

Pembroke Center Associates

Newsletter

Frances Perkins: The Woman Behind the New Deal

By Leah Sprague '66



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FRANCES PERKINS CENTER

Secretary Perkins and colleagues assembled as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act on August 14, 1935. Frances Perkins was the chief proponent and major architect of the Social Security Act, which established not only Social Security itself, but the Unemployment Insurance Program as well.

When, in 1932, Franklin Roosevelt asked Frances Perkins to be his Secretary of Labor, Perkins accepted only after extracting a series of commitments from the newly elected President. She wanted assurances that he would support the social and economic reforms to which she had dedicated her working life. Perkins was nervous and ambivalent about taking on the role of a Cabinet secretary. She would be the first woman to serve in that capacity, and her appointment was controversial, not only because she was the first woman, but because she did not have the wholehearted support of organized labor. That would

change soon enough, however, as Perkins quickly became a friend of labor and successfully spearheaded a number of new federal programs that would become the backbone of the New Deal.

Among Roosevelt's brain trust, Frances Perkins was the most ardent advocate for the poor, women, and children. From the beginning, Roosevelt looked to Perkins for plans to provide relief to those devastated by the nation's drastic economic woes. She developed the first federal welfare plan, enacted as the Federal Emergency Relief Act. She convinced

Roosevelt that the key to providing jobs to the unemployed would be a massive public works program, enacted as the National Industrial Recovery Act. Later, Roosevelt appointed her to chair the Committee on Economic Security, which developed what would become Perkins's greatest achievement, the enactment of the Social Security Act in 1935. In 1938, her advocacy for minimum wage legislation and limitations on child labor resulted in the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

In a new biography to be published by Random House on March 3, 2009, award-winning journalist Kirstin Downey confirms that Frances Perkins is truly the woman behind the New Deal. Downey, who for twenty years served as business and finance reporter for the *Washington Post*, has won numerous awards for her reporting, including the 2008 Pulitzer Prize, won by the *Post* for its coverage of the Virginia Tech

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From the Director

Not long after the Pembroke Center was established, Christine Dunlap Farnham '48, the original force behind the Pembroke Associates, died in a car crash. Thanks to the generosity of her friends, the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives was founded to collect the papers and other materials of Brown and Rhode Island women. In this way, a sad death enabled the Center to institutionalize its commitment to the history of Brown and local women. That collection has grown to be a rich and dynamic resource for scholars and a critical contribution to the archival records of University and state history.

In 2001, Naomi Schor, Nancy Duke Lewis Professor, Professor of French Studies, and founding co-editor of *differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, died prematurely. In 2002, the Pembroke Center and the John Hay Library received her papers, and once again, a tragic occurrence opened the way to an important institutional initiative. From that gift, the project now called The Feminist Theory Papers began to form. Today the Pembroke Center, in partnership with the Brown Library, is in the process of collecting the papers of several generations of feminist scholars who, from the late 1960s through the next three decades, changed what we think of as knowledge in the academy. By bringing together the papers of scholars from across the disciplines, representing feminist theory in its broadest and most diverse manifestations, the collection will be an inestimable resource to future scholars and historians.

In January, Columbia University hosted a conference titled "Archiving Women." Sponsored by Columbia's Center for the Critical Analysis of Social Difference, the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, the Institute for Research in African American Studies, and the Columbia



Poster from Columbia University's "Archiving Women" conference using images from Brown's Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives and Feminist Theory Papers.

University Libraries, the conference brought together a large audience of scholars and archivists for a remarkable daylong discussion of the challenges and rewards of archiving women. I was invited to speak about the Feminist Theory Papers and was accompanied to the conference by Feminist Theory Papers archivist Amy Greer (whose position was initially funded by generous gifts from feminist scholars) and project coordinator Denise Davis. It soon became evident to us that Pembroke's commitment to build and secure women's archives is shared by many. And, as speaker after speaker made reference to the Feminist Theory Papers, it became clear that the Pembroke Center's project is a vital component of that commitment.

