies, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19174).

2. To develop and disseminate strategies for changing traditional curricula, programs and institutional practices. NEW YORK: Sandra Rubaii (Humanities, Tompkins Cortland Community College, 170 North St., Dryden, NY 13053) and Pamela Farley (Women's Studies, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY 11210).

3. To assist, through information and consultation, the development of women's studies programs or courses in various educational settings. NEW ENGLAND: Catherine Portuges (Women's Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01002).

4. To develop a support and information network among women's studies researchers. NORTH CENTRAL: Dana Hiller (Women's Studies, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH 45221).

5. To respond to programs seeking assistance in self-evaluation of their curriculum. NORTHWEST: Sue-Ellen Jacobs (Women's Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195).

6. To advocate the concerns of the Association by monitoring and reporting on local, state and national policy-making groups, lobbying at the local, state and national level, and joining with other groups to take appropriate action on issues of concern to women's studies. NORTH PACIFIC: Marilyn Fleener (Women's Studies, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA 95192).

7. To provide moral and legal assistance to members in danger of losing their jobs because of their work in women's studies. SOUTH PACIFIC: Beverly Kivel (Women's Studies, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90007).

8. To recruit members and reach out to individuals and groups who share our concerns. MIDWEST: Sarah Hoagland (Philosophy Department, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NB 68508).

9. To offer affiliation to individuals and organizations who support our goals. SOUTH: Cheryl Evans (Institute for Women, Florida International University, Miami, FL 33199).

10. To raise funds. GREAT LAKES: Blanche Hersh (Women's Studies, Northeastern Illinois University, 550 N. St. Louis Ave., Chicago, IL 60625).

Each region assigned to a particular aspect of the Association's program is responsible for organizing an interesting series of panels and workshops; individuals wishing to present materials should contact the appropriate coordinator. The afternoon sessions should be problem and issue-oriented, and should lead to resolutions and reports to be brought to the convention floor at least by the third day, to be discussed, modified, accepted or rejected by the delegates. It is expected that all regions will, in fact, participate in each of these aspects of the Association's program, by deliberately dispersing delegates to all of the ten simultaneous sessions each afternoon. It is also expected that from these sessions will come National Task Forces, with responsibility for program development through the following year.

(continued on page 11)
Anyone who has been confronted by a student, teacher, colleague or friend with the remark—hostile, ignorant, or both—that "women never did anything in history" should find enormous comfort and pride in the Third Berkshire Conference on the History of Women. The 157 papers that were presented in 70 sessions over three days to an audience of nearly 1500 demonstrated not only the scope of women's participation throughout history, but also the vast amount of work that women historians have done in uncovering that participation. And if the sheer size were not impressive enough, the creativity and scholarship of the work, and the warmth and energy of the presentations was certainly exhilarating.

Not surprisingly, the majority of the sessions and papers dealt with American material by more than two to one, though every period and place was represented. Several topics were particularly in evidence: women's education, health/sexuality, women's relationships with other women and women's working lives. Two sessions on women and grants provided some practical help in a time of restricted budgets. There was one session each on popular culture, historiography, archives and oral history.

The evening hours provided time for people to meet informally and for such groups as the planning committee of the National Women's Studies Association to continue their work. There were discussions of affirmative action and the status of graduate students as well as a variety of entertainments. One of the outstanding events was the Anna Crusis Women's Choir's folk opera of songs that women have sung from the fifteenth to the twentieth century.

A recurring issue in women's studies has been the question of activism vs. academics: one side worries about declining standards of scholarship, the other about the lack of relevance in purely academic efforts. It's an argument that brings into question the very existence of a conference such as the Berkshire; it is an issue I have heard raised at each of the three annual events. The 1976 Berkshire Conference seemed to provide a compromise that was unique and encouraging. The papers showed the result of thorough research, creative thinking and often brilliant analysis, while the comment and discussion revealed vigorous questioning and committed efforts to apply the material to daily lives and feminist goals.

One of the most exciting sessions included two papers on feminist writers: one on Olive Schreiner by Joyce Berkman and the other on Virginia Woolf by Berenice Carroll. The discussion on Carroll's treatment of Woolf as a political person—and a model for us today—was heated but sisterly in its groping for answers. How seriously can one take "the personal is the political"? Woolf personified it, but was she an activist? Questions of cultural vs. social; personal vs. political; and alternative vs. mainline organizing came up again and again as alternate sides of the room—and the question—cheered. Yet there was no sense of hostility or animosity; the atmosphere was tense, but it was a tension of excitement as reconciliation in the search for forms that are both feminist and workable seemed near. Unfortunately, time ran out and the discussion ended abruptly.

But that was certainly not the end of the question. It came up in one form or another in nearly every session I attended and in informal conversation over meals and at the evening cocktail parties. A commentator at the session on "Ante-Bellum Health Reform" expressed fear that a "second wave" of feminist scholarship had begun since the pioneering days of the late sixties and that it had grown more "objective." She was concerned that self-conscious feminist motives and the insights of the movement had been lost. I disagree. Instead, I felt a sense of excitement and pride in the search for our past and in the remarkable progress that has been made. More important, perhaps, was the sense of community, the willingness to share new research, ideas and analyses in an effort to increase our collective knowledge and understanding. Together, women historians are digging eagerly and self-consciously into their material to find their history and to find answers and guides for their own lives and struggles. Women's history as a field is more vital than ever and the 1976 Berkshire Conference was an inspiring demonstration of that vitality.

Jane Williamson

NATIONAL FOUNDING CONVENTION (continued)

Obviously, many details remain to be worked out. San Jose women have already begun to plan evening entertainment and to consider scheduling for caucuses, regional meetings, affinity groups, as well as for exercise and meditation. Further information will appear in the Fall issue of the Women's Studies Newsletter. Final reminders: Charter memberships are needed to support the Association's beginnings. For programs, the fee is $50: for individuals, $25; for students and the unemployed, $10; make checks payable to the National Women's Studies Association and send them to Sybil Weir, Women's Studies, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA 95192. Second, volunteer to coordinate your state; get in touch with your regional representative (see list above), or, if you can't reach her, with Sybil Weir at San Jose. Third, enter your regional lottery by calling or writing your regional representative as listed above.