

THE WOMEN'S PROJECT OF NEW JERSEY:

The Issues and Process of a State-Based Women's History

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Toni Morrison, the award winning author of *The Bluest Eye* remarked that "the real American Dream, which nobody ever talks about, is to go back and do it over again. It's like reinventing the past," she said, "just by knowing it. And once you know it, you can move forward." As participants in the Women's Project of New Jersey, we had for five years that exhilarating task of reinventing the past—reinventing in the true Latin meaning of the word, which is to "find again". Through the direct efforts of more than 300 women and men and the support of numerous organizations, we were not only able to retrieve and chronicle the lives of the 296 New Jersey women detailed in our reference volume, *Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women*, but we also incorporated into the volume an inclusive view of history that understands the past as the history of all the people, not merely the history of those who held a monopoly of power.

Past and Promise contains biographies of artists, activists and entertainers, scientists, scholars and teachers, factory workers and agricultural workers, businesswomen and public officials, social engineers and community builders. The Women's Project has been fortunate to receive a great deal of publicity about the reference volume. In article after article in newspapers, college publications, and magazines, journalists have focused on the volume's subjects, on the variety of their roots, their experiences, their accomplishments. This is entirely appropriate for many reasons. First, because it was the extraordinary stories of these women's experiences which first attracted a group of people to the idea of creating a book to celebrate the lives of New Jersey women. Second, because preserving the uniqueness of the lives of each of these women was throughout the project a driving force in the entire process of conceptualizing and editing the book. And third, because the original goal of the Women's Project of New Jersey—the creation of a book on New Jersey women—was intended to leave a product, a series of

biographies which attempt to reflect the diversity and value of the lives of the women of this State. No amount of analysis or commentary speaks as powerfully or as eloquently as the simple retelling of what these women have succeeded in doing, often against overwhelming odds.

Formative Issues

The Women's Project was organized in November, 1984, as a consortium of some 16 scholars and writers interested in promoting an understanding of the role of women in the history and culture of New Jersey. That desire propelled our original project, the creation of the first comprehensive reference volume on the history of women in New Jersey, and inspired our travelling photographic exhibit, also entitled, "Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women." While the finished products turned out much as we had envisioned them, none of the participants expected that it would take five and a half years to complete the work. It would not be until March 1, 1990, that members of the state government, the Women's Project, its major funding agents and supporters and school children from local communities gathered at the New Jersey State Museum to celebrate the beginning of Women's History Month with the preview of the exhibit and watch as the first copy of *Past and Promise* was presented to Governor and Mrs. Florio. But back on that grey autumn afternoon in 1984, it was with key issues of conceptualizing the reference volume that the first board members began: the goals of the project, guiding principles, targeting the audience, deciding how to select subjects for inclusion, what time period to span, how to organize the volume, how long the biographical entries should be, how to gather potential subjects, how to ensure accuracy. The decisions made in those early meetings remained firm guideposts throughout the long research and production process.

Goals of the Project

Three very tangible goals were adopted. First, the board members wanted to publish a reference volume on selected New Jersey women that would explore the scope and significance of women's lives as far back as historical materials would permit and that would help to integrate their lives into the historical context of the state. Second, it soon became clear that the materials gathered were rich enough to justify reaching an even wider audience than the reference volume alone would attract. This we planned to do through the production of a travelling exhibit that could appropriately be displayed in schools and universities, libraries, museums, retirement vil-

lages and corporations. Lastly, it became obvious that so much more useful material had been discovered than could be included in the volume that a repository had to be found for this potential New Jersey women's archive. The most appropriate repository was determined to be the Special Collections of the Rutgers University Libraries. Donations by several of our living subjects and the documents of the Women's Project itself have also been placed in this Women's Archive. Both the reference volume and the archive signal to women the importance of preserving the documents which relate to their lives. As we found far too often through the course of this research effort, an individual's history is only validated by the paper trail it leaves.