Frances Perkins from page 1

shootings. While a Nieman Fellow at Harvard in 2000-2001, Downey came upon the amazing story of Frances Perkins. Since that time, Downey has immersed herself in researching the contributions of Perkins, doing extensive archival research in libraries across this country and in Europe, and interviewing dozens of Frances Perkins's friends and relatives, many of them very old, reaching some people only months before they died. What Downey discovered is that this relatively unknown woman was the true architect of the New Deal, conceiving, crafting, and implementing many of the government programs that helped pull the United States out of

the Great Depression. The first historians of the New Deal, particularly Arthur Schlesinger, knew Frances Perkins's importance and accentuated it, but until now, most subsequent analyses of the period contain little more than a reference or two to this very important person. "She was almost completely forgotten by history," Downey said.

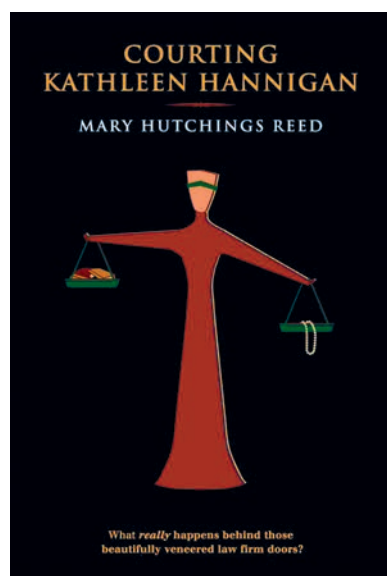
Kirstin Downey will be speaking at Brown University on March 16, 2009 for a Women's History Month program sponsored by the Sarah Doyle Women's Center and co-sponsored by the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women. Please see page 4 for details.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FRANCES PERKINS CENTER

This is Perkins's favorite photo of herself. It was found in her room at Telluride House at Cornell University after her death.

Mary Hutchings Reed '73, AM '73 Authors Novel on Women in the Legal Profession



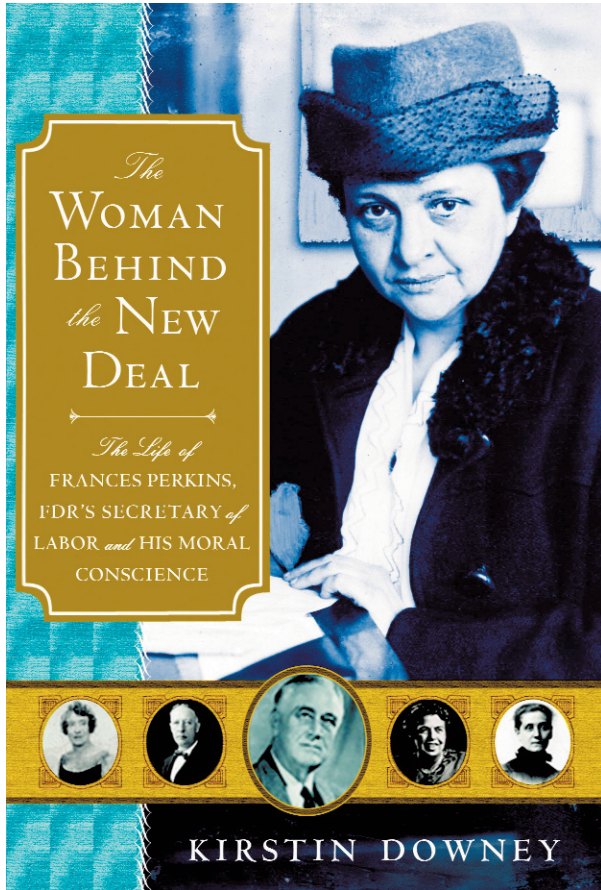
After graduating from Brown University with a bachelor's degree in public policy and a master's degree in economics, Mary Hutchings Reed went on to Yale Law School. She has spent her legal career at two large Chicago law firms, Sidley & Austin, and Winston & Strawn, making partner at both firms. She resigned her partnership in Winston & Strawn's intellectual property department in 1992 to focus on her writing, but still serves of counsel.

