

IAWA Archivist's Report, 2008-2009
International Archives of Women in Architecture (IAWA)

By Aaron D. Purcell
Director of Special Collections

Overview

During the past year, Special Collections made significant efforts to support the acquisition, processing, and promotion of IAWA collections. While all departmental staff have contributed to this effort, we were fortunate to have a professional archivist devoted to IAWA work. During the spring of 2009 we hired Sherrie Bowser as a three-year project archivist to focus on processing IAWA collections. With a solid background in archival processing from Duke University, Bowser has made great strides in processing the voluminous Eleanore Pettersen collection. The past year also featured significant donations of new materials and financial contributions to support the maintenance of IAWA collections.

Collection Highlights

- Special Collections received 19 new IAWA collections during the past year, totaling about 110 cubic feet.
- Adding those totals to the overall holdings of Special Collections, there are now approximately 344 distinct IAWA collections totaling 1,430 cubic feet.
- The most substantial donation of the past year was the Pamela Webb Architectural Collection. It consists of approximately 41 cubic feet of drawings, professional files, slides, and photographs. Webb practiced largely in Portland, Oregon, from the late 1970s until the early 2000s. Some significant projects include: the master plan for Portland's "East Bank," several homes for the planned community "Forest Heights," and designs for the Jewish congregation of Havurah Shalom. Documentation of Webb's business ventures and student work also appear within the collection. Items of particular interest are Webb's artwork etched into metal and Plexiglas and a sketchbook containing drawings of both structures and individuals. Processing should be finished by late 2009.

Progress on the Eleanore Pettersen Collection

- In the spring of 2009, Bowser surveyed the collection and resumed the processing.
- The collection of approximately 350 cubic feet encompasses fifty years of project files, sketches, drawings, blueprints, models, and photographs representing approximately 600 designs. There is also an extensive clipping file of materials related to Frank Lloyd Wright and Taliesin.
- Among her clients were former president Richard Nixon and jazz artist George Benson.
- Pettersen was primarily a residential architect although she also designed churches, schools, college buildings, motels, nursing homes, and other commercial properties. She was especially proud of her involvement with the development of the luxury town home community of Bear's Nest in Park Ridge, New Jersey. It was developed in many stages in the 1980s and 1990s and each of the approximately 200 units had custom design features.
- Physical processing of the collection is nearly complete. Tasks that remain are the rehousing of some materials; reformatting of computer disks; and writing the finding aid.

Research, Promotion, and Selected Uses of IAWA Collections

- Hosted tour of Special Collections, IAWA advisory board, March 2009.
- Performed instructional session for Design Theory and Research course taught by Prof. Lisa Tucker, Spring 2009.
- Assisted the AIA-New Jersey chapter in their preparations to nominate Eleanore Pettersen, FAIA for the Michael Graves Lifetime Achievement Award, Spring 2009.
- Assisted freelance writer Margaret Windley researching Mary Channel Brown for a “Your Corner” segment of the *Virginian Pilot* newspaper, Spring 2009.
- Edited a biographical blurb of Eleanore Pettersen for her inclusion in the Cooper Union Alumni Hall of Fame, Spring 2009.
- Exhibited IAWA material for White Glove event, April 2009.
- Supported research for CAUS independent study course, Fall 2009.
- Selected scanning for researchers from eight IAWA collections including: Olive Chadeayne Architectural Papers; L. Jane Hastings Architectural Papers; Stanislawa Nowicki Architectural Papers; Audrey Emmons Papers; Liane Zimbler Collection; Anna Keichline Papers; Norma Merritt Sklarek Biographical Materials; and H. Mae Steinmesch Papers.
- Staff replied to nearly 40 reference questions related to IAWA collections.

Support for IAWA

- Awarded a \$5,000 preservation grant from the Peck-Stacpoole Foundation to support the preservation and maintenance of IAWA collections, summer 2009. With this gift, we hired a former student to begin processing the Pamela Webb collection and purchased archival supplies.
- Sigrid Rupp Endowment, Library, to support IAWA collections.
- Department purchased flat-file map cases to house current and future IAWA collections.

Biographical Database

- Gail McMillan, the Director of the Digital Library and Archives, oversaw the addition of entries into the IAWA biographical database bringing the total number of individual architects represented to over 1,300. Beverly Willis funds supported a graduate student in architecture to research new entries and update old ones. This work will continue.

Mission and Vision

My goal for Special Collections is to build true research collections of manuscripts, books, and images for scholars, students, faculty, and any patron to use. In particular, I want to build the IAWA material at Virginia Tech into a research collection of original and printed material related to the history of women's involvement in and contributions to architecture. Selected areas of emphasis may include landscape architecture, design, architectural history and criticism, urban planning, and organizational records. We must then use the resulting collections for direct classroom instruction, while attracting outside scholars through promotion. During the past year, we have made great strides toward those interconnected goals.