

**NEVERTHELESS, SHE PERSISTED:
30 YEARS OF WOMEN WRITING
WOMEN'S LIVES**

October 5, 2020

3:00 – 6:00 pm EDT

**Celebrating
100 Years of Women's Suffrage
and
30 Years of Women Writing Women's Lives**

<https://womenwritingwomenslives.org/>

Welcome

Sydney Stern, Chair, Women Writing Women's Lives

Opening Remarks

NEVERTHELESS, THEY PERSISTED: WRITING WOMEN'S HISTORY FROM SECOND WAVE FEMINISM AND BEYOND

The **Women Writing Women's Lives** seminar was organized in 1990 as a direct response to second wave feminism. Informed by the movement's thinking, WWWL biographers and memoirists have gathered monthly for the last thirty years, working to identify, understand, and convey the complex realities that our subjects – and we, as authors – have faced in women's roles, status, opportunities and interests. We have sought to develop new ways of looking at and presenting these stories within the genres of biography and memoir, ultimately hoping to influence the way they are perceived, written and read.

In addition to their individual projects, **Alix Kates Shulman** and **Honor Moore**, two of our original members, have spent the last several years co-editing *WOMEN'S LIBERATION! Feminist Writings That Inspired a Revolution – & Still Can*, a 600-page collection of essays important to the history of second wave of feminism (Library of America, 2021). By selecting, including and arranging 90 pieces, and writing a headnote for each, Alix and Honor have carried on the work of Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who chronicled women's lives in their germinal multi-volume *History of Woman Suffrage*.

Honor and Alix will describe the powerful and influential ideas that shaped their compendium of second wave American feminism and ways in which they see WWWL's work as part of that story.

Panel One

NEVERTHELESS, OUR FOREMOTHERS PERSISTED: REFLECTIONS ON THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF U.S. WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Jill Norgren, Moderator

Members of this panel use biography and history to curate a more nuanced picture of the actual participants in the fight for women's political rights. **Louise Bernikow** examines women's activism at the local level, in New York City and New York State, while **Jill Norgren** explores women's political involvement in grass roots America. **Linda M. Grasso** presents a reconsideration of race, radicalism, and feminism in the suffrage era by comparing special issues on suffrage published in the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine with the left-wing *Masses*. **Betty Boyd Caroli** looks at women in the White House to see what help—or harm—they offered.

Jill Norgren: RUNNING WITHOUT VOTING: 19TH CENTURY WOMEN POLITICAL CANDIDATES

As early as 1853, thousands of women in the U.S. ran for—and won—elections at the local level long before the 1920 ratification of the women's suffrage amendment. Who were these women and what made it possible for them to run? An examination of their political involvement shows how women seized the opportunity to join in partisan politics with, and without, local suffrage rights.

Louise Bernikow: NEW YORK CITY WAS THE TORCH

The trajectory of the suffrage movement toward the ultimate passage of the Nineteenth Amendment took a sharp turn in 1917 when New York State, led by the city, passed a pro-suffrage referendum. A closer look at that campaign foregrounds Jewish, radical and working class participation and teases broader understanding of political forces at

work, including the civil disobedience of Alice Paul and the anti-war resistance of many New York women.

Linda M. Grasso: GENDER, RACE AND RADICALISM RECONSIDERED IN *THE CRISIS* AND *THE MASSES*

In 1915, *The Crisis*, the NAACP magazine, and *The Masses*, an irreverent outlet for left-wing political eclecticism, dedicated special issues to advocating women's suffrage. What does a comparison of these two issues reveal about race, radicalism, and feminism in the suffrage era?

Betty Boyd Caroli: A WORD FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

After Seneca Falls, and especially after the suffrage movement focused on a national amendment, an endorsement from the White House proved to be a substantive act of support. This talk explores the actions of Presidents' wives, daughters, and sisters that helped in the fight to enfranchise women.

