

B.C. Midwifery Collection / Megan Davies & Abra Palumbo (Collectors)

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Collection Description

B.C. Midwifery Collection. – 1972-2015.

39 cm of textual records and other materials.

Megan Davies Collector

In June and July of 2004, York University professor Megan Davies used funding from Associated Medical Services (Toronto) to conduct field research into B.C.'s radical homebirth and midwifery movement history.

This movement emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, linked to feminist, counterculture, and "back-to-the-land impulses." In the 1950s & 60s, parents allied with a small group of sympathetic health practitioners endeavored to create a sustained critique of the standard hospital birthing procedures. They regarded hospital birthing as pathologizing and medicalizing the natural birth process.

Often drawing inspiration from aboriginal rituals and practices, these people sought to redefine birth not as a medical event but as a spiritual experience meant to take place within the context of home, family, and community. Within communities, certain women were considered 'midwives.' This designation was not done by a professional body but by the nature of their practice and their status in the community. These midwives operated on the margins of medicine. They practiced for the most part well beyond the confines of the sometimes-antagonistic hospital boards and staff but intersecting with medicine through formal or informal education, medical practice, and connections with sympathetic doctors and nurses.

Thirty-four individuals were interviewed, including women and partners who had homebirths, community midwives, doctors and nurses. A decision was made to videotape the interviews. UBC midwifery student Sarah Jane Swartz filmed the interviews. Oral history interviews were conducted in the Kootenays, Vancouver, Victoria, Salt Spring Island, and Black Creek.

Abra Palumbo Collector

Abra Palumbo was born in 1945 in New York City. Her father was a science teacher and a naturalist, and as a child, she often assisted newborn animals. After leaving the U.S. in 1967, she lived in various parts of Canada, primarily B.C., where after the homebirth of her child in 1972, she became active in the emerging movement of midwifery. The midwifery movement came from a desire on the parts of some women who were not interested in the hospitalization or drugs systematically used and wanted to naturalize

the birthing process. Palumbo's involvement in the movement began at a grassroots level, without any particular training in the matter but as part of a support network of like-minded individuals.

While midwifery certification was available through Washington State University, Palumbo's family responsibilities prevented her from taking the required courses. Instead, she began assisting in births in 1974 in the Kootenay region. She and others started an apprentice-style training system as community midwives, occasionally supported by medical professionals. The midwifery movement met with a great deal of resistance from medical professionals of the time. Much of their training came from on-the-job assistance of home births. The medical profession's views towards homebirths began to change as the concept became more acceptable to them. Palumbo retired from midwifery in 1986 and moved into early childhood education after assisting in roughly a hundred deliveries during her career.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of materials collected by Megan Davies and Abra Palumbo on the midwifery movement in British Columbia. Materials include books, instructional guides, and notes about the midwifery movement collected by both Davies and Palumbo. The collection also includes recordings of oral history interviews conducted by Megan Davies.

Notes

Other materials include 22 DVDs, 2 books, 9 photographs, and 1 CD.

File list available.

Materials were donated to University Archives by Megan Davies in 2008 and 2025 and by Abra Palumbo in 2010.

Consult University Archives staff for more information on restricted materials.

An indexed description of subject matter in the Davies' interviews compiled by project research assistant Corrine MacPherson is included in the collection accession file.

Information about Abra Palumbo was taken primarily from the DVD interview from the B.C. Midwifery Collection (V.T. 1983:14).

UBCARCH-1053

Series Descriptions

Abra Palumbo. – 1977-1985.

19 cm of textual records, 2 books, and 1 CD.

Abra Palumbo collected printed papers kept about the midwifery movement in the 1970s and 80s in B.C. Most of the materials are official forms, manuals, or articles utilized by the midwifery movement.

This part of this collection was previously described as the Abra Palumbo sous-fonds.

Megan Davies. – 1972-2015.

20 cm of textual records and 22 DVDs.

This series contains books, pamphlets, and other materials on the midwifery movement in B.C. collected by Megan Davies in the course of her research, as well as recordings of her oral history interviews.

Papers. – 1972-2015.

20 cm of textual records.