Guiding Principles

The fundamental thesis of the book was clearly defined from the outset: what women do is important; women's lives count. This takes us straight back to the primary question: "What is history?" There is an English hymn that begins with the words "Let us now praise famous men . . ." That hymn, in one line, typifies the message and the vision of the history we were taught. How many times have we been introduced to the history of a town with the statement that Ezekial Headley founded Headleytown in 1796 and had nine children—with no mention of the woman or women who gave birth to those children and who were probably responsible for rearing them and building up the community of Headleytown? At the first meeting of the Women's Project, a different vision of history was presented: "History ought to be the story of people, of ordinary people, of everyday people, of the people who do the work, rear the children, pay bills, laugh and cry, live and die. And these people must come to know that their lives are an essential part of the creating of their families, their church, their society, this nation, this world."

Those are the words of Darlene Clark Hines, Director of the Black Women of the Middle West Project, an effort to recover women's history through the gathering of primary source materials. Hines' approach to history is very broad and inclusive. Looking at history inclusively, as Women's History does, gives us all a chance to rethink what matters in history—wars and politics or the building of families and communities. It confirms that the lives of women are worthy of society's consideration, that women perform societally essential tasks. It no longer takes for granted women's nonstop dawn-to-dusk labor. Clearly, this new view of history means that the editors' task was not only to decide *who* was significant, but also *what* was significant. In particular, the value of women's unpaid work

was felt to be an essential point to make. We wanted to understand what it has meant to be a woman, living and working in New Jersey from earliest recorded times to the present. We hoped our efforts would enlarge and transform the chronicle of history as it had been handed to us.

Selecting Subjects

The editors interpreted the question of “Who is a New Jersey woman?” with the inclusive approach described by Hines. In determining their criteria for inclusion, they developed a very broad definition of “New Jersey woman,” and included women who had an impact on the state or upon whom New Jersey had had an impact. If a woman had not lived all her life in the state, the emphasis of the entry would be on her New Jersey experience. If a choice had to be made between a national figure with tenuous ties to the state or a lesser-known woman whose contribution was more closely tied to New Jersey, the editors chose the latter. A woman need not, however, have been born in New Jersey to be considered, nor need she be dead, as is often required in biographical reference volumes. Indeed, some of the most exciting research stories, and certainly some of the most rewarding relationships of the project, have evolved from interviews with living subjects.

The conviction that all woman’s lives are important—from the most visible entertainer or politician to the anonymous mother or factory worker—had a significant impact on the way subjects were selected for the volume. The editors looked both for women who succeeded in male-defined paths and those who succeeded in less visible or simply more female-defined roles. It translated into the “notable versus representative” approach to subject selection. Most biographical reference volumes, indeed most history, focuses on those who are “notable,” which for us meant those women who in one way or another entered public life, whether they chose to enter it or were thrust into it, whether they accomplished these notable deeds in addition to the traditional ascribed duties of women or whether they had to sacrifice marriage and family to achieve. The notables are women who, increasingly, over the 19th century and into the 20th century, expanded women’s involvement, pushed out the definition of women’s appropriate sphere from the family, to the community, to the state, the nation and the world. A volume of notables would be the easiest to produce, it was agreed, but skews the subjects toward the white, upperclass, educated women whose backgrounds gave them greater opportunity to become well-known. Such women as Annis Boudinot Stockton and Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley, better known as Molly Pitcher, are notable women from New Jersey,

as are Clara Barton, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Annie Oakley, Alice Paul, Lillian Moller Gilbreth, Ruth St. Denis, Margaret Bourke White and Anne Morrow Lindbergh. These New Jersey women achieved notable status within the state and nationally.

But the inclusive view of history also demanded that the editors consider representative women, that is, women whose lives in some way illuminated a particular event or movement—be it local, state or national—or whose lives revealed a particular human or female attribute such as the nurturing spirit which drives one to tend the sick or build churches. Abbie Eliza Magee, who cleaned, cooked, sewed, butchered hogs and farmed for her neighbors to earn her living, is such a woman. Restelle Revey and herbal healer Elizabeth Harker Elmer reflected the concerns of American Indian women working in New Jersey. Another representative woman is Olive Bond Polk, a black woman devoted to her family, her church and her community, who had to bear her children at home because local hospitals in New Jersey would not accept African-American obstetrical cases until the 1940s.