Courting Kathleen Hannigan draws upon Reed's personal knowledge of what women experience in high powered law firms. Heroine Kathleen

Hannigan does all that is required of her to make partner – until she is called to testify in a lawsuit that forces her to choose between her partners and her principles. Set in Chicago, the novel follows the growth of Hannigan's legal career and culminates with a sex discrimination suit that the author loosely models after the real-life gender discrimination suit *Hopkins v. Price Waterhouse* in the late 1980s.

To read more about the novel and Reed's work, please visit the author's website: www.maryhutchingsreed.com.

Upcoming Pembroke Center Associates Events



An Evening with Kirstin Downey, Author of *The Woman Behind the New Deal*

Monday, March 16, 2009

7:30 p.m.

List Auditorium

64 College Street, Providence, RI

Kirstin Downey will discuss her new book and present a slide show of Frances Perkins's life including never-before-published pictures. Downey will do a short reading from her book and talk about Perkins's fascinating life and Perkins's interest in Rhode Island. Also at the event will be Barbara Burt, executive director of the Frances Perkins Center, dedicated to perpetuating Frances Perkins's life work, and to turning her family homestead, still in its 1930's condition, into a museum and research center.

This event is sponsored by the Sarah Doyle Women's Center and the Pembroke Center Associates.

2009 Pembroke Center Commencement Forum Crisis: Policies to Strengthen a Troubled Economy

Saturday, May 23, 2009

Time and Location TBD

In recent months, the U.S. economy has been buffeted by the housing slump, a credit crisis, rising unemployment, gyrating energy prices, and a dramatic rise in the federal deficit. The Obama Administration, Congress, and economic leaders have been implementing new policies to address the crisis and stabilize consumer confidence. Where is it all heading? Are we entering an era of more regulation and government intervention? What policy options remain in the toolbox? Please join **Annette Nazareth '78**, Partner, Davis, Polk & Wardwell and a former Commissioner of the Securities and Exchange Commission and **Jill Schlesinger '87**, Executive Vice President and Chief Investment Officer for Strategic Point Investment Advisors, to discuss the current state of the U.S. economy and the prospects for recovery.



Reproductive Rights as Human Rights: What Can the U.S. Learn from Global Developments?



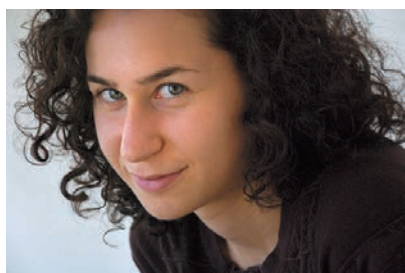
Nancy Northup '81

A group of sixty alumnae/i and friends met in Boston on March 4 to hear Nancy Northup '81, President of the Center for Reproductive Rights, talk about global developments in reproductive rights. Co-sponsored by the Pembroke Center Associates and the Brown Club of Boston, this event was also the first of a series of women-focused events the Club is sponsoring called "Brown Women of Boston."

Northup acknowledged that thirty-six years after *Roe v. Wade*, the political debate in the U.S. over reproductive health and rights issues remains intractable and stale. While Ameri-

cans debate the effectiveness of abstinence-only sex education, the right of pharmacists to refuse to fill birth control prescriptions, and legal restrictions on abortion, there have been groundbreaking developments around the globe. Northup noted that reproductive rights have been recognized in binding international and regional human rights treaties and praised recent efforts by human rights lawyers to obtain authoritative interpretations in individual cases. The group engaged in a lively discussion about the lessons that can be learned abroad for politics and policy in the United States.

Inaugural Linda Pei Undergraduate Research Grant: Debbie Lehmann '10



Linda Pei Grant Recipient Debbie Lehmann '10

The Linda Pei Undergraduate Research Grant supports research related to issues of women's financial empowerment such as: gender equality in the workplace; micro-lending to

women in developing nations; and the relationship between educational attainment and financial independence for women. The \$1,000 grant is to be used to support an undergraduate doing research for an honors thesis.

