

Helen Ramirez-Odell Papers 1949-2013

Preliminary Finding Aid

Creator: Helen Ramirez-Odell (1942-2022)

Extent: 3 linear feet (4 boxes)

Language: English

Repository: Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago

Administration Information

Access Restrictions: Consult the WLA Director regarding access to the digitized interview tapes.

Usage Restrictions: Copyright for all materials created by Helen Ramirez-Odell in this collection has been transferred to the Women and Leadership Archives.

Preferred Citation: Identification of item, date, box #, folder #, Helen Ramirez-Odell Papers, Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago.

Provenance: Helen Ramirez-Odell donated the materials to the Women and Leadership Archives in 2016, 2017, and 2020 (WLA2016.01, WLA2016.33, 2017.05, WLA2020.15).

Processing Information: This collection is unprocessed. Information in this preliminary finding aid was gathered through an initial inventory. Preliminary finding aid created in 2022; last updated January 2025.

Separations: None

Biographical History

Helen Marie Hershinow was born in Chicago on July 22, 1942 to Jessamine (Kreuser) and Irving Hershinow. She lived in Chicago her whole life, primarily on the north side. She graduated from Immaculata High School in 1960. She attended the Loyola University School of Nursing and graduated in 1964 with her BSN.

At Loyola, Ramirez-Odell worked on the student newspaper, the Phoenix, and held various leadership positions including news editor. The nursing curriculum at Loyola included courses on Public Health, a field in which she became very interested. The program partnered with the Visiting Nurses Association, giving students the opportunity to visit patient homes with registered nurses and eventually on their own. Ramirez-Odell enjoyed the independence of this type of nursing and helping people connect with the community services they needed.

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After graduating, Ramirez-Odell worked as a nurse on the surgical floor at the University of Chicago Billings Hospital. She lived in the nurses' residence in Hyde Park until marrying in 1965. She gave birth to a daughter in 1966. Ramirez-Odell and her husband divorced soon after, and she became a single mother. Needing consistent hours and higher pay to care for her child, Ramirez-Odell sought a job that better fit the needs of her family. Through the Illinois Nurses Association, she obtained a job as a school nurse in Chicago Public Schools on the near west side starting in November 1966. She took graduate courses and earned Teacher-Nurse certification to prepare for this new role. She went on to earn a Master's in Guidance and Counseling from Northeastern Illinois University.

As a school nurse, Ramirez-Odell provided medical care, identified students with health issues, and taught health education to students and teachers. Later, school nurses were also put in charge of student inoculation programs and evaluating children in special education programs.

When budget problems threatened the school health program, Ramirez-Odell joined the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), which helped the school nurses obtain job security and better working conditions. In 1984, CTU President Robert M. Healey appointed her to chair the Chicago Teacher's Union Women's Rights Committee. She was the first school nurse on the CTU Executive Board and continued in this role until 2001.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Ramirez-Odell was involved in the women's movement through her membership in the National Organization for Women (NOW) and other activist organizations. She fought for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and was passionate about the issues of pregnancy-based discrimination, equal pay, Title IX, and the right of a woman to obtain credit in her own name. She was also active in Cassandra, a radical feminist nurses' network, and the Chicago chapter of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). During this time, Ramirez-Odell wrote a manuscript *RN Revolution Needed*, about how feminism could improve nursing.

Ramirez-Odell married Paul A. Odell in 1990. They were married for 32 years, until her death.

In 1994, Ramirez-Odell was a founding member of the Women and Labor History Project, later the Working Women's History Project, an organization dedicated to increasing the knowledge and understanding of women in labor history and other social justice movements. In 2002, Ramirez-Odell published the book *Working Without Uniforms: School Nursing in Chicago, 1951-2001*. The book was the result of over 70 oral histories and interviews with Chicago school nurses who worked from the beginning of the school health program in 1951.

In 1991, Ramirez-Odell was named Trade Union Woman of the Year by the Chicago Federation of Labor. She was awarded the Mother Jones Award by the Women in Labor History Project in 1998. She was honored at the 2003 Loyola University Chicago Founder's Dinner with the Damen Award for her leadership and service to the community.

After 44 years as a school nurse, Ramirez-Odell retired in 2011. She continued her various service activities and remained active in the CTU Women's Rights Committee. Ramirez-Odell passed away March 22, 2022.