In some cases, as with the Lenni Lenape women and the Jewish farming women of southern New Jersey, the lack of notability of these women's lives meant that there was no one woman on whom enough information could be pulled together to write a standard biographical entry. In those instances, the editors eventually opted to write a collective entry, using as much specific information on known women as was available. By choosing to include representative women, the editors took on the concurrent task of examining New Jersey history to determine what movements or characteristics they should be trying to represent: industrialization, suburbanization, the influx of immigrants. In other words, they had to look at what made New Jersey New Jersey.

They resolved the “notable v. representative” conflict by including both, and learned many lessons in the process of subject selection, such as 1) that there is an overabundance of subjects for those occupations in which women were permitted to engage; 2) that the nature of these societally approved occupations changes from the Revolutionary period to the 19th century and on into the 20th century; and 3) that changes in women's roles are particularly rapid during the Colonial era and during wartime when their labor is needed and is then restricted afterward. They learned also that there were scarcities of women in other occupations due to barriers which some pioneers were eventually able to break down but not until many other women had tried and failed to enter those careers. The editors regretted

having to drop from the book even subjects of international stature in the 20th century on whom not even basic data could be found.

Out of the more than 1,000 potential subjects considered during the course of the project, approximately 300 individuals were selected. They represented a broad spectrum of social, religious, ethnic, class and occupational backgrounds.

Time Period Covered

The volume spans a period from the earliest recorded history of this area—the Lenni Lenape Indians in 1600—up to and including women born in 1923, living or deceased. The editors had been searching for a cut-off date somewhere around 1925 in order to allow the subject maximum documentation. 1923 was selected as the end date because in that year Alice Paul, a New Jersey woman, wrote the Equal Rights Amendment, an event of significance to the state, the nation and all women.

Organization of Volume

Organizational choices for the reference volume included occupational, alphabetical or chronological arrangement. The chronological approach was selected, creating four major time periods and thus four generations of women. This approach was eventually wedded with the alphabetical approach within each time period, for ease of access. In this organizational scheme, subjects would be arranged into generations of approximately 50 years. Thus, women working together in like movements and women who grew up under similar historical influences would be grouped together. In this way, it was hoped that a story about the experience of women in New Jersey over time would emerge. In order to facilitate the development of a flowing narrative, it was decided that an historical overview before each of the periods would be added, to provide the context of national, state, and women's issues within which the subjects of that period lived. In choosing a generational, four-period organization for the volume, the editors knew they would have to make tough decisions in placing women whose careers spanned many decades, but they found it particularly exciting to discover through this generational approach the scope and longevity of women's networking.

Periodization

Having decided to divide the book into periods, the editors then had to determine the dates for those periods. Standard histories typically choose events such as the outbreak of wars or the election of a pivotal figure to the presidency. Such dates, however, often bear little significance for women's lives. A woman's history text would require a periodization that reflected events of national and state significance as experienced by women. The scheme finally selected does that. The first period begins in 1600—the beginnings of New Jersey history as deciphered by archeologists and early explorers—and ends in 1807, the date when a revision of the New Jersey state constitution took away a woman's right to vote. (The original state constitution stated that a "person" with a stated amount of property was eligible to vote. However, an incident of voter fraud in an Essex County election, in which men dressed up as women voted more than once, was used as a pretext to assert women's irresponsibility and deny them suffrage.) The second period begins in 1808 and extends to the end of the Civil War in 1865, when many women worked for the war effort, believing that when slaves gained the right to vote, women would too. This date marks the end of a half century of abolitionist, suffrage and reform efforts by New Jersey's women. The third period, starting in 1866, marks the entrance into a period of industrialization, suburbanization and social reform. It extends to 1920, the date when women suffragists, lead by New Jersey's Alice Paul, won the right to vote. The fourth period begins in 1921 and traces the ebb and flow of women's progress up to the present. It was decided that no effort would be made to label each of the periods, since anything more than simple dates would limit, manipulate or interpret the period in ways that were bound to be inappropriate for some of the subjects, however apt they were for the majority.

Targeting the Audience

The editors wanted to change the way people thought about women, about what they had done in the past and what they could achieve in the future. Consequently, they decided that the volume would not be targeted to an exclusively scholarly audience. Rather, they wanted a scholarly research approach to produce a volume aimed at as wide an audience as possible—from high school age readers through college as well as the general reading public.

