

# Documenting Illinois Women's Lives

A GUIDE TO WOMEN'S AND GENDER HISTORY  
COLLECTIONS AT THE SIUE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

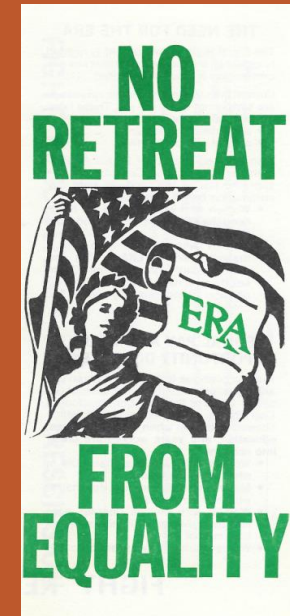
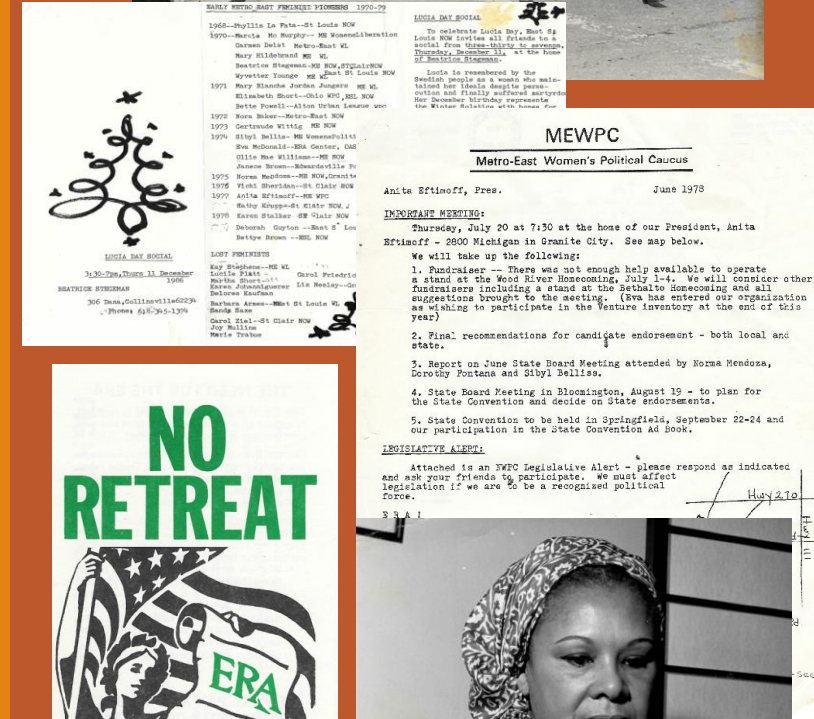
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Conference on Illinois History  
October 2026

Zack Palitzsch  
University Archivist and Special Collections Librarian  
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