Panel Two

NEVERTHELESS OUR SUBJECTS PERSISTED: PUSHING BOUNDARIES IN THEIR CHOSEN FIELDS

Carla L. Peterson, Moderator

This panel focuses on women who pushed boundaries in their chosen fields across time (1815 to 1941), space (Europe, the U.S., and Japan), and class (aristocrat to immigrant). **Emily McCully** begins with a portrait of the aristocratic, yet scientifically inclined, Ada Lovelace who helped develop computer technology. **Eve Kahn** details the life of American globetrotting artist, Mary Rogers Williams, whose proto-modernist sensibility placed her well ahead of her times. **Terese Svoboda** reconstructs the career of Irish immigrant Lola Ridge, whose radical politics

informed her avant-garde aesthetics. **Janice Nimura** concludes with her depiction of three “accidental” activists from Japan who, though chosen by their government to push boundaries, succeeded beyond expectations. The panelists ask why and how these women pushed those boundaries, and why they were subsequently written out of history.

Emily Arnold McCully: THE CONTESTED LEGACY OF ADA LOVELACE

It is impossible to imagine our modern world without the technology facilitated by the nascent breakthrough contributions of Ada Lovelace. How did an early nineteenth-century aristocratic girl come to participate in the development of the computer? Why and how has persistent sexism called her legacy into question?

Eve M. Kahn: ARTIST MARY ROGERS WILLIAMS, GLOBETROTTER AND RULE-BENDER, AND HOW SHE FOUND ME

A 19th-century woman painter, Williams biked and hiked across Europe and New England while navigating art-world politics, dodging misogyny, and forging an avant-garde aesthetic. Known during her lifetime but forgotten after her death, she nevertheless left behind vivid documentation that surfaced in 2012 in a boathouse.

Terese Svoboda: RADICAL MODERNIST POET LOLA RIDGE WAS NOT NICE

“Nice is the one adjective in the world that is laughably applied to any single thing I have ever written.” Why? What was not nice about the writings of immigrant, working class, radical, feminist poet, Lola Ridge?

Janice P. Nimura: THE ACCIDENTAL ACTIVISTS: HOW THREE SAMURAI DAUGHTERS GREW UP AMERICAN AND CHANGED WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN JAPAN

In 1871, the Japanese government shipped three little girls, ages 6, 10, and 11, to the United States; a decade later, three young bicultural intellectuals returned to help

Japan's Meiji-era struggle toward modernization. What enabled them to succeed as cultural ambassadors and educational innovators well beyond the expectations of the men who sent them?

Panel Three

NEVERTHELESS, WE PERSISTED: CHALLENGES IN RESEARCHING, WRITING AND PUBLISHING BIOGRAPHIES OF WOMEN

Barbara Fisher, Moderator

Members of this panel will discuss the wide-ranging difficulties they faced in writing their biographies. **Sheila Weller** describes the perils and pleasures of writing an honest, compassionate and definitive biography without the participation or authorization of the family. **Victoria Phillips** recounts the difficulties of gaining access to government documents for a biography of a subject who claimed her work was not political – while touring the globe for the State Department. **Kathy Chamberlain** describes the challenges of writing a first biography and finding a publisher for a biography of a woman, better known as the wife of a more famous man.

Sheila Weller: WRITING THE “RESPECTFULLY UNAUTHORIZED” BIOGRAPHY

Sheila Weller has written biographies of famous living songwriters, newscasters, and actresses without the official, whole hearted or active cooperation of their families and friends. "Authorized" biographies, which may provide access to private papers and personal interviews, have advantages, but family cooperation, participation, and approval come with their own disadvantages.

Victoria Phillips: HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: MARTHA GRAHAM AND THE COLD WAR

While writing *Martha Graham's Cold War: The Dance of American Diplomacy*, Victoria Phillips encountered significant barriers while attempting to gain access to crucial government and personal documents. This talk describes the challenges of working with the State Department, other government agencies, and international archives, as well as oral histories, to tell the story of the political life of modern dancer Martha Graham as she toured for the US government during the Cold War while defiantly proclaiming, "My work is not political."

