

**L2012.18**  
**Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich**  
**Collection, 1983-2011**

**FINDING AID AUTHOR**

Gabrielle Garcia

**ACQUISITION INFORMATION**

Cynthia Rich donated these materials to Lambda Archives of San Diego in 2012.

**PROCESSING INFORMATION**

This collection was processed by Gabrielle Garcia as part of the 2020 CSL Project

**EXTENT**

Number of containers: 1

Linear feet of shelf space: 0.25

**ABSTRACT**

**BIOGRAPHY OR HISTORY**

Barbara Macdonald

“Barbara Anne (Charles) Macdonald, social worker, lesbian feminist activist, and author, was born on September 11, 1913, to Emily Lister (Baker) Charles and Fred Henly Charles in Pomona, California. She grew up around the La Habra, California, area. At the age of fifteen, she left home permanently and began supporting herself as a domestic worker in Long Beach, California. In 1930 Macdonald married Elmo Davis; the marriage lasted five years. She attended Long Beach Junior College (1931-1932), Santa Ana Junior College (1932-1937) where she was almost expelled as a lesbian, and the University of California, Berkeley (1938-1940). She paid for her education by working as a stunt parachute jumper about which she was the subject of numerous articles in The Santa Ana Register, which called her "intrepid and daring." Macdonald married John Macdonald in 1941; the marriage was very brief.

After leaving the University of California, Berkeley, Macdonald worked at WPA Vallejo (Calif.) Housing Authority. From 1950 to 1953 she attended the University of Washington where she received a B.A. and an M.S.W. Upon graduation she moved to Wenatchee, Washington, and worked as a supervisor for Child Welfare Services. In 1957

she moved to Morgantown, West Virginia, and commuted to the University of Pennsylvania where she worked on a 3rd year certificate in psychiatric social work. Subsequently she worked as a clinical social worker in pediatrics at the University of Maryland and taught at the medical school. She lived in Baltimore from 1964 to 1967 and worked as a school social worker in the Baltimore public schools. During this time, she took up sailing and bought the sailboat "Mighty Mouse." In 1967 she moved to Connecticut where she worked as a consultant for the Bureau of Pupil Personnel and Special Education for the state of Connecticut. Macdonald and her companion Ethel Weeden, also a social worker, took a year's leave to travel the country in a Volkswagen bus. They followed that with a trip via freighter to Asia.

Macdonald retired in 1974 as a social worker. That same year, while living in Connecticut, she took a feminist writing workshop at Goddard-Cambridge Graduate School in Cambridge, Mass. The workshop was taught by Cynthia Rich, who later became Macdonald's domestic partner of 26 years. Over the next twenty-five years, Macdonald's work appeared frequently in lesbian and feminist publications such as *Equal Times*, *Lesbian Ethics*, *Ms.*, *New Directions*, *New Women's Times*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *Sojourner*. She received national recognition for her writings. In 1980, she covered the UN Mid-Decade Conference on Women in Copenhagen for *Equal Times*. In 1983, along with Rich, Macdonald co-authored *Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism*. The book, which appeared in two expanded editions (1991, 2001), combined her personal experiences of ageism with ground-breaking lesbian feminist theory, and was named by *Ms.* as one of 35 classics of the second wave of feminism. It also was widely anthologized for women's studies courses and was translated into Japanese in 1995. Macdonald was a frequent speaker at lesbian and feminist organizations, universities, and organizations of social workers nationally and internationally, including the UN Conference on Women at Huairou, China, in 1995. She was the keynote speaker at the National Lesbian Conference in Atlanta in 1991 and gave a plenary address at the National Women's Studies Conference in 1985. Her work was the inspiration for the First West Coast Conference of Old Lesbians in 1987. She served on its planning committee and gave the keynote address. Out of the conference came the creation of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, a national organization seeking to end the ageism experienced by old women. Macdonald died June 15, 2000, of Alzheimer's disease."

<https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/5138>

### Cynthia Rich

"Cynthia Rich, teacher, lesbian feminist activist, and author, was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on March 12, 1933, the daughter of Helen (Jones) and Arnold Rice Rich. Her sister was Adrienne Rich. In 1952 she graduated from the Roland Park Country School in Baltimore, and then received her A.B. in English summa cum laude from Radcliffe College in 1956. During her junior year, she made Phi Beta Kappa, and in 1956 won first prize in the *Mademoiselle* fiction contest for her story, "My Sister's Marriage." She also received the Augustus Anson Whitney Fellowship from Harvard University (1957-1958). Rich received her A.M. in English (1958), and completed residence requirements and

oral examinations for a Ph.D. in English from Harvard in 1960. Rich married Roy Glauber, a member of the physics department at Harvard in 1960. They had two children: Jeffrey (1963- ) and Valerie (1970- ). The couple separated in 1971; they divorced in 1975.