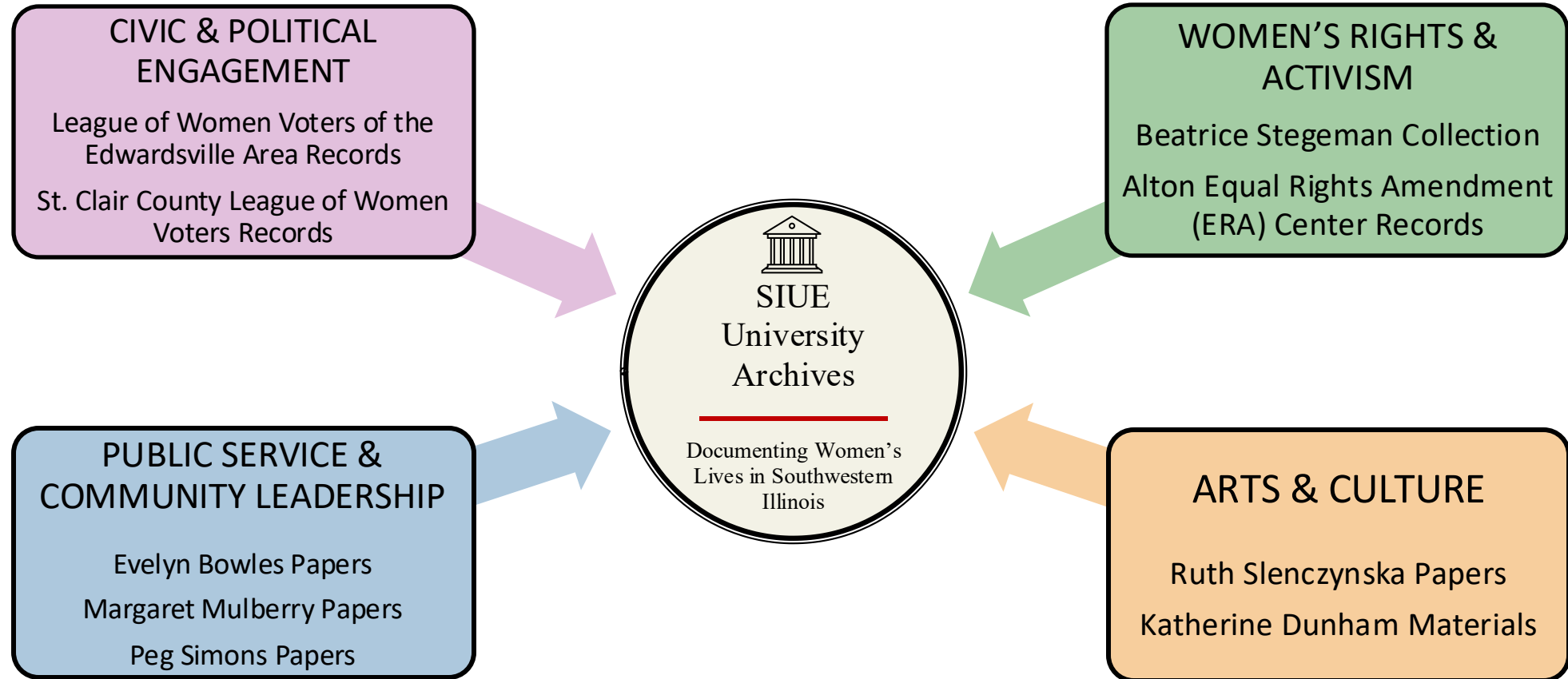
# Archives as Evidence of Women's History

- Women's history is documented across many types of archival collections.
- Local records reveal experiences often overlooked in statewide or national histories.
- SIUE University Archives and Special Collections preserves records of civic organizations, activists, educators, artists, and community leaders throughout the St. Louis Metro East.



# Women's and Gender History

## Across Our Collections



# Women in Civic and Political Life

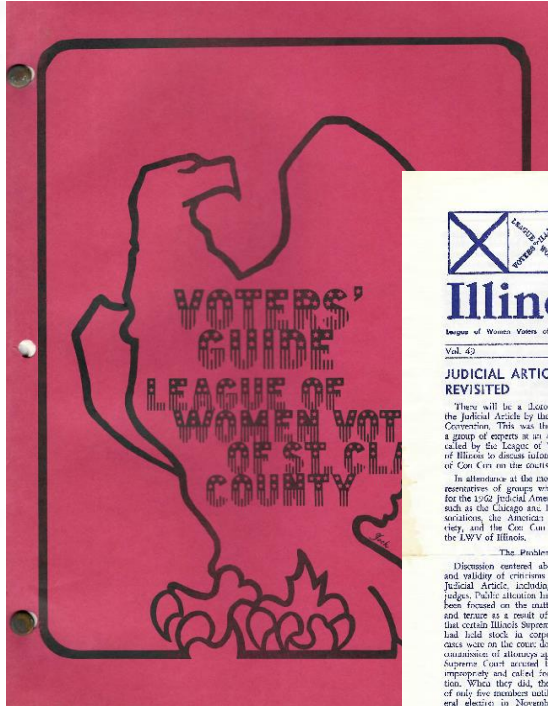
*Documenting democracy at the local level*

## Illinois Pollwatchers

their rights  
and limitations



Illinois law provides for pollwatchers to be present in the polling place during an election. Pollwatchers are intended to observe the conduct of the election and their prime concern is the integrity and fairness of the election.



