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Nina Swaim Papers

1913-2015 (*Bulk:* 1952-2015)
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Eleanor "Nina" Hathaway Swaim (1938-2015) was a feminist, environmental and antinuclear activist, antiwar organizer, and proponent of women's collective enterprises globally. She was arrested for the final time just a month before her death, chained to the gates of a pipe yard in Williston, VT, protesting a fracked gas pipeline. Born into a conservative family in Sharon, MA, Swaim was radicalized during the mid-sixties by courses at the Free University on the Lower East Side and during the 1968 occupations at Columbia University, where she was an administrator. She joined the It's All Right to be a Woman Theater in 1970 and toured the country with them before leaving New York City to work in a GI bookstore near a military base in Massachusetts, helping soldiers protesting the Vietnam War. Learning the printing trade, she moved to Vermont and co-founded the women's collective press, New Victoria Press, worked as a mediation coordinator for the Vermont Supreme Court, and became a strong force in the antinuclear movement, helping found the Upper Valley Energy Coalition (UVCE), and co-authoring a book with Susan Koen, "A Handbook for Women on the Nuclear Mentality." She met her husband, Douglas Smith, through UVEC, and the pair worked on numerous antinuclear, environmental, and other grassroots campaigns and protests together, including a project in Mozambique on water access, where Swaim worked as a cooperater with the revolutionary Organization of Mozambican Women. Other international work included picking cotton in Nicaragua, visiting Cuba under siege, and touring Gandhian centers in India to learn practical nonviolence and social change techniques. A practicing Buddhist, Swaim was an avid writer, gardener, beekeeper, and hiker, and in addition to her other causes, spearheaded numerous events related to the natural world, food security, and honeybees.

The Nina Swaim Papers offer an intimate look into the life of an indomitable and inspiring grassroots activist focused on both local Vermont issues and global concerns. Unpublished writings, clippings, and correspondence, as well as photographs, tapes, and scrapbooks reflect her international travels and work, as well as her community and concerns in the antinuclear and environmental movements based out of Vermont. Detailed writings, reflections, short stories, travel notes, and a comprehensive set of journals dating from the late sixties make up a large part of the collection. They are full of the musings of an activist pondering the meaning of women's consciousness raising and conflict settlement, of worker collectives and other community building, of struggles and misunderstandings between lesbian and straight women, of power in organizations like Clamshell Alliance and the Upper Valley Energy Coalition, of motherhood and aging, and of the relationship between action for social change and spiritual practice.

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Background on Nina Swaim

Born in Sherborn, Massachusetts in 1938, Eleanor "Nina" Swaim was brought up by conservative parents. As a child, she attended St. Mary's, a school located in New Hampshire. She graduated with her B.A. from Boston University and an M. Ed. from Columbia University. She dedicated her life to research and learning more about her world.

Despite her traditional upbringing, her radicalization and dedication to activist causes began in the mid-1960s while enrolled in college. Nina started her lifelong engagement in activism in response to the Vietnam War by participating in campus protests at Columbia University. She worked in a GI bookstore near a military base to help soldiers protest against the war. She entered the printing trade not long after working with the New Victoria Press in Lebanon, New Hampshire.

As a radical feminist and environmentalist, Swaim made worldwide connections, collected data, and joined others in protests focused on local change. Her research and activism included international concerns and she traveled to multiple countries within Europe and Africa. Most of her research investigated African women, the environment, and the connections between these areas of interest and community. A significant area of study was the government and feminist movements in Mozambique.

In 1980, Swaim co-wrote the book "A Handbook for Women on the Nuclear Mentality" with Susan Koen, emphasizing the antinuclear movement. By the 2000s, Nina and her friends started protesting nuclear movements in New England. She protested throughout the first decade of the 2000s, working with the Upper Valley Energy Coalition. A month before her death in 2015, Swaim and several of her friends, including her husband Doug, were arrested for protesting a fracked gas pipeline in Williston, Vermont.

Nina was also a published author and a creative writer. She appeared in multiple magazines and newspapers regarding political, environmental, and social reform. She was an avid beekeeper, giving lectures and advice on caring, raising, and saving bee populations. In October of 2015, Swaim died from a stroke at the age of 77.

Scope of collection

The Nina Swaim Papers offer an intimate look into the life of an indomitable and inspiring grassroots activist focused on both local Vermont issues and global concerns. Unpublished writings, clippings, and correspondence, as well as photographs, tapes, and scrapbooks reflect her international travels and work, as well as her community and concerns in the antinuclear and environmental movements based out of Vermont. Detailed writings, reflections, short stories, travel notes, and a comprehensive set of journals dating from the late sixties make up a large part of the collection. Unprocessed digital materials include writings, drafts, and notes from later years. They are full of the musings of an activist pondering the meaning of women's consciousness raising and conflict settlement, of worker collectives and other community building, of struggles and misunderstandings between lesbian and straight women, of power in organizations like Clamshell Alliance and the Upper Valley Energy Coalition, of motherhood and aging, and of the relationship between action for social change and spiritual practice.

Series descriptions

[Series 1. Correspondence](#)

1926-2015

Includes decades worth of letters written to and by Nina Swaim. It documents her life abroad and the friends she holds dear as collaborators in community, research, and protest activities. This extensive collection of correspondence tracks Swaim from her early womanhood until her death in 2015.

[Series 2. Writing](#)

1957-2015

Swaim was a distinguished writer and short-story author. Within writings are diaries, creative and reflective writing, published stories, drafts and unpublished stories and speeches.

[Series 3. Publications](#)

1913-2015

As a researcher, Swaim consulted a lot of publications as reference material including booklets, editorials, and newspapers.

[Series 4. Audiovisual](#)

1957-2015

Personal photographs of Swaim as well as photographs she took throughout her life. Showcasing her time abroad and with family and friends, this series is a visual window into Swaim's life. Also contains cassettes and CDs of interviews with Swaim.

[Series 5. Research and Activism](#)

1957-2015

Materials Swaim collected and consulted during her decades' worth of research and community engagement. Includes notes, articles, pamphlets, information packets regarding activist group, shirts and the plastic handcuffs Nina wore upon her protesting in Vermont in 2011.

Inventory

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1926-2015

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1926 July 22

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Correspondence

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Correspondence

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Correspondence

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Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of Douglas V. Smith, 2021.

Processing Information

Processed by Claire Gagnon, 2022.

Related Material

For materials related to Nina Swaim's contributions to the New Victoria Press see the [New Victoria Publishers Records \(MS 883\)](#).

Language:

English

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Search terms

Subjects

- Antinuclear movement
- Bee culture
- Feminism
- Feminism and mass media
- Mozambique Island (Mozambique)
- Nuclear power plants--Vermont
- Protest movements
- Vermont
- Women environmentalists

Contributors

- Swaim, Nina [main entry]

Genres and formats

- Correspondence
- Diaries
- Photographs

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