This subseries contains books and other materials relating to the midwifery movement that Davies consulted in her research. Other materials include Davies' notes, participant information sheets, content descriptions of the oral history interviews, and birthing notes taken by Maggie Ramsey, one of the midwives Davies interviewed.

DVDs. – 2004.

22 DVDs.

This subseries consists of recordings of Megan Davies' oral history interviews with those in the midwifery movement around British Columbia.

Photographs. – 1984-early 1990s.

9 photographs.

Photographs show Abra Palumbo and others in the midwifery movement, primarily at workshops.

File List

BOX 1

ABRA PALUMBO

- 1-1 Schools & Study
- 1-2 Manual Originals-K.C.C.C. Manual Originals "Responsible Home-Centered Childbirth"
- 1-3 Midwives' Associations: MANA, AOM, ACHI, MABC, MTF, NMA, NAPSAC
- 1-4 Midwives Forms-P/N, Birth, Newborn, Postpartum, Transfer, etc.
- 1-5 Parent Information
- 1-6 Ina May Workshop-Ina May Gaskin Workshop, Cortes Island-1984 (7 photographs)
- 1-7 Informed Choice and Agreement Forms
- 1-8 "A Childbirth Manual" (bound)
- 1-9 Statistics
- 1-10 Articles/Media & Presentations
- 1-11 Pre-Natal Classes

BOX 2

ABRA PALUMBO (Cont.)

Chamberlain, Geoffrey. *The Safety of the Unborn Child*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969

Levy, Juliette de Bairacli. *Nature's Children: A Guide to Organic Foods and Herbal Remedies for Children*. New York: Shocken Books, 1971.

- 2-1 KCCC (Kootenay Childbirth Counseling Center) & Kootenay Parents-Corresp.
(File includes Audio CD: "Presentation for Maternity Nurses at Kootenay Lake District Hospital (KLDH) Nelson B.C. May 1983. May 1983. Ilene Bell, Abra Palumbo (& baby Anna) Representing the Kootenay Childbirth Counseling Center & MABC. Jo Doetzel-Head Nurse-Mat. and Mat. Nurses.")

BOX 3

MEGAN DAVIES

Papers

- 3-1 *Birth Book* by Raven Lang. 1972
- 3-2 *Spiritual Midwifery* by Ina May and the Farm Midwives. 1975
- 3-3 [Birthing notes from Maggie Ramsey, a midwife interviewed by Megan Davies]. 1979-1998 [RESTRICTED]
- 3-4 "Free Delivery," this booklet is dedicated towards the demystification of childbirth. [ca. 1970s]
- 3-5 *A Guide to Midwifery* by Elizabeth Davis. 1981
- 3-6 *Midwifery is a Labour of Love* by the Midwifery Taskforce Association and the BC Association of Midwives. 1981
- 3-7 *Healing the Family: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children's Ailments* by Joy Gardner. 1982
- 3-8 [Articles on midwifery]. 1983-1986
- 3-9 *Reclaiming Birth: History and Heroines of American Clinical Birth Reform* by Margot Edwards and Mary Waldorf. 1984

BOX 4

MEGAN DAVIES (Cont.)

Papers (Cont.)

- 4-1 *Midwifery is Catching* by Eleanor Barrington. 1985
- 4-2 [Participant information sheets]. 2004
- 4-3 [Megan Davies notebooks on oral history work]. [ca. 2004] [RESTRICTED]
- 4-4 Content descriptions of interviews. [ca. 2004]
- 4-5 [Correspondence, Abra Palumbo to Megan Davies]. 2005-2015

DVDs

Each DVD contains the following information, as well as a number and the names of the interviewee:

Homebirth and Midwifery in B.C.