## League of Women Voters of St. Clair County

- 1946-1998
- 18.5 cubic feet

## Beyond Voter Registration...

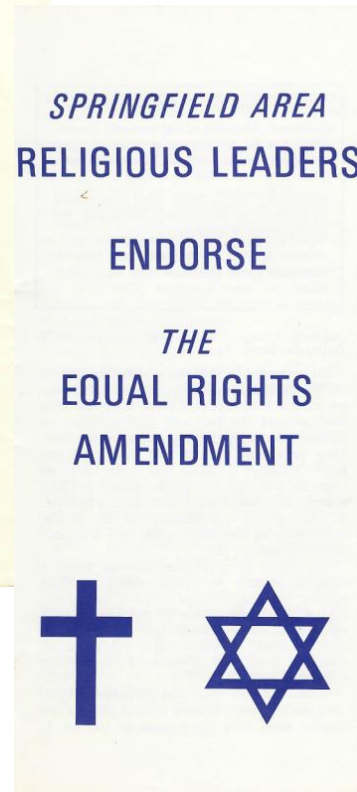
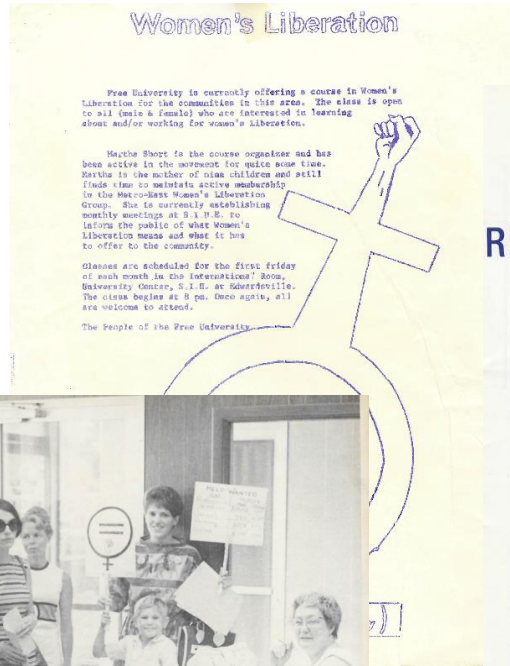
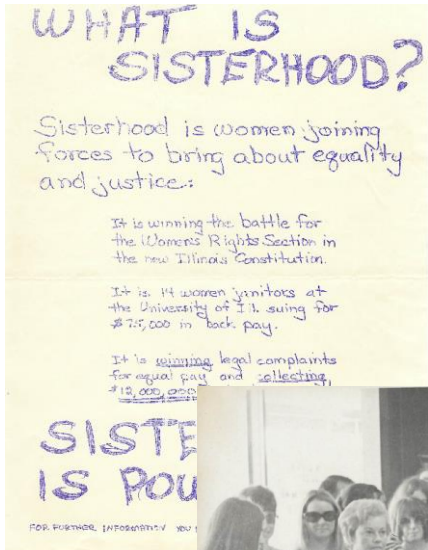
- Hosting candidate forums
- Publishing voter guides
- Monitoring elections
- Studying local government
- Advocating on public policy
- Educating citizens

## Research Questions

- How did women shape civic life after suffrage?
- What local issues mattered most to voters?
- How did civic organizations educate and mobilize communities?

# Grassroots Feminism

*Preserving local activism and social change*



## Beatrice Stegeman Collection on Metro-East Feminism

- Records of Metro-East NOW, St. Clair NOW, and East St. Louis NOW
- Women's Political Caucus
- Legislative advocacy and women's centers

## Alton ERA Center Records

- Board minutes and organizational records
- Lobbying materials and newsletters
- Rally, march, and public outreach documentation

## Research Questions

- How did national feminist organizations operate locally?
- How did activists organize communities around the ERA?
- How were national debates experienced in Southwestern Illinois?

# Women in Public Service and Community Leadership

*Shaping communities through leadership and public service*



Evelyn  
**Bowles**



Democrat for

**STATE  
SENATOR**  
56TH DISTRICT

Same Good Friend.  
Different Location.



## Evelyn Bowles Papers

- Illinois State Senator
- Legislative initiatives and public policy advocacy
- Community development
- Women in politics

## Margaret Mulberry Papers

- Educational leadership in East St. Louis
- Development of special education programs
- Public education

## Research Questions

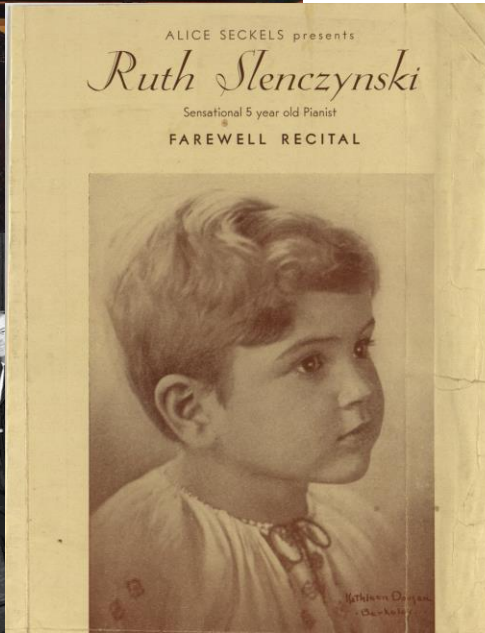
- How did women build political and professional leadership roles in Illinois?
- How did women influence public policy, education, and community development?
- How did women shape their communities through public service?