Economics concentrator Debbie Lehmann has received the first Linda Pei Undergraduate Research grant to examine the role of micro-credit programs on women's empowerment in Salta, Argentina. Lehmann is partnering with Pro Mujer – a local organization that provides micro-credit, health education, business development, and empowerment training to women. Lehmann seeks to understand how microcredit programs impact women's lives – particularly gender roles and relationships. She will use the

grant to conduct survey research in Argentina of women who have been participating in microfinance programs, as well as women who have not had the opportunity. Once all data is collected, she will work under the guidance of Mark Pitt, Professor of Economics, to analyze the data and consider the impact of microcredit on women's empowerment. This project has significant benefits for Pro Mujer, providing guidance on how best to improve its services.

The grant honors the life of Linda Pei '67 (1944-2007). Pei was born in China and grew up in Tokyo. Her parents sent her to the United States for schooling at the age of sixteen. She graduated from Brown with a bachelor's degree in chemistry, earned a master's degree in teaching from Wesleyan University, and completed a master's degree in business administration at Stanford University. She founded the Women's Equity Mutual Fund in 1993 to advance the social and economic status of women in the workplace by bringing to bear the collective power of individual and institutional investors. She also founded a program to integrate entrepreneurial learning and microfinance in a small community in China. The grant was established in 2008 thanks to the efforts of Carol Lemlein '67 and the Brown University Club of Southern California Women's Committee.



HANK RANDALL

A Special Thank You for Your Membership Renewal in 2009

The Pembroke Center Associates have created a set of five special postcards that we will send to all of our members who renew their membership this year. The postcards feature images of the newly renovated Pembroke Hall, originally dedicated in 1897 and rededicated on October 17, 2008. The image to the left is from the postcard collection.

Amelia S. Knight was treasurer of the Rhode Island Society for the Collegiate Education of Women, the group that raised the funds to build Pembroke Hall. Knight funded the creation of the frieze on the second floor of Pembroke Hall. This image is but one small detail from the artwork that adorns the perimeter of the room and features figures depicting sculpture, engineering, navigation, and other vocations.

Join the Pembroke Center Associates on Facebook

The Pembroke Center Associates now have a home on Facebook. Making use of the popular social networking site, we created our own Facebook group page to help Associates members keep current with our activities and network with each other.

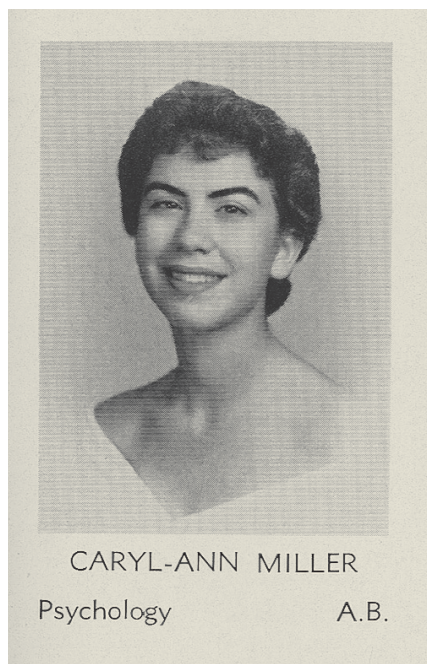


Find us on
Facebook

Facebook (www.facebook.com) connects people with friends and others who work, study, and live around them. All that is needed to join Facebook is a valid email address.

Once you have a Facebook account, simply search for “Pembroke Center Associates” group and click on the link that says “Join This Group.” When you do, you’ll be able to see our announcements about upcoming events, read Pembroke Center news, invite others, participate in the online discussion board, and connect with other members. We look forward to counting you as a Facebook friend!

Caryl-Ann Miller Nieforth '59 Gift Helps Preserve the History of Pembroke College



As part of her 50th reunion celebration, Caryl-Ann Miller Nieforth '59 has donated to the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives a treasure trove of memorabilia, books, and photos related to Pembroke College in Brown University and alumnae/i activities. The Farnham Archives focuses on Brown and Rhode Island women and their organizations. Available at the University Archives at the John Hay Library, the collection includes correspondence, diaries, photographs, newspapers, yearbooks, memorabilia, and oral histories. The Pembroke Center Associates support the Archives through their fundraising efforts and record oral histories that become part of the collection.