Length and Format of Entries:

The length of the articles was set at approximately 2,000 words, or eight double-spaced typed pages, with a few highly active women receiving slightly longer treatment and a few other women on whom documentation was scarce receiving shorter treatment. Primary source material was included where possible to make the articles more personal and meaningful. The editors wanted readers to get a sense not only of the facts of the subjects' lives and accomplishments, but also to feel something of the women herself—what had shaped her mind, what had helped her to break through the barriers erected by society, what had been important to her. Writers were encouraged to include the telling narrative or the revealing quotation or detail that would bring the subject to life. Accuracy of specific, crucial facts such as birth and death dates and educational attainment was insured by requiring writers to supply copies of birth and death certificates where possible and to verify by phone or in writing the highest educational degrees. In several notable instances, long accepted dates were found to be erroneous and the historical record was finally corrected. Consistency of format was a challenge with 250 different writers producing 296 entries on radically different women from different historic periods. The editors attempted to minimize these problems by providing writers with style guidelines and sample entries and by painstakingly editing and re-editing the revised entries.

Bibliographies and Index

The volume was intended to whet the appetites of readers and lead them, as well as historians, on to future research. It was thus essential for each entry to include as full a bibliography as space would allow, with keys to where the materials could be found. While most bibliographies had to be shortened considerably, the bibliographic editor was skillful in including major works which would themselves contain a full bibliography as well as the more unusual source materials which writers had unearthed.

An extensive index—triple columned over 20 pages—was developed as well. Not only does it give quick access to subjects by name, but also by occupation, geographic location, and association to historic movements. It also indexes organizations and institutions within the state. In this way, anyone wishing to know which New Jersey women were associated with Newark, or Morris County, or the Consumers' League, or Trenton State College, need only look up the place, organization or institution's name and

the subjects and citations will be listed out for him. This is an invaluable tool for anyone beyond the casual browser.

The Process

The idea for the book was introduced by Barbara Little Lombardi in the summer of 1984 when she brought *Our Hidden Heritage: Pennsylvania Women In History* to the attention of several colleagues. New Jersey had no comparable history of its women—and the idea was born that such a history should and could be produced. This idea was brought to the Mendham Free Public Library, which contacted Gayle Samuels to head the project and provided initial support for the effort. Very early on in the process it became clear that if the project was to achieve its very ambitious goals and obtain the funding necessary, it had to be an independent, non-profit organization, so that within eight months of its inception, the Women's Project of New Jersey, Inc. was a self-sustaining tax-exempt corporation. The project initially comprised some 16 writers and scholars—historians, librarians, archivists, and women's studies faculty drawn from institutions and locations throughout the state—as active board members. Gayle Samuels was elected President of the Board, Delight Dodyk, Vice President, and Caroline Jacobus, Secretary. Eventually the Women's Project grew through extremely active networking, within the state and beyond, to include 24 early-phase researchers who began the process of locating potential subjects and 250 researcher/writers who produced the 296 biographical entries in the volume. There were three university sponsors—Drew, Jersey City State College and Rutgers—as well as many county and local historical societies, numerous libraries, organizations, colleges and universities and eventually foundations, corporations, and government offices which were drawn into the project during the research and funding stages.

Having conceptualized the volume, the Board of Trustees created an Editorial Board. The Women's Project was fortunate to be able to find within its original Board of Trustees most of the skills it needed to staff the Editorial Board. Joan Burstyn, an historian, former head of women's studies and professor of education at Rutgers, The State University, became the Editor-in-Chief. Delight Dodyk, an instructor of women's history at Drew University whose research at that time focused on women in the Paterson silk industry became one of the three associate editors in charge of assuring historical accuracy. Dodyk was joined by Carolyn Gifford, a specialist in 19th century women's history, notably the Temperance and religious movements. She headed, at that time, the Women's History Project of the