Scope and Content

The Helen Ramirez-Odell Papers consist of 3 linear feet and span the years 1949-2013. Materials relate primarily to Ramirez-Odell's involvement with the Chicago Teacher's Union Women Rights Committee, Cassandr, a radical feminist nurses' network, and other organizations focused on labor and women's rights issues. Materials also relate to the Chicago School Nurses Oral History Project that Ramirez-Odell led and the resulting book, *Working Without Uniforms: School Nursing in Chicago 1951-2001*. Topics covered in the collection include school nursing, public health, pregnancy discrimination and maternity leave, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), sex biased language, Female Genital Mutilation, and more.

Materials include correspondence, books, manuscripts, annual reports, memos, meeting minutes, news clippings, newsletters, brochures, memorabilia, DVDs, VHS tapes, and photos. Also included are source materials for *Working Without Uniforms* including interview transcriptions, biographical background sheets, supporting material, and audiocassettes for some of the 71 participants.

Interview audiocassette tapes and an audiocassette tape of an AFT Women's Issue Conference were digitized by a vendor in February 2022. See archivist for access to these recordings.

Box	Folder	Title	Date
1	1	Letters to Archivist	
1	2	Proposal/ RN: Revolution Needed	1981
1	3	Cancer as a Woman's Issue	
1	4	Women's Rights Committee ribbon	
1	5	Blueprint for School Nurse Program in Chicago	1949
1	6	1983 INA Resolutions	
1	7	Personal	
1	8	Timeline: History of Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee	
1	9	WRC- Annual Goals Report	
1	10	Helen's Notes (typed) on Women's Rights Committee History	
1	11	Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee, August 1983-July 1986	1983-1986
1	12	Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee, August 1986-June 1989	1986-1989
1	13	Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee, September 1989-June 1992	1989-1992
1	14	Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee: Reproductive Rights Kit	1990
1	15	Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee, September 1992-August 1994	1992-1994
1	16	Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee, September 1994-December 1996	1994-1996

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1	17	Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee, January 1997-June 2000	1997-2000
1	18	Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee, June 2000-December 2001 to 2004	2000-2004
1	19	Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee, September 2004-June 2007	2004-2007
1	20	Chicago Teachers Union Women's Rights Committee, September 2007-July 2010	2007-2010
1	21	CTU Women's Rights Committee Women's Sports	
1	22	Misc Press	
1	23	Women at Washburn Trade School [1 of 2]	
1	24	Women at Washburn Trade School [2 of 2]	
1	25	Miscellaneous	
1	26	Working without Uniforms	2002
1	27	Cassandra Radical Feminist Nurses Network	
1	28	Cassandra Newsjournal [1 of 2]	
1	29	Cassandra Newsjournal [2 of 2]	
1	30	Correspondence: ERA and other issues	2016
2	1	Misc	
2	2	Vivian Barry	
2	3	Doris Bell	
2	4	Elsie Bond	
2	5	Alice Byrne	
2	6	Eileen Byrne	
2	7	Mildred Catchings	
2	8	Margaret Christianson	
2	9	Elaine Clemens	
2	10	Marilyn Danzy	
2	11	Virginia Davis	
2	12	Barbara Desinor	
2	13	Jackie Dietz	
2	14	Phyllis Dietz	
2	15	Terry Dumond	
2	16	Helen Dunham	
2	17	Karen Egenes	
2	18	Irene Newton Ellens	
2	19	Jane Faust	
2	20	Marlene Fisher	
2	21	Kathi Fitzgerald	
2	22	Marilyn Fitzgerald	
2	23	Alberta Fuller	
2	24	Dorothy Goushas	
2	25	Thelma Hogg	
2	26	Eveline Horton	

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2	27	Billie Howard-Coleman	
2	28	Diane P. Johnson	
2	29	Evelyn Kahn	
2	30	Ann Kajiwara	
2	31	Dorothy Kelly	
2	32	Eleanore Klein	
2	33	Maureen Larsen	
2	34	Mildred Lavizzo	
2	35	Loretta Lee	
2	36	Ursula Levy Korup	
2	37	Bea Lites	
2	38	Kathy Lux	
2	39	Mary Lynch	
2	40	Ricky Maloof	
2	41	Dorothy Marks	
2	42	Mae Mayer	
2	43	Harryetta Matthews	
2	44	Eileen McGrath	
2	45	Julia McGrath	
2	46	Maria Mellman	
2	47	Delora Mitchell	
2	48	Genevieve Nadherny	
2	49	Sally Nusinson	
2	50	Evelyn Owens	
2	51	Harue Ozaki	
2	52	Verna Porter	
2	53	Helen Ramirez-Odell	
2	54	Joan Reilly	
2	55	Margaret Reyes	
2	56	Madeline Roessler	
2	57	Jeri Rose	
2	58	Mary Ellen Rybicki	
2	59	Shirley Severino	
2	60	Iris Shannon	
2	61	Betty Slattery	
2	62	Cecile Smith	
2	63	Clarys Souter	
2	64	Millie Herman Sweeter	
2	65	Monica Trocker	
2	66	Florence Verkler	
2	67	Carolyn Wilkerson	
2	68	Celestine Williams	
2	69	Aline Young	

