The Social Work Archive
Vida Simenas Grayson '57 MSS'60 describes the Archive and its aims

The Social Work Archive was launched three years ago, but we postponed its official installation till this summer so that we could all celebrate the event in conjunction with the 65th Anniversary of the School for Social Work. The fact that the Smith College Archives and The Sophia Smith Collection* moved this year from much more limited space to this magnificent building was an additional inducement to time the opening for this summer. Indeed, there are very few archives that can boast of this kind of space and appointments.

The Social Work Archive is a special division of The Sophia Smith Collection, a world-renowned collection on women's history. It was organized for the specific purpose of preserving for historical research the papers and interviews of leaders in social work education and practice. The aim is to document the building blocks of our theory of practice. The collection will encompass the pivotal figures, both men and women, who through their writings, teaching or clinical work, advanced the basic concepts of social work practice. The individuals selected will not be limited to Smith graduates, but since the School's history is closely linked with leaders in social work education, a number of Smith alumni and faculty members will be represented.

One of the reasons Smith is such an inviting place to build a resource center on social work history is that there is a commitment on the part of the School to the building of knowledge. This commitment is imbedded in the research component of the educational plan. Equally important is the fact that The Sophia Smith Collection has a professional staff that not only organizes the materials but also serves for reference and guidance to researchers. An informed staff at an archive is a major intellectual resource of an educational institution.

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In general, the preservation of historical documents in social work proceeded in a rather haphazard way until very recently. Most of the archives collecting social work materials focus on social welfare, voluntary agencies, and leaders of social action. The Social Work Archive here at Smith, however, attempts to preserve an area that has not been fully identified. The Social Work Archive will document the intellectual history of the profession by collecting in a systematic fashion primary source material on social work educators and practitioners who laid the foundation for a theory of practice in social work. The materials collected will be of great interest not only to historians of social work but also to historians of professional education, psychiatry, psychology and social history in general.

The Sophia Smith Collection is noted for its holdings on early social reformers, such as Jane Addams, Ellen Gates Starr, Vida Dutton Scudder, Mary Van Kleek, and Margaret Sanger. In the 1960s, Dean Howard Parad, who was interested in the history of the School, initiated the transfer of a number of documents from the School to the College Archives. He also was responsible for securing the papers of Mary C. Jarrett, founder of the School, and Bertha C. Reynolds, a Smith graduate and later Associate Director as well as a distinguished social work thinker. These were the holdings in social work when we started three years ago. Since then, we were fortunate to obtain the papers of Helen Witmer, the head of research at Smith and later Director of Research of the U.S. Children's Bureau, the papers of Yonata Feldman, a noted teacher of advanced clinical practice, and the papers of a number of social work theoreticians, such as Florence Hollis.

Parallel with the collection of papers, The Archive initiated an oral history program in order to record the reminiscences of eyewitnesses about events, ideas and opinions that have shaped the development of social work thinking. Oral histories are critical sources nowadays, because written documentation through letters, memoranda and journals has become scarcer. The oral histories supplement the written sources. Our collection includes interviews with a number of graduates of the Class of 1919, the first trained psychiatric social workers in this country and the world, such as Esther C. Cook, Rose Hahn Dawson, Bertha C. Reynolds, Gertrude C. Scott, as well as interviews with the latest innovators in social work intervention. Unfortunately, history projects do not usually generate widespread support or big grants. It has taken the special interest and support of a few individuals to get this project off the ground.

From the beginning, building the Social Work Archive was a work of collaboration on the part of the School, the Alumni, and The Sophia Smith Collection. It is a solid beginning, but a great deal more needs to be done. We need to continue the work of collecting and organizing the materials, of locating potential donors and of spreading the word among researchers.