Rich taught expository writing, fiction, and poetry writing at Wellesley College (1962-1963), Cooper Community College (1965-1969), and Harvard University (1958-1961, 1969-1981) . She held the Briggs Copeland Lecturership in English and General Education at Harvard (1969-1970). In 1974 she taught a feminist writing workshop at Goddard Cambridge College, where she met Barbara Macdonald, who later became her domestic partner of 26 years. Rich helped establish the Harvard Writing Center in 1978 in which she remained involved for two years. In 1980, she covered the UN Mid-Decade Conference on Women in Copenhagen for Equal Times. From 1980 until 1981 she directed independent studies in writing for M.A. candidates at Goddard and consulted for the New York City Office of Educational Evaluation before joining Digital Equipment Company in Nashua, N.H., as a software editor. In 1983 Rich co-authored with Macdonald *Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism*, a ground-breaking examination of ageism from a feminist perspective. In 1989 she wrote *Desert Years: Undreaming the American Dream*, an eco-feminist account of living for six years in a trailer at Agua Caliente County Park on the Anza Borrego Desert. *Desert Years* was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award in 1990. From 1992 to 1994 Rich taught ESL at Mira Mesa Continuing Education. She wrote regularly for feminist publications such as *Equal Times*, *New Women's Times*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *Sojourner*, and was a frequent contributing editor in the lesbian and feminist press.

Rich was a lifelong progressive political activist. She worked with Voice of Women--New England, (1961-1965); San Diego United Farm Workers Grape Boycott Committee (1982-1989); "Myth" California (1986-1992); Desert Waves affinity group at the Nevada Test Site and in San Diego (1987-1993); Women's Alliance for Peace in the Middle East (1988-1991); Martin Luther King Tribute Coalition (1989-1996); Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers (1989-1999); and Old Women's Project (founded in 2001 with Mannie Garza and Janice Keaffaber).”

<https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/5138>

## **COLLECTION SCOPE AND CONTENT**

This collection contains materials pertaining to the literary works of Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich, presentations they did, the group Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, and lesbian conferences. The materials include books, a flyer, posters, a photo album, and VHS tapes.

## **ARRANGEMENT**

This collection consists of 1 box.

## **SEPARATED MATERIAL**

In this field, list any materials that have been removed from the collection and transferred to another collection, department (e.g., the library), or institution.

1. Photos: [P220]
  - a. Album of photos, text, and documents showing the life of Barbara Macdonald from birth to death
2. Flat Files: [Q0542 (Drawer 8, Folder D), Q0540 (Drawer 11, Folder A), Q0541 (Drawer 6, Folder E)]
  - a. West Coast Old Lesbian Conference 1987 [L2012.18.01]
  - b. Feminist Lecture Series: Barbara Macdonald 1983 [L2012.18.02]
  - c. "A Couple of Authors, Cynthia Rich and Barbara Macdonald" painting by Helen Redman 1995 [L2012.18.03]
3. VHS Tapes: [V0708-V0710]
  - a. Old Lesbians Organizing for Change Tape 1/5: Keynote Cynthia Rich and Panel #1 (Respecting All Our Sisters)
  - b. Old Lesbians Organizing for Change Tape 3/5: Keynote Shaba Barnes and Panel #3 (The End of Life Tying Up Loose Ends)
  - c. Barbara Macdonald, "Professionalism Is Not Benign" National Lesbian Conference 1991

## **SUBJECTS**

Barbara Mcdonald, Cynthia Rich, Lesbians, Lesbian non-fiction, Literature, Publications, Aging, Seniors, LGBTQ seniors, Desert living, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change

## **CONDITIONS GOVERNING ACCESS**

This collection is open and available for research use. Copyright restrictions apply.

## **PREFERRED CITATION**

The suggested citation for the collection is:

[Item Description]  
Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich, 1983-2011  
Lambda Archives of San Diego  
San Diego, California

## **RELATED MATERIAL**

L2014.13, L2015.28

## LOCATION NOTE

C.3.1.2

## LANGUAGES

English

## CONTAINER LIST

<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>	
1		<i>Women and Aging: An Anthology</i> , Calyx: A Journal of Art and Literature by Women, vol. 9, no. 2 and 3, Winter 1986	1986	
1		<i>Ensemble Anthology: Art &amp; Hybrid Writing by International Women</i> , no. 1, 2011	2011	
1		<i>Look Me in the Eye: Old Women Aging and Ageism New Expanded Edition</i> by Barbara Macdonald with Cynthia Rich 2001	2001	
1		<i>Look Me in the Eye: Old Women Aging and Ageism</i> by Barbara Macdonald with Cynthia 1983	1983	
1		<i>Desert Years: Undreaming the American Dream</i> by Cynthia Rich 1989	1989	
1		1 purple flyer "Multicultural Women Writers presents An Evening with Barbara Macdonald & Cynthia Rich" 1993	1993	