

**Center for a Woman's Own Name Records**  
**A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress**



**Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**2021**

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Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms010142>

Prepared by Manuscript Division

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2010  
Revised 2021 September

## Collection Summary

**Title:** Center for a Woman's Own Name Records

**Inclusive Dates:** 1956-2008

**Bulk Dates:** 1972-1985

**ID No.:** MSS85452

**Creator:** Center for a Woman's Own Name

**Extent:** 4,700 items

**Extent:** 18 containers

**Extent:** 7 linear feet

**Language:** Collection material in English

**Location:** Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**LC Catalog record:** <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2009085452>

**Summary:** National non-profit organization. Correspondence, legal records, newspaper clippings, press releases, printed material, and other records documenting the organization's work as a clearinghouse for information concerning state laws, lawsuits, and various legal and social issues relating to women's efforts to retain their chosen name after marriage.

## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

### People

Feigen, Brenda--Correspondence.  
Ginsburg, Ruth Bader--Correspondence.  
Harney, Kathleen R.--Correspondence.  
Kessler, Joan F.--Correspondence.  
King, Jean L. (Jean Ledwith)--Correspondence.  
Krauss, Elissa--Correspondence.  
Landers, Ann--Correspondence.  
Levedahl, Kathryn Scates, 1927-2014--Correspondence.  
MacDougall, Priscilla Ruth--Correspondence.  
MacDougall, Priscilla Ruth.  
Mead, Margaret, 1901-1978--Correspondence.  
Montage, Judith Natale--Correspondence.  
Montandon, Pat--Correspondence.  
Peratis, Kathleen Willert--Correspondence.  
Roberts, Sylvia--Correspondence.  
Sandler, Bernice Resnick--Correspondence.  
Sheley, Kathy Ann--Correspondence.  
Sousa, Sheila Cabral--Correspondence.  
Stannard, Una, 1927-2004--Correspondence.  
Takemoto, Anne H.--Correspondence.  
Tepper, Terri P.  
Tepper, Terri P.--Correspondence.  
Tepper, Terri P.--Family--Correspondence.  
Van Buren, Abigail, 1918-2013--Correspondence.  
Vanderbilt, Amy--Correspondence.  
Weddington, Sarah Ragle--Correspondence.

### Organizations

American Civil Liberties Union. Women's Rights Project--Correspondence.  
Center for a Woman's Own Name.  
Consumer Credit Project. Consumer Credit Project records. 1973-1984.  
Lucy Stone League--Correspondence.

National Organization for Women--Correspondence.  
Olympia Brown League--Correspondence.  
Playboy Foundation--Correspondence.  
Women's Legal Defense Fund, inc.--Correspondence.

### **Subjects**

Consumer credit--United States.  
Credit--United States.  
Names, Personal--Law and legislation--United States.  
Names, Personal--United States.  
Names, Personal.  
Sex discrimination against women--United States.  
Sex discrimination in consumer credit--United States.  
Women's rights--United States.  
Women--Finance, Personal--United States.  
Women--Taxation--United States.  
Women--United States--Economic conditions.  
Women--United States--Social conditions.  
Women--United States.

### **Places**

United States--Social conditions--20th century.  
United States--Social life and customs.

## **Acquisition Information**

The records of the Center for a Woman's Own Name were given to the Library of Congress by the organization's cofounder and director, Terri P. Tepper, in 2009.

## **Processing History**

The records of the Center for a Woman's Own Name were arranged and described by Kathleen O'Neill in 2010. The finding aid was edited and revised in 2021 by Colleen Benoit Kim.

## **Copyright Status**

Copyright in the unpublished writings of the Center for a Woman's Own Name in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

## **Access and Restrictions**

The records of the Center for a Woman's Own Name are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

## **Preferred Citation**

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Center for a Woman's Own Name Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Organizational History

In 1972, Terri P. Tepper, cofounder and director of the Center for a Woman's Own Name, petitioned the 19th Judicial Circuit Court of Illinois to change her surname and to recognize Ms. as a legal title. The petition was granted, making Tepper the first woman in Illinois to regain her chosen name after marriage and marking the first time the State of Illinois recognized Ms. as a legally designated title. The material in this collection relates to Tepper's name change petition and the creation of the Center for a Woman's Own Name and contains only passing references to the legal recognition of Ms.

The Center for a Woman's Own Name began informally in 1973 when Tepper placed an advertisement in *Ms.* magazine seeking information on state law and policies relating to women's names. The Center was incorporated later that year, with Tepper as director and president; Priscilla Ruth MacDougall as director, vice president, and legal consultant; and Diana Altman as director. The Center developed into a clearinghouse for information concerning state laws, lawsuits, and various legal and social issues relating to women's efforts to retain their chosen name after marriage. The Center did not advocate that women retain their maiden names after marriage; instead, the Center maintained that women had a right to determine their legal name irrespective of their marital status.

Through a network of volunteers, the Center tracked legal opinions and on-going lawsuits on a state-by-state basis. With correspondence from the general public, prominent individuals, national organizations, and government officials, the collection's strength lies in its ability to document the evolving societal attitudes and legal opinions around the name issue as well as individual and institutional responses to women maintaining their own names after marriage.