# Women in Arts and Culture

*Preserving creative achievement and cultural influence*



DAVID N. MARTIN presents Katherine DUNHAM



## Ruth Slenczynska Papers

- Internationally acclaimed concert pianist
- Performance programs, correspondence, photographs, and recordings
- Documentation of a career spanning more than 9 decades

## Katherine Dunham materials

- Dancer, choreographer, anthropologist, and educator
- Records documenting her work and relationship with SIUE
- Materials relating to performance, teaching, and cultural advocacy

## Research Questions

- What role did Southern Illinois institutions play in supporting women in the arts?
- How did women build careers in the performing arts during the 20th century?
- How did artists use performance to influence culture and society?

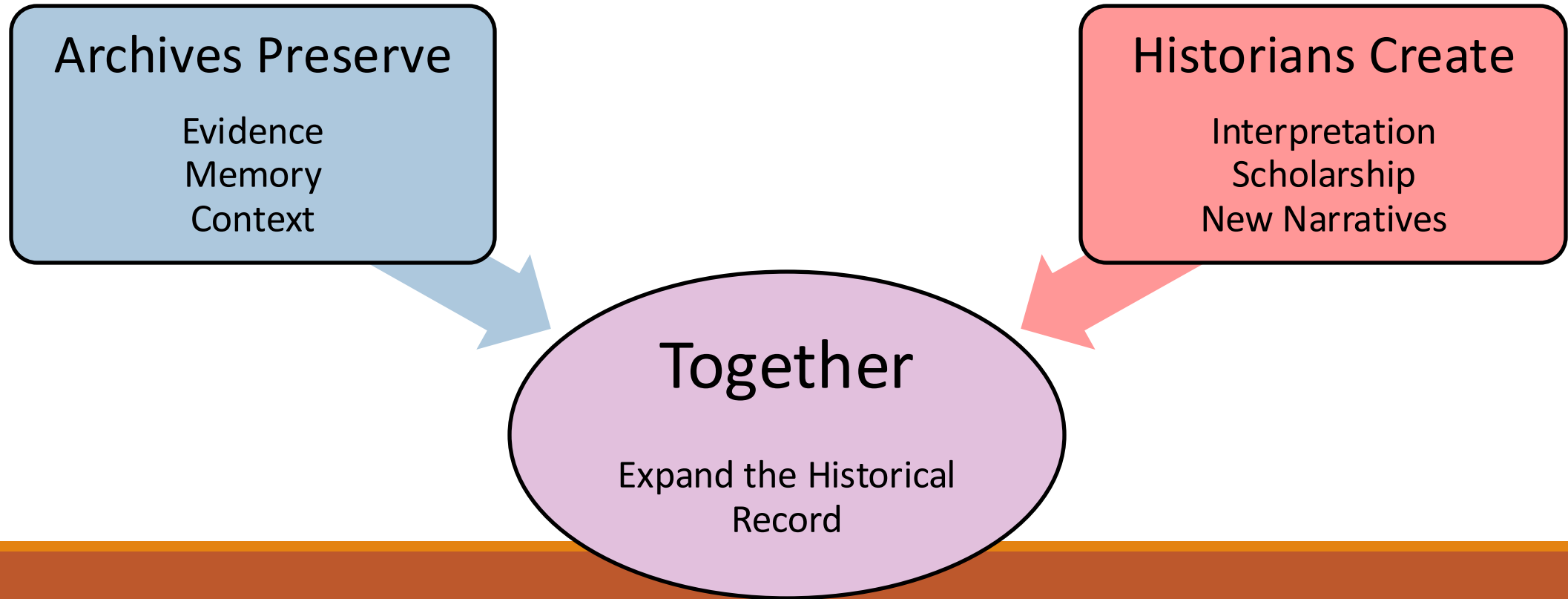


# More Stories Remain to Be Discovered

## Beyond the Collections Highlighted Today

- Women's organizations documented within larger collections
- Faculty, staff, student, and alumni records throughout SIUE history
- Photographs, oral histories, publications, and local government records
- Recently acquired and underutilized collections with untapped research potential

# Archives, Historians, and New Perspectives



Discover collections. Ask questions. Begin new research.