Kathy Chamberlain: STAYING THE COURSE: COMPLETING A BIOGRAPHY OF JANE WELSH CARLYLE: PRIVATE WRITER

Researching, writing, and finding a publisher for a biography of the wife of the renowned British historian and essayist, Thomas Carlyle, posed formidable challenges. Although Jane Carlyle was known as one of Victorian Britain's best and wittiest letter writers, nothing she wrote was publishing during her lifetime. Kathy Chamberlain needed to discover the methods that would bring to life for a modern reader this private writer, traditionally overshadowed by her husband. She then had to locate an agent who would believe in such a biography and an editor willing to publish it. The extent to which her book became a critical success, garnering many positive, even rave reviews in major journals, surprised even Kathy. She credits WWWL with helping her through years of solitary work by providing stimulation and inspiration, as well as incredibly helpful practical suggestions.

SPEAKER AND PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES

Louise Bernikow (louisebernikow.com/) is the author of nine books, founder of several Women's Studies programs and seminars, a frequent speaker at colleges, communities and on television, and a tornado on social media.

Betty Boyd Caroli (bettyboydcaroli.com) has written extensively on the White House and the women who lived there. Her most recent book, *First Ladies: The Ever-Changing Role, from Martha Washington to Melania Trump* (2019) followed *Lady Bird and Lyndon* (2015), *The Roosevelt Women* (1998), *Inside the White House* (1992), and others.

Kathy Chamberlain taught English at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, City University of New York for thirty-four years. A past chair of the Women Writing Women's Lives seminar, she served on its Steering Committee for over two decades. In 2017 her biography *Jane Welsh Carlyle and Her Victorian World: A Story of Love, Work, Friendship, and Marriage* was published simultaneously by Overlook Press in New York and Duckworth in London.

Barbara Fisher taught 18th and 19th Century English Literature at Eugene Lang College of the New School for more than twenty years. While regularly reviewing books for *The New York Times*, *the Washington Post* and *the Boston Globe*, she also wrote a biography of Trix Kipling, Rudyard Kipling's sister, and is presently looking for a publisher.

Linda M. Grasso is Professor of English at York College, and of Liberal Studies and Women's and Gender Studies at The Graduate Center, CUNY. She has published widely on nineteenth and twentieth-century US women's literature, history, and culture. Her most recent article, "Differently Radical: Suffrage Issues and Feminist Ideas in *The Crisis* and *The Masses*" is included in *Front Pages, Front Lines: Media and The Fight for Women's Suffrage* (U of Illinois P). Grasso is the author of *The Artistry of Anger: Black and White Women's Literature in America, 1820-1860* (2003) and *Equal Under the Sky: Georgia O'Keeffe and Twentieth-Century Feminism* (2017).

Eve Kahn (evekahn.com/) is an independent scholar who wrote *The New York Times'* weekly Antiques column (2008-2016). She still regularly contributes to the *Times* as well as to *Apollo* and *The Magazine Antiques*. Her first book, *Forever Seeing New Beauties: The Forgotten Impressionist Mary Rogers Williams, 1857-1907* (2019), won a Sarton Women's Book Award and the Connecticut League of History Organization's book prize. She is currently writing a biography of the journalist Zoe Anderson Norris (1860-1914).

Emily McCully (emilyarnoldmccully.com/) is the author/illustrator of more than 150 picture books, including biographies of important yet often forgotten women, and the fictional *Mirette on the High Wire*, a Caldecott winner. Her Y/A biographies are *SHE*

DID IT!: 21 Women Who Changed the Way We Think (2018), and *Ida M. Tarbell* (2014), finalist for the YALSA Award for best Y/A biography. *DREAMING IN CODE, Ada Byron Lovelace, Computer Pioneer*, was published last year. She has published two adult novels and an O'Henry Prize short story.

Honor Moore's (honormoore.com/) latest memoir is *Our Revolution: A Mother and Daughter at Midcentury*. An earlier memoir about her father, *The Bishop's Daughter*, was a National Book Critics Circle finalist. *The White Blackbird*, her biography of her grandmother the painter Margaret Sargent, was just released as an audiobook read by Stockard Channing. She is author of three volumes of poetry and *Mourning Pictures*, a play produced on Broadway. Her work has appeared widely in magazines and journals, including *The New Yorker*, and she is on the faculty of the graduate writing program at The New School where she is the nonfiction coordinator.