Methodist Church at the Methodist Archives at Drew. The third associate editor was Carmela Karnoutsos, a historian at Jersey City State College who specializes in Colonial and Revolutionary history in New Jersey. Gayle Samuels and Caroline Jacobus, two writers and community activists, became co-managing editors, in charge of tracking the 296 manuscripts through the complex editorial process, in charge also of all recruitment, training and management of the 250 writers, fundraising, tracking down photos and obtaining photo permissions, dealing with publishers and exhibit fabricators and the myriad details required to see a volume of this complexity through publication. Patricia Butcher, a Trenton State College librarian and writer for the project, became bibliographic editor. Lois Krieger, copy editor, and Linda Quinn, who designed the volume and dustjacket, were known to the editors through previous work. Anne Aronovitch, project counsel, provided invaluable legal advice and assistance throughout the project. When it came time to develop the travelling exhibit, the expertise was again found on the Board of Trustees, in the persons of Doris Friedensohn and Barbara Rubin of Jersey City State College and Ferris Olin of Rutgers, The State University. Gayle Samuels and Caroline Jacobus served as the administrators of the exhibit.

Using some 25 volunteer researchers and beginning with the most widely available research materials on women, over 175 secondary sources were combed for citations of potential subjects, making sure to include representatives of the obvious groups and movements such as abolition, suffrage, Utopian movements, Consumers' League, Temperance, and Club women. A particular effort was made to seek out and represent racial, ethnic and religious minorities which tended not to be chronicled. The editors contacted each of the 463 county and local historical societies in the state, as well as numerous historians, women's organizations, occupational associations, and religious organizations for suggestions. Barbara Irwin and the other reference librarians at the New Jersey Historical Society combed all of their materials to locate potential subjects. Every mention of a woman with New Jersey connections in any of these sources was noted. These efforts eventually yielded more than 1,000 potential subjects, out of which 300 were selected for inclusion in the volume. The more the Women's Project became known, the more suggestions for subjects were brought to the editors' attention.

The selection of subjects was a balancing process which proved to be both exhilarating and complex for those involved. Keeping in mind the fundamental desire for inclusiveness, the editors attempted to create a vivid

and representative mosaic of women from different time periods, different locations, different ethnicities, races, social classes, occupations, religious backgrounds and sensibilities. Certain groups were initially underrepresented. This reflected in part the patterns of occupations that women had been permitted by society to fill and also which historians have felt to be worthy of chronicling. At that point, the editors sought out subjects who were representative of underrepresented segments of New Jersey women's experience and were rewarded by locating subjects with exceptional life stories, such as Ellen Noguchi Nakamura, a Japanese-American interned during WWII who subsequently became the female member of a team which recommended the relocation of large numbers of internees to Seabrook, in southern New Jersey. Nakamura continues to this day to be an activist for the Japanese-American community in Seabrook.

Often the editors found they had an interesting-sounding subject, but virtually no documentation on her life. Other times, they found a wealth of interesting subjects all in the same field—such as writing or education. Occasionally they were confronted with a woman of national importance but with an insufficient relation to the state. Many factors influenced the choices that were made—the richness of the sources and the richness of the stories connected to the women, as well as the issues, movements and occupations of the subjects. The entire process was intended to produce something of a patchwork of women's experience throughout the long history of our state. The editors never thought of their work as final or comprehensive, but rather as a first effort at examining the history of women in the state.

Recruiting Writers

The research and writing of the biographical entries was essentially a grass roots, volunteer effort. The recruiting of writers began with many of the editors' writer friends, some of whom had done historical research before, but many of whom learned it as they went along. As the project grew, scholars from institutions of higher learning all over the state were contacted and asked to share their expertise. Clearly, this was a project which captured people's imagination, for almost everyone asked to serve accepted, even though they knew it was a volunteer effort—the honoraria did little more than cover xerox and travel expenses.

If there is one word which best describes the process of creating *Past and Promise*, it is collaboration—collaboration of trustees, of editors, of writers, of funders and sponsors. The writers worked diligently and tirelessly, often

travelling great distances to track down information. And out of their efforts emerged numerous great stories and visual materials, many of which had never been published before.

