

The Interconnected Network, a proposition

La Red Interconectada, una proposición

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- 1 For IAWA Center initiatives:
<https://iawacenter.aad.vt.edu>.
For IAWA Collections:
<https://guides.lib.vt.edu/iawa/collections>
(Last accessed June 2024)

The upcoming 40th anniversary of the International Archive of Women in Architecture (IAWA)¹ is a time to celebrate its achievements but also an invitation to reflect on past preservation efforts to help envision possible futures.

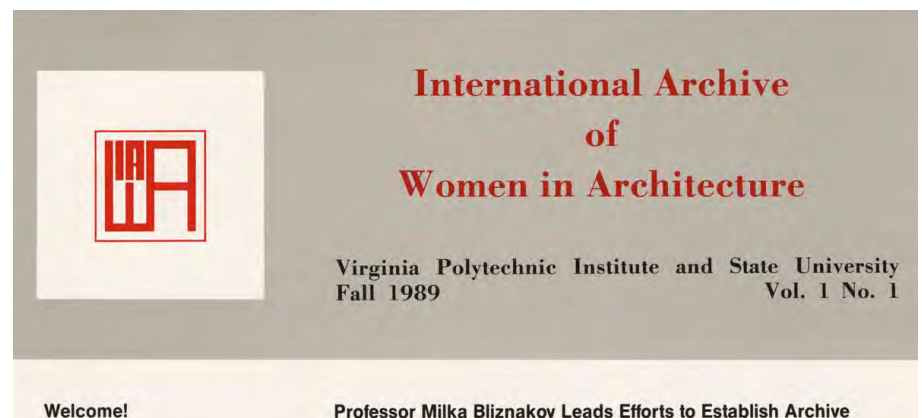
As historian and author Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains:

[T]o ignore women is not simply to ignore a significant subgroup within the social structure. It is to misunderstand and distort the entire organization of that society.²

- 2 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 19.

Of unmeasurable consequence, the historical distortion she refers to has also impacted architecture, both the profession and the discipline. In 1985, and after a lengthy process, Dr. Milka T. Bliznakov founded the IAWA at Virginia Tech and, with it, finally anchored the critical quest to remediate the pervasive gender omission in architecture, worldwide. (Fig.1)

Figure 1. IAWA inaugural newsletter, Fall 1989, celebrating the establishment of the archives in Special Collections. Clara B. Cox (ed.), *International Archive of Women in Architecture Newsletter*, vol. 1, n° 1 (1989): 1.



- 3 Asli Davaz, "How to Encounter the Historical Omission of Women in the Process of Acquisition of Documents Women-Centered Archives", in *International Conference on Knowledge and Politics in Gender and Women's Studies* (Ankara: Gender and Women's Studies, 2015), 19-28.
- 4 Hering, Sabine and Waaldijk, Berteke. "International Information Center and Archives for the Women's Movement (IIAV)", in: *History of Social Work in Europe (1900-1960)*, ed. Sabine Hering and Berteke Waaldijk (Oplande: Springer Nature: 2003), 211.

The urgency to establish women's archives can be traced back to the late 19th century and the pioneering women and groups leading the different feminist waves of the 20th century. Multiple collecting foci ignited in Europe and the US as women actively sought to preserve the documents that would record the events, actions, challenges, and gains of the different movements, to substantiate the history of women.³

In 1935, in Amsterdam, the IIAV was founded:

As the International Archives for the Women's Movement, with the goal to promote the knowledge and scientific study of the women's movement in the broadest sense.⁴

The IIAV amassed large collections despite interruptions, relocations, looting, and world wars. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, in New York City, American historian and author Mary Ritter Beard, together with suffragist Rosika Schwimmer established, also in 1935, the World Centre for Women's Archives (WCWA). Beard called not just for including women in history, but for expanding the very idea of history itself:

*The narrative of history must be reopened, must be widened to take in the whole course of civilisation.*⁵

Shifting the historical focus from enshrined male heroes toward a wide lens on civilization, Beard sought to abandon the dominant patriarchal perspective and restore the "neglected one-half of the beings that have made up the human world".⁶

From their alternative standpoints, both the WCWA and the IIAV emerged as "counter-archives", each greatly expanding the scope of documents and artifacts deemed of historical value.⁷ The IIAV, currently Atria,⁸ continues to function today as a repository and a "broker of information". The WCWA, on the other hand, closed in 1940 due to lack of funding during the World War and internal disagreement. Nevertheless:

*(M)ore than thirty college presidents endorsed the project; (and) branches had been established in (several states).*⁹

With similar convictions and goals, Bliznakov sought to collect everything from every woman that had contributed "in any capacity" to the profession and the development of the built environment worldwide.¹⁰ (Fig.2)



One of many formative initiatives of the 1900's, the IAWA still stands unique in its kind in the world as specifically dedicated to preserving the papers of women in architecture. Some maintain that "the goal should be to ensure equal representation in all archives",¹¹ but this:

*Integration with established repositories (can only occur) once equality has been achieved.*¹²

Until then, the IAWA, like the WCWA, IIAV and all women-centered archives must remain distinct; physically acting as "symbols of resistance to patriarchal values".¹³

5 Mary Beard, *On Understanding Women* (New York: Longmans Green, 1931), 32.

6 Ibidem, 17.

7 Sarah Lubelski, "Kicking Off the Women's 'Archives Party': The World Center for Women's Archives and the Foundations of Feminist Historiography and Women's Archives", *Archivaria* 78 (2014): 95.

8 Atria, Institute on gender equality and women's history. Available at <https://institute-genderequality.org/> (Last accessed June 2024)

9 Mary Trigg, "To Work Together for Ends Larger than Self": The Feminist Struggles of Mary Beard and Doris Stevens in the 1930s." *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 7, n° 2 (1995): 74.

10 Paola Zellner Bassett, "The Archive: Evidence of Unrealized History", in *(In)Tangible Heritage(s)*, *AMPS Proceedings Journal Series 29.1*, ed. Howard Griffin (Canterbury: University of Kent, 2022), 438-449.

Figure 2. Han Schröder, one of the pioneering donors of records to the IAWA highlighted in the IAWA inaugural newsletter. Clara B. Cox (ed.), *International Archive of Women in Architecture Newsletter*, vol. 1, n° 1 (1989): 2.

11 Julie Collin, "A 'powerful, Creative history': The Reticence of Women Architects to Donate Their Professional Records to Archival Repositories", *Archives & Manuscripts* vol. 40, n° 3 (2012): 181-90.

12 Gabrielle Lili Earnshaw, "Preserving Records Bearing on the Experience of Women in North America: The Women's Archives Movement and Its Significance for Appraisal for Acquisition", in *Retrospective Theses and Dissertations, 1919-2007* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1994), 104.

13 Ibidem, 104.



Figure 3. Inaugural IAWA Board of Advisors led by Chair and founder Milka Bliznakov including, among other visionaries, Solange d’Herbez de la Tour, founder in 1963 of L’Union Internationale des Femmes Architectes (UIFA); and Susana Torre, founder in 1973 of the Archive of Women in Architecture (AWA). Clara B. Cox (ed.), *International Archive of Women in Architecture Newsletter*, vol. 1, n° 1 (1989): 4.

The historical omission in architecture is of such a magnitude that it precludes a single repository. Moreover, valid concerns about the emigration of artifacts have hindered collecting efforts. The IAWA’s main goal is preserving material that would otherwise be forever lost, with a preference for it to remain in its country of origin. However, world events and a lack of receptive repositories worldwide have resulted in the loss of large amounts of valuable records. It is imperative, and this is the proposition, that interconnected “branches” be established around the world to preserve material locally or regionally.

Almost 40 years after being founded, the mission carried by the IAWA is increasingly pressing as the window of opportunity to save the original papers of women practicing in pre-digital times is closing. The great advantage of our time, nevertheless, resides in our digital connectivity, which allows for an extraordinary global scale of networking that Bliznakov couldn’t possibly reach in 1985. There is a vast expanse of social networks, groups, and initiatives achieving resounding gains in the quest for gender equity in all aspects of architecture. The invitation today is for all to organize as one expansive force behind a vital vision: establishing a global network of women’s archives. This is, undoubtedly, a monumental endeavor but it begins with a simple vision and a first step.¹⁴

At 40, IAWA’s role may point —beyond being a repository and a clearinghouse of information— toward launching and advising on this vision; the only viable path if we are to reopen and widen history to take in the whole course of architecture.

14 To participate in the development of the vision for interconnected women’s archives worldwide, please contact the author at pazb@vt.edu. Follow IAWA Center on IG: iawa_vt. (Last accessed June 2024)