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2	70	Anne Zimmerman	
2	71	Chicago Public School: School Nursing	
2	72	Feminism+ Update on Doctor/ Nurse Games	
2	73	Revolution The Journal of Nurse Empowerment	
2	74	[Mattel Toys]	
2	75	Maternity Leave and Pension	
2	76	ERA	
2	77	ERA-IL [1 of 2]	
2	78	ERA-IL [2 of 2]	
2	79	Female Genital Mutilation	
2	80	Language and Feminism	
2	81	Take Our Daughters to Work Day	
2	82	Title IX	
2	83	[Misc.]	
3	1	"Keep Abortion Legal, Now.org" license plate frame	
3	2	Abortion/church & state: bumper stickers	
3	3	Domestic Violence Safety Cards	
3	4	New Foundation and Chicago Women's Liberation Union Magnets	
3	5	"Keep Abortion Legal" NOW buttons	
3	6	"March to Fight the Radical Right" button	
3	7	"Women at Work" button	
3	8	Audre Lorde button	
3	9	"Failure is Impossible" button	
3	10	"Hatred is not a Family Value" button	
3	11	"I'm Straight but not narrow" button	
3	12	"A Woman's Place is in her Union" button	
3	13	Women's Bicentennial Medallion	
3	14	Turquoise Ribbon pin	
3	15	ERA bracelet	
3	16	Chicago School Nurses pen	
3	17	The Motherhood Manifesto [DVD] (was listed as 3-3)	2006
3	18	Shortchanging Girls: CTU 3/13/92 [VHS and DVD]	1992
3	19	56th Presidential Inauguration: scarf	
4	1	Oral History: Alice Byrne, School Nurse CP, by Harue Ozaki [audiocassette] [digitized], June 24	1999
4	2	Oral History: Mildred Catchings [micro audiocassette] [digitized], July 28	1998
4	3	Oral History: Terry (Therese) Dumond interviewed by Michelle Luellen [audiocassette] [digitized], June 28	2000
4	4	Oral History: Marilyn Fitzgerald [audiocassette] [digitized], November 4	2000
4	5	Oral History: Myrna Garcia [audiocassette] [digitized], June 29	1999
4	6	Oral History: Dorothy Goushas by HR [audiocassette] [digitized], June 26	2000

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4	7	Oral History: Ursula Levy by Helen Ramirez-Odell [audiocassette] [digitized], July 22	1999
4	8	Oral History: Ricky (Richardine) Reyes Maloof by Sally Nusinson [audiocassette] [digitized], November 19	2000
4	9	Oral History: Delora Mitchell [micro audiocassette] [digitized], July 7	1998
4	10	Oral History: Genevieve Nadherny [audiocassette] [digitized], November 14	1998
4	11	Oral History: Sally Nusinson [1 of 2] [audiocassette] [digitized]	circa 2000
4	12	Oral History: Sally Nusinson by Ursula [2 of 2] [audiocassette] [digitized]	circa 2000
4	13	Oral History: Helen Ramirez-Odell [1 of 2] [audiocassette] [digitized], December 27	2000
4	14	Oral History: Helen Ramirez-Odell [2 of 2] [audiocassette] [digitized], January 4	2001
4	15	Oral History: Margaret Reyes in her home by Michelle Luellen [audiocassette] [digitized], June 22	2000
4	16	Oral History: Jeri Rose start interview side A [audiocassette] [digitized], January 15	1998
4	17	Oral History: Jeri Rose - to be transcribed [audiocassette] [digitized], November 14	1998
4	18	Oral History: Iris Shannon [audiocassette] [digitized], November 29	2000
4	19	Oral History: Clarys Souter + Joan Reilly both sides used [audiocassette] [digitized]	circa 1998
4	20	Oral History: Clarys Souter Back-up tape, Clarys Souter Joan Reilly [Audiocassette] [digitized]	circa 1998
4	21	Oral History: Carolyn Wilkerson by Sally Nusinson [Audiocassette] [digitized], November 18	2000
4	22	Oral History: Harue Ozaki [Audiocassette] [digitized], June 1	1999
4	23	AFT Women's Issue Conference, Educational Equity: New Horizons 9:00-10:30AM, Tape #14, Dr. David Sadker, Dr. Susan Klien [Audiocassette] [digitized], March 10	2002