Interviewer Megan J. Davies

Videographer Sarah Jane Swartz

- VT 1983:1 DVD #1 Interview with Leslie M. Campos, Lisa Farr, Irme Mende, and Lynnda Moore. July 27, 2004. Slokan, B.C. 118 minutes.
- VT 1983:2 DVD #2 Interview with Dr. J. Michael Hartley. June 28, 2004. Nelson, B.C. 41 minutes.
- VT 1983:3 DVD #3 Interview with Dian L. Holt, Susan Stryck, Liz Tanner, and Don Tanner. June 28, 2004. Nelson, B.C. 91 minutes.
- VT 1983:4 DVD #4 Interview with Pamela Nagley Stevenson. June 28, 2004. Winlaw, B.C. 49 minutes.
- VT 1983:5 DVD # 5 Interview with Irene Bell. June 29, 2004. Nelson B.C. 87 minutes.
- VT 1983:6 DVD # 6 Interview with Dianne Carter, Tanya Carter, and Shanoon Bennett. June 29, 2004. Winlaw, B.C. 61 minutes.

- VT 1983:7 DVD #7 Interview with Marilyn Burgoon and Barry Burgoon. June 30, 2004. Vallican, B.C. 51 minutes.
- VT 1983:8 DVD #8 Interview with Heather Martin. July 7, 2004. Salt Spring Island, B.C. 98 minutes.
- VT 1983:9 DVD #9 Interview with Gail Mussell and Jo Twaites. July 7, 2004. Salt Spring Island, B.C. 34 minutes.
- VT 1983:10 DVD #10 Interview with Maggie Ramsey. July 7, 2004. Salt Spring Island, B.C. 110 minutes.
- VT 1983:11 DVD #11 Interview with Tema Dawn. July 8, 2004. Salt Spring Island, B.C. 60 minutes.
- VT 1983:12 DVD #12 Interview with Rae-Anne Huth. July 8, 2004. Salt Spring Island, B.C. 57 minutes.
- VT 1983:13 DVD #13 Interview with Linda Underwood and Daphne Taylor. July 8, 2004. Salt Spring Island, B.C. 42 minutes.
- VT 1983:14 DVD #14 Interview with Abra Palumbo. July 9, 2004. Black Creek, B.C. 99 minutes.
- VT 1983:15 DVD #15 Interview with Katherine Atkins. July 10, 2004. Salt Spring Island, B.C. 41 minutes.
- VT 1983:16 DVD #16 Interview with Barbara Ray. July 10, 2004. Victoria, B.C. 114 minutes.
- VT 1983:17 DVD #17 Interview with Anne Barkham. July 13, 2004. Langley, B.C. 45 minutes.
- VT 1983:18 DVD #18 Interview with Camille Bush. July 13, 2004. Vancouver, B.C. 115 minutes.
- VT 1983:19 DVD #19 Interview with Deborah Harding. July 14, 2004. White Rock, B.C. 98 minutes.

- VT 1983:20 DVD #20 Interview with Wendy Clemens. July 15, 2004. Horseshoe Bay, B.C. 58 minutes.
- VT 1983:21 DVD #21 Interview with Marilyn Green and Teresa O. MacDonald. July 15, 2004. Vancouver, B.C. 60 minutes.
- VT 1983:22 DVD #22 Interview with Dr. Michael Klein. July 15, 2004. Vancouver, B.C. 50 minutes.

PHOTOGRAPHS

- 143.1/1 Barb Ray & Camille Bush - Early 1990's. Working on the midwifery legislation draft. [sp]
- 143.1/2 Early 1990s. L-Rt: Barb Ray, Camille Bush, Deborah Kozlick, Sadie Minard, Abra Palumbo. [sp]
- 143.1/3 Midwives Workshop - Hollyhock Farm. Cortez Island, B.C. 1984. [sp]
- 143.1/4 Ina May Gaskin - Cortez Island-1984, Hollyhock Farm. [sp]
- 143.1/5 Ina May (back turned) & 3 midwives at Cortez Island workshop 1984. [sp]
- 143.1/6 Ina May Gaskin - 1984 midwives workshop - Cortez Island. (Woman on rt is Mara.) [sp]
- 143.1/7 Ina May Gaskin (Hollyhock Farm) Cortez Island, B.C. 1984. [sp]
- 143.1/8 Abra Palumbo-1984 - on Cortez Island at Ina May workshop. [sp]
- 143.1/9 Taking a break and soaking up sun! Abra & Susan – 1984 - Cortez. [sp]