Janice Nimura (janicenimura.com/) is the author of *Daughters of the Samurai: A Journey from East to West and Back*, a 2015 *New York Times* Notable Book. She received a 2017 Public Scholar Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities in support of her new book, *The Doctors Blackwell: How Two Pioneering Sisters Brought Medicine to Women--and Women to Medicine*, forthcoming from W.W. Norton (2021).

Jill Norgren (jillnorgren.com/) is professor emerita of political science at John Jay College/The Graduate Center, City University of New York. She has written three biographical books, most recently *Stories from Trailblazing Women Lawyers* (2018). She is currently co-authoring a study of U.S. women who ran for elective office between 1853 and 1920 that draws on the data of her co-founded project, herhatwasinthering.org/.

Carla L. Peterson is Professor Emerita in the Department of English at the University of Maryland. She specializes in nineteenth-century African American literature, culture, and history and has published numerous essays in this field. She is the author of *"Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* and *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (Yale UP, 2011). She is currently working on a new project, *Urbanity and Taste: The Making of African American Modernity in Antebellum Philadelphia and New York, 1820-1865*.

Victoria Phillips (victoria-phillips.global/) is a Visiting Scholar at the London School of Economics in the Department of International History where she teaches courses on Cold War culture and diplomacy. She also directs the Cold War Archival Research project (CWAR). During the COVID crisis, she chaired a Task force for the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations on on-line primary source research, and has conducted international virtual conferences with archivists and researchers from students to professionals. Her next project is a biography of Eleanor Lansing Dulles.

Alix Kates Shulman (alixkshulman.com) has written fourteen books - including five novels, a biography, and three memoirs - and her essays have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *n+1* and others. *Drinking the Rain*

was named an *LA Times* Book Prize finalist and her biography of Emma Goldman was a *NY Times* Notable book. Her debut novel, the million-copy *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*, has been newly reissued as a “feminist classic.” In 2018 she received a Clara Lemlich Award for a lifetime of social activism.

Sydney Ladensohn Stern (sydneylstern.com) most recently published *The Brothers Mankiewicz: Hope, Heartbreak, and Hollywood Classics*. Her first biography was *Gloria Steinem: Her Passions, Politics, and Mystique*.

Terese Svoboda (teresesvoboda.com/) is a Guggenheim fellow and author of 19 books of poetry, fiction, memoir, biography, and translation. *Anything That Burns You: A Portrait of Lola Ridge, Radical Poet* appeared in paper in 2018; *Great American Desert*, a book of stories in 2019; and *Theatrix: Play Poems* in 2021. "Terese Svoboda is one of those writers you would be tempted to read regardless of the setting or the period or the plot or even the genre." *Bloomsbury Review*

Sheila Weller is the author of many books, including her family memoir, *Dancing at Ciro's: A Family's Love, Loss, and Scandal on the Sunset Strip* (2003); *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon – and the Journey of a Generation*, (2008); *The News Sorority: Diane Sawyer, Katie Couric, Christine Amanpour – and the Triumph of Women in TV News* (2014); and most recently *Carrie Fisher: A Life on the Edge* (2019).

The [Women Writing Women's Lives](http://womenwritingwomenslives.org/) seminar includes approximately seventy members who are writing book-length biographies and memoirs. Organized in 1990, the group represents a wide range of feminist perspectives and a variety of professional backgrounds. Our members include academics, independent scholars, and journalists. WWWL is under the aegis of the [Center for the Study of Women and Society](http://www.csws.cuny.edu/) and the [Center for the Humanities](http://www.cshs.cuny.edu/) at the [Graduate Center of the City University of New York](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/). The seminar meets in New York City monthly, from October to May, to present work for discussion and the sharing of ideas and suggestions. In addition, outside presenters visit regularly to talk about their work. WWWL yearly offers two works-in-progress talks that are open to the public.

**WOMEN WRITING WOMEN'S LIVES
GRATEFULLY THANKS OUR
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