Training Writers

In the summer and fall of 1985, the project offered training workshops for writers, covering the how-to's of scholarly research and the guidelines and research aides for writing the entries. These meetings also provided writers with the opportunity to claim subjects for whom they felt a particular affinity. Approximately half of the writers went through these workshops. Many of the writers recruited after this workshop series were, themselves, professional historians, well-versed in research methodology. The stylistic guidelines and sample entries provided by the project were sufficient to yield quality entries. Another training opportunity offered to the writers was the lecture series and seminars in the fall of 1985 with nationally known biographers of women. These seminars were offered through a grant developed by the Women's Studies Department of Drew University.

The writers were encouraged to go directly to primary source materials—correspondence, newspapers from the period, interviews with descendents or the subject herself when possible. Librarians and aides at county and local historical societies were invaluable. Often, the researchers got some of their best material by tracking down and interviewing living subjects and family members. In some cases children were unaware that their mother had played an important role in history. This was true of Hannah Silverman, the young heroine of the 1913 Paterson silk strike, whose son knew nothing of his mother's union activities.

Setting Up the Editorial Process

With 250 different writers producing the 296 entries, it was necessary to find an efficient and fool-proof system for processing the entries and achieving consistency of style and a uniform "voice," while letting the flavor of each subject and the expertise of each writer come through. The system which developed started with each draft entry being sent by writers to one of the managing editors to be logged in. Each entry was then sent to one of the three associate editors. As each of the associate editors had particular expertise, subjects were often divvied up according to the period or the movement to which the subject had devoted her life. These editors had the major task of ensuring historical accuracy and context, editing for stylistic consistency and pace, determining information gaps and conveying to the

writers exactly what needed to be done to revise their manuscripts. Drafts were then returned to the writers with written comments and revisions were made and resubmitted, again being sent through the managing editor so that we would always know where each manuscript was and what stage of production it was in. Each manuscript was then submitted to the copy editor for a final stylistic revision and then went on to the editor-in-chief for a final critique. The last editor to see the manuscript was the bibliographic editor who reworked and abbreviated the bibliography at the end of each entry. The entire 486-page manuscript, an almost overwhelming assemblage of details and interrelated facts, was then comprehensively indexed by Caroline Jacobus. The whole manuscript was then minutely proofed three times by separate editors.

Securing Funding

Securing funding for the project took many forms, the most effective being soliciting the traditional grant from foundations and government agencies. The first grant application for any project takes an enormous amount of time; but, like the bearing of children, it gets easier each time. The Women's Project was fortunate in finding many supporters who believed in its goals and in the editors' ability to bring them to fruition. In all, about \$130,000 was raised—small for a project of this size. It is due largely to the commitment of our essentially volunteer writers that the project was completed with the funding we secured.

Finding a Publisher

A serious search for a publisher began in early 1987 when there were sufficient entries in near final form to give a publisher a flavor of the manuscript. Academic and textbook publishers within the state were contacted, as the editors sought a publisher with established marketing and distributing systems with the educational community in New Jersey. It emerged, however, that textbook publishers, no matter how worthy they felt the effort, were not able to consider a single volume like *Past and Promise*, which did not fit into a series.

By May of 1987, however, two interested publishers were located. The editors were particularly impressed with the commitment of Scarecrow Press to women's history. They have an entire catalogue devoted to women's studies and they also offered editors and marketing people who were experienced in dealing with women's history.

Publicizing the Project

Publicity began early on through various organizational and professional newsletters and a mailing to all 463 county and local historical societies, seeking their input on potential subjects. The New Jersey concert debut in March of 1986 of the violin octet, a set of eight stringed instruments designed by Carleen Maley Hutchins, one of the living subjects, provided another opportunity for statewide publicity.

By mid-1989, Marcia Zweig, an experienced publicity person, had joined the team. She sketched out a scenario of events that would provide an opportunity for press coverage. Scarecrow Press promised that copies of the book would be available by March 15 of 1990, but newspapers statewide would be eager for stories on March 1, the opening of Women's History Month. So, with assurances that at least 10 copies of the volume would be ready by March 1, the Board of Trustees decided on a pre-publication preview of the travelling exhibit and presentation of *Past and Promise* to Governor and Mrs. Florio at the State Museum in Trenton, hoping that it would be possible to give the book to them in person in spite of their busy schedules. It was planned to follow up this publicity opportunity with a March 15 publication celebration and heartfelt "Thank You" party for the writers and living subjects, which the Newark Public Library graciously offered to host. A brochure for the exhibit was designed and produced to complement the book brochure developed by Scarecrow. Newspapers and magazines across the state were targeted, press releases were written, abbreviated biographies and sample glossies of selected subjects were reproduced, press packages were prepared and mailed. All of these efforts produced exceptional coverage from newspapers and publications across the state. The project was even covered on the front page of *The New York Times* New Jersey section.