### Biographical Note

#### Terri P. Tepper

Date	Event
1942, May 29	Born Denver, Colo.
1964	B.S., education, Boston University, Boston, Mass.
1964, Aug. 23	Married Lawrence Jay Weiner
1964-1970	Elementary school teacher, Barrington, Ill. and Chicago, Ill.
1972	<i>In re Weiner</i>
1973	President, National Organization for Women. North Suburban Chicago Chapter, Techny, Ill.
1973	Outstanding Achievement award, National Organization for Women. North Suburban Chicago Chapter, Techny, Ill.
1973-1984	Founder, president, and director, Center for a Woman's Own Name, Barrington, Ill.
1974	Published with Diana Altman and Priscilla Ruth MacDougall <i>Booklet for Women Who Wish to Determine Their Own Names After Marriage</i> . Center for a Woman's Own Name: Barrington, Ill.
1976-1984	Founder and director, Consumer Credit Project, Barrington, Ill.
1980	Published with Nona Dawe Tepper, <i>The New Entrepreneurs: Women Working from Home</i> . New York: Universe Books
1981	B.A., photography, Columbia College, Chicago, Ill.
1982	One-woman photography exhibition, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, Ill.
1984-1985	President, Illinois Council on Home Based Enterprise
2007-	Trainer and owner, The Cultivated Canine, Barrington, Ill.

### Scope and Content Note

The records of the Center for a Woman's Own Name span the years 1956-2008, with the bulk of the material dating from 1972 to 1985. The collection is comprised primarily of correspondence but also includes administrative files, clippings, legal files, promotional materials, and publications. The papers are in English and are organized into the following four series: [Correspondence](#), [State File](#), [Consumer Credit Project](#), and [Miscellany](#).

The [Correspondence](#) series documents both public and private reactions to Tepper's name change petition and her initial efforts to gather information and resources to form the Center. The Tepper's correspondence with her family includes letters between Tepper and her mother-in-law, Idelle Weiner, along with Tepper's personal narrative detailing the impact Tepper's name change had on their relationship. The correspondence between Priscilla Ruth MacDougall and Tepper reflects the development of the Center's mission and strategy as well as MacDougall's analysis of legal cases and opinions. The series contains both incoming and outgoing correspondence, primarily between MacDougall and Tepper. Notable correspondents in this series include Brenda Feigen, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Elissa Krauss, and Kathleen Willert Peratis who represent organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union Women's Rights Project, the Lucy Stone League, National Organization for Women, and Women's Legal Defense Fund.

The [State File](#) comprises the bulk of the collection and consists primarily of correspondence. The series contains a master file of attorney general opinions and state legislative councils; therein, the series is organized alphabetically by state. The material in this series was used by Tepper to track each state's recent legal opinions and legislation. The volunteers correspondence contains letters from individuals and organizations that act as contacts in each state. Their duties included providing the Center with updates on state legislation and lawsuits and distributing the Center's fact sheets and informational pamphlets. The material in this series complements the general correspondence from the Correspondence series as many of these individuals and organizations initially contacted Tepper to request information on name change law.

Notable correspondents include Joan F. Kessler, Jean L. King, Ann Landers, Kathryn Scates Levedahl, Pat Montandon, the Olympia Brown League, The Playboy Foundation, Sylvia Roberts, Bernice Sandler, Sheila Cabral Sousa, Una Stannard, Abigail Van Buren, Amy Vanderbilt, and Sarah Ragle Weddington. The series also includes correspondence from name change petitioners Kathleen R. Harney, Judith Natale Montage, and Anne H. Takemoto as well as those who used common law to establish their legal names such as Kathy Ann Sheley.

The [State File](#) demonstrates the wide reaching network of individuals and organizations supporting a woman's right to determine her own name as well as the disagreements among supporters regarding the best method and strategy to ensure this right. The series is especially rich in personal narratives, women expressing the connection between their names and their sense of identity and autonomy. These narratives illustrate the way state laws, institutional policies, bureaucratic barriers, and personal bias impacted women on a practical level, affecting their ability to file tax returns and obtain identification and credit. The realization that many women lost their credit history after they took their husband's name and were often unable to obtain credit under their own name after marriage led Tepper to create the Consumer Credit Project.

The [Consumer Credit Project](#) series contains administrative files, clippings, correspondence, credit discrimination complaints, credit surveys, legal files, promotional materials, publications, and other writings. The series documents the Project's efforts to educate women about their credit rights and to help those who had faced discriminatory credit practices.

The [Miscellany](#) series includes administrative files, announcements, clippings, legal files, promotional material, publications, and a scrapbook. The historical file includes an essay by Tepper chronicling her decision to file the name change petition and the creation of the Center. The legal file consists chiefly of material from Lawrence Jay Weiner, an attorney and Tepper's husband, who represented Tepper and several other women in their name change petitions. This series also contains MacDougall's published writings on women and name change law.

## Arrangement of the Records

This collection is arranged in four series:

- [Correspondence, 1972-1985](#)
- [State File, 1969-1985](#)
- [Consumer Credit Project, 1973-1984](#)
- [Miscellany, 1956-2008](#)

## Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-2	<p><b><u>Correspondence, 1972-1985</u></b></p> <p>Correspondence with individuals, various federal agencies and armed services, organizations and schools, the press, and Terri P. Tepper's family.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by topic and name of person or organization and chronologically therein.</p>
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