Miller Nieforth has a strong connection to Brown University. Graduating from Pembroke College in Brown University in 1959, she is the daughter of Beatrice Wattman Miller '35 and mother of Andrew L. Feldman '86, '91 M.D. She has cousins, aunts, and uncles in the Brown family as well. Miller Nieforth has been very active in alumnae/i activities and was the 1999 recipient of the Nan Tracy Class Officer Award "in recognition of Individual Class Leadership and Distinguished Service to Class, the Association of Class Officers, and the University." After graduating from Brown, she worked as a museum administrator for over twenty-five years at institutions such as the Children's Museum in Boston and the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. The Providence Public Library has recognized her community service work with numerous awards.

"This year, as Co-Chair of my 50th Class Reunion, I've been rummaging through many nostalgic memories available in the Brown and Pembroke Archives, hunting for just the right tickles to tantalize my classmates to return for Reunion, and to remind them of their 1950s selves in our Reunion Yearbook," said Miller Nieforth. "As a retired museum administrator, librarian, and archivist, I realize how an individual's personal experiences and materials bring past eras to life. So I decided to organize my own bits and pieces of Pembroke and Brown to share with others later on."

Some of the more notable items in the extensive donation include: two folders of the Class of 1959's 40th and 45th reunion planning materials; a Brown University brass cowbell from a Brown Football game played in the 1990s; five scrapbooks of personal memorabilia collected from 1955 – 1959; and, an invitation from Dean Rosemary Pierrel on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of Pembroke Hall.

"We are tremendously grateful to Caryl-Ann for her generosity and excellent stewardship of her class history. Her materials will be of great use to scholars who rely on the Archives for their research," commented Christy Law Blanchard, Director of Alumnae/i Affairs for the Pembroke Center.

For information about donating items to the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives, please contact the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at (401) 863-2643 or via e-mail at Pembroke_Center@brown.edu.

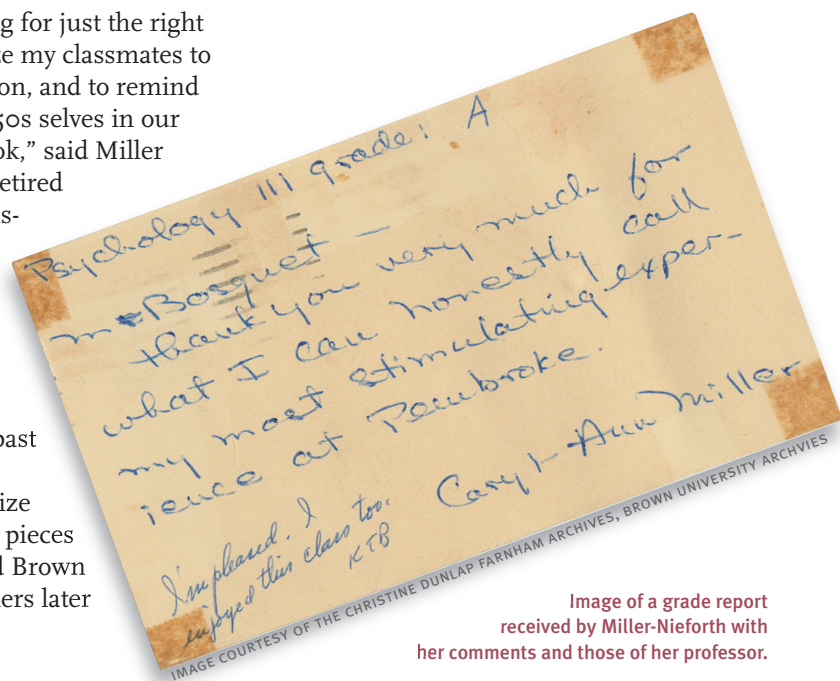


Image of a grade report received by Miller-Nieforth with her comments and those of her professor.

Yes! I'd like to make a gift to the Pembroke Center Associates!

Membership gifts to the Pembroke Center Associates support the diverse research, teaching, and alumnae/i programs sponsored by the Pembroke Center.

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