

Seneca Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice Collection

1977-1997

1 box (0.5 linear feet)

Call no.: MS 839



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Concerned women in upstate New York joined together in the summer 1983 to form the Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice, occupying a site near the Seneca Army Depot in Romulus, New York, where nuclear weaponry was stored. Taking a radical stance against militarism, violence, and oppression and modeling their approach after the women's encampment at Greenham Common in England, the Women's Encampment drew participants from a large number of women's peace groups. In 1990, the Encampment transitioned into the Women's Peace Land, remaining an active center of resistance to militarism and nuclear power for several years.

Maintained by attorney Alaine T. Espenscheid, the collection consists primarily of legal records relating to the Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice, including filings documenting health and safety, sanitation, water, and finances and materials relating to the arrest of several women for civil disobedience in 1985. Also included is a folder of ephemera and clippings on the Encampment from local media.

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Background on Seneca Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice

Inspired by the Peace Camps of Europe, the Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice originated at a conference on Global Feminism and Disarmament held on June 11, 1982 in New York City. The next month the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom coordinated a meeting with the Upstate Feminist Peace Alliance to discuss the possibility of initiating a peace camp at the Seneca Army Depot, a storage facility for nuclear weapons, as a demonstration of U.S. opposition to the deployment of nuclear missiles. The two groups agreed to move forward with the establishment of a peace camp and together with several other women's groups in upstate New York, New York City, and Boston, the Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice was formed.

The land for the campsite--a 53 acre farm in Varick, New York near the Seneca Army Depot--was purchased in May 1983 by Seneca Encampment, Inc., a non-profit group formed by several regional peace and feminist groups. The Encampment officially opened on July 4, 1983 and was attended by participants throughout the region and beyond; many of these participants had volunteered months in advance and were organized into various working committees. All who gathered were opposed to militarism, violence, and oppression, modeling their approach after the women's encampment at Greenham Common in England.



From the beginning the planning committee integrated educational events into the activities, which included outreach, leafletting, and opportunities for civil disobedience. Their aim was not only to build opposition to nuclear weapons, but to build connections between various women's groups, share skills, and foster community. By the summer of 1984, efforts to reach a wider audience included training on issues of non-violence and feminism, distribution of a newsletter called *Jane Doe*, and presentations about their mission to local audiences. These efforts were not always received as intended, however, and the Encampment continued to be unpopular within the larger conservative community of Romulus-Varick area.

During this time, the campground also underwent changes in order to become a legal, permanent site, including the installation of a new septic system and well, and water quality tests. Despite efforts to comply with all local and state regulations, area residents continued to object to the Encampment. Sensitive to their neighbor's concerns, the women instituted a new set of policies to govern behavior at the campground, including a ban on public nudity, vandalism, and alcohol and drug use.

To make matters worse, a series of newspaper articles entitled "Witches of Seneca" were published in November 1984 in the *Syracuse Post-Standard* by a journalist who had spent some time at the camp. These articles only served to reinforce the negative impressions locals had of the Encampment and renewed public objections to the site. By the following year, there were few women who lived on the campground, but their annual demonstrations still drew a large crowd of nearly 800 women. In the years that followed, however, the Encampment's activities decreased and by the summer of 1990 leaders organized a "transform or die" discussion about the future of the Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice. Out of these discussions came the establishment of a non-profit land trust called Women's Peace Land and an intentional community for women.

Scope of collection

Maintained by attorney of Women's Peace Encampment Alaine T. Espenscheid, the collection consists primarily of legal records relating to the Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice, including documents about health and safety, sanitation, water, finances, and materials relating to the arrest of several women for civil disobedience in 1985. Also included is a folder of ephemera and clippings on the Encampment from local media. Also included are legal documents relating to the creation of the land trust Women's Peace Land.

Inventory

By-laws: Seneca Encampment, Inc.

1984

Box 1: 1

By-laws: Woman's Peace Land, Inc.

1994-1995

Box 1: 2

Certificate of Incorporation and Certificate of Amendment

1983-1997

Box 1: 3

Civil disobedience case, arrests in Rochester, N.Y.

1985

Box 1: 4

Engineering report, encampment

1984

Box 1: 5

Box :

Espensheid, Alaine: correspondence and research notes, encampment

1983-1985

Box 1: 6

Mortgage and purchase documents

1983-1991

Box 1: 7

Newspaper clippings

1983-1984

Box 1: 8

Oil and gas service

1983

Box 1: 9

Photographs

1983-1984

Box 1: 10

Printed material: Federal Courts--A Citizen's Guide

1981

Box 1: 11

Printed material: flyers and memos

1983-1988

Box 1: 12

Printed material: Unites States District Court, Western District of New York

1979

Box 1: 13

Research notes: water regulations

1984

Box 1: 14

Seneca Department of Health

1983-1984

Box 1: 15

Varick (N.Y.): lot, encampment

1977-1983

Box 1: 16

Varick (N.Y.): water supply

1983-1984

Box 1: 17

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Alaine T. Espenscheid, 2014.

Processing Information

Processed by Libby Wassmann, 2015.

Language:

English

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Search terms

Subjects

Antinuclear movements--New York (State)

Feminists

Peace movements--New York (State)

Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice

Women's Peace Land

Women--History

Contributors

Seneca Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice **[main entry]**

Espenscheid, Alaine T.

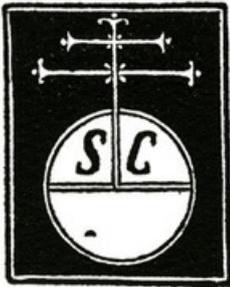
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