Impact of the Women's Project

To assess the impact of the Women's Project, it is necessary to return to the original goals defined in the fall of 1984. The provision of information on women's achievements for students and the general public was seen as one of the most effective ways to influence society's views and expectations about what women have accomplished, should be able to accomplish and should be allowed to accomplish. For a very long time, most American history—and most New Jersey history, too—was written as though women had never

existed. The Women's Project was founded to restore some of those women to us all and to help us rethink what is significant in history.

As the project members have learned about New Jersey women, they have also provided opportunities for others to learn. Because it was producing the first comprehensive history of the women of the state, the Women's Project of New Jersey was involved in numerous conferences and symposia from the very start of the project. One of the most exciting and rewarding ventures of the project was its participation with the Women's Study Department of Drew University in a state-funded lecture/panel series which brought six nationally known scholars in the field of women's biography to Drew University in the fall of 1985 for a series of public lectures and offered twelve panels of Women's Project writers to New Jersey audiences across the state in the spring of 1986. The series offered project writers an opportunity to meet with and discuss the problems of biography with experienced women's biographers and, through the panel presentations by the project writers, provided a vehicle to disseminate our research to the broader community. This lecture/panel series was awarded a certificate of commendation by the American Association for State and Local History.

A number of project writers were inspired by their research for the Women's Project to continue on their own, with a view toward publishing a fuller biography of their subject. Three of the writers in particular, all elementary level teachers, produced and published a workbook for elementary age students which combines material on nine selected subjects from *Past and Promise* with hands-on projects for the children. In another project to promote the teaching of women's history in New Jersey classrooms, two high school teachers have developed a teaching unit, based on material from *Past and Promise* and augmented with original documents, which treats the women's suffrage movement in New Jersey. This effort has been so successful that additional volumes on other topics are in production and it is being used as a model for similar teaching units in other states. The sales of *Past and Promise* itself have been going very well. The volume has already almost sold out its second printing. In addition, the reference volume was presented with an Award of Recognition in 1990 from the New Jersey Historical Commission for its outstanding contribution to the study, popularization and preservation of New Jersey history and was presented a national award of merit by the American Association for State and Local History in 1991.

The impact of the project on the lives of the board members has been significant also. They all had to do a good deal of juggling to balance the Women's Project with jobs, homes, families and other commitments. But

what they all gained was the confidence and wider vision to be found, first, in the lives of the 296 subjects—some of the most inspiring role models around—and, second, in the very process and success of the project's efforts. The experience has served as a springboard for other projects. One board member attributed to her Women's Project experience the expertise to seek funding for a large editorial undertaking. Another was motivated to seek a masters degree, another her doctorate.

The more than 300 people who worked on the Women's Project of New Jersey gave enormously of themselves. Many have said that they believed education—changing people's perceptions and values—was a worthwhile strategy for attaining their goals. Those board members who first envisioned the Women's Project of New Jersey hoped that it would have an impact on the people of this state. They hoped, too, that it would serve as a blueprint for state-based women's history—a model for other states to use in showing what women can do. Change that comes about through legislation and policy decisions can be reversed. Change that comes about more slowly, through education, takes longer but cannot easily be reversed. If you can get a book on women's history into the hands of children and young people so that their attitudes are permanently affected, then you have achieved something for women's equality.

The 486-page book *Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women*, 1990 (photogs, index; LC 89-34946; ISBN 0-8108-2201) with a price of \$39.50, may be ordered from Scarecrow Press, P.O. Box 4167, Metuchen, NJ 08840 or call (908) 548-8600.

This paper was presented at a workshop of the New Jersey Library Association Spring Conference 1991, "Libraries: Your Key to the Future." The workshop was entitled "Opportunities for Research in Women's History: The Women's Project of N.J., Inc."