

## **The Collection of Women's Personal Papers**

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In summer 2015, the Collection of Women's Personal Papers at the Department of History contained 220 contributions comprising the estates and pre-estates of 358 persons. The backgrounds of the writers were varied: They were teachers, farmers, authors, housewives, servants, aristocrats, factory workers, school or university students, actors, doctors' assistants, milliners, artists, athletes. Other women include a butcher, a miller, a photographer, a dentist, a tour guide, a translator and an ambassador. The writers are women of all ages, they come from urban or rural settings; also included are family members, friends and acquaintances, which is why documents written by men are also part of the Collection of Women's Personal Papers. While hardly any of them were at the centre of public attention, all of them wrote and left various self-narratives.

Regarding content and material properties, these written legacies are as varied as the individual life stories of the women. In the collection, the written documents included in their estates and pre-estates are archived, made accessible and ready for use as sources for research purposes. The archive is continually utilised for a wide range of academic projects and in university teaching. The documents serve as sources for a great variety of issues of historical and cultural interest. Also, the various materials may influence genre discussions and attributions with regard to auto/biographical documents, which primarily used to be classified and evaluated according to criteria applied in literary studies.

The collection is continually expanded through calls for contributions in the course of research projects, by cooperating with other archives and by gradually supplementing the existing pre-estates and estates. Currently, prominent areas of research are love letters and diaries.

The material has been precisely registered on individual stock sheets. In addition, a systematic catalogue containing a short description of each item, as well as a register of documents and a register of places was established. Currently the catalogue lists 784 volumes of diaries and similar records, 810 other documents in book form such as agendas, household books or poetry journals, around 37,600 items of correspondence, approximately 35,600 photographs, some 3,970 official and business documents, 101 autobiographical

texts and twelve literary estates. 99 contributions additionally include small commemorative objects, such as decorative ribbons, medals, so-called Jewish badges, needlework samples, children's shoes, jewellery boxes, etc. The estate of the welfare association "Vienna Settlement" also forms part of the collection.

Most of the documents in the collection originate from the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. All in all, the time frame extends over three centuries: The earliest piece is a business document dating from 1738, and the most recent additions are parts of an exchange of letters and e-mails which ends in April 2011. Geographically, the collection focuses on the area of what is now Austria; however, quite a number of contributions come from the former crown lands under the Habsburg monarchy and its neighbouring countries. The collection includes documents from all continents.

As an academic institution, the Collection of Women's Personal Papers is an example of the shift of focus that has occurred in historical studies over the past few decades, towards Women's and Gender History and auto/biographical research, which is becoming increasingly varied. Owing to its main interest in collecting pre-estates and estates of all women, rather than just the members of a certain occupational category or social group, political movement or party, the collection is unique in Europe.

The Collection of Women's Personal Papers was initiated in 1990 by Edith Saurer (1942-2011), Professor of Modern History and doyenne of women's and gender history in Austria. It was started to mark the anniversary of 70 years of votes for women in Austria, when a call to contribute biographical records as part of an exhibition was published in a newspaper. Jointly directed by Edith Saurer and Christa Hämmerle, Associate Professor of Modern History and Women's and Gender History, the collection was established and expanded at the Department of History over the following years. In 2000, the collection was organised as an association; from 2006 to 2012 it was part of the research platform 'Repositioning of Women's and Gender History in an Altered European Context' at the University of Vienna, through which a part-time position for the academic supervision of the collection was financed. In 2013, a permanent part-time position was created at the Department of History for that purpose.

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Li Gerhalter: The Collection of Women's Personal Papers, in: Claudia Feigl (Ed.): Academic Showcases. The Collections at the University of Vienna, Wien/Köln/Weimar 2016, pp. 53-55.

Further link (in German):

<http://www.univie.ac.at/Geschichte/sfn/>

Further reading (selection):

Gerhalter, Li with the collaboration of Brigitte Semanek: Bestandsverzeichnis der Sammlung Frauennachlässe am Institut für Geschichte der Universität Wien. 2<sup>nd</sup> expanded edition, Vienna 2012.

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Gerhalter, Li: Decisions and Chances – the Winding Path of Women's Personal Testimonies. The Collection of Women's Estates/Sammlung Frauennachlässe, Vienna. In: Women and Minorities: Ways of Archiving. Ed. Kristina Popova, Marijana Piskova, Margareth Lanzinger, Nikola Langreiter and Petar Vodenicharov. Sofia/Vienna 2009, pp. 20–34.

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Hämmerle, Christa: Nebenpfade? Populäre Selbstzeugnisse des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts in geschlechtervergleichender Perspektive. In: Vom Lebenslauf zur Biografie. Geschichte, Quellen und Probleme der historischen Biographik und Autobiographik. Ed. Thomas Winkelbauer. Horn/Waidhofen a.d. Thaya 2000 (= Schriftenreihe des Waldviertler Heimatbundes 40), pp. 135–167.

Li Gerhalter: The Collection of Women's Personal Papers, in: Claudia Feigl (Ed.): Academic Showcases. The Collections at the University of Vienna, Wien/Köln/Weimar 2016, pp. 53-55.

Saurer, Edith: "For Women, the Act of Writing – whether Letters or Diaries – Expresses their Identity, their Life's Ambition, the Will to Survive". Interview Kristina Popova with Edith Saurer. In: Women and Minorities: Ways of Archiving. Eds. Kristina Popva, Marijana Piskova, Margareth Lanzinger, Nikola Langreiter and Petar Vodenicharov. Sofia/Vienna 2009, pp. 16–19.