

C Harris, Fran (1909-1998), Papers, 1930, 1943-1976  
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## INTRODUCTION

Papers of Fran Harris, journalist, broadcaster, and president of Women In Communications, Inc. (WICI). The papers consist of correspondence, organizational records, conference materials, and photographs pertaining to Harris's tenure as WICI vice president and president.

## DONOR INFORMATION

The Fran Harris Papers were donated to the University of Missouri by Fran Harris on August 20, 1990 (Accession No. 4978). The papers are part of the National Women and Media Collection.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born on April 19, 1909, in Detroit, Frances Alvord received her AB in English and Psychology from Grinnell College (Iowa) in 1929. She began her journalism career in the advertising department of Himelhoch Brothers and Company, a Detroit women's specialty shop, followed by a stint as host of Detroit radio station WWJ's "Julia Hayes" daily half-hour program devoted to household hints. Fran Harris was Michigan's first female newscaster at WWJ in 1943, the first female television interviewer in 1946, and features coordinator for WWJ's radio and television stations from 1964 until her retirement in 1974.

Harris served as treasurer, president, and CEO of I.C. Harris & Company from 1957 to 1984, in addition to her involvement with Women in Communications, Inc. (WICI). Starting as chapter president, she served on the national board of directors of WICI from 1968 to 1974, first as vice president and later as president. Under her leadership WICI reorganized structurally from a women-only honorary society (Theta Sigma Phi) to a professional association, which voted to admit African-Americans and men as members.

Other organizations to which Harris belonged include the American Federation of Advertising (first female national vice president, 1966-1968), the Camp Fire Girls executive committee, and the United Way of Southeastern Michigan. She also served as an American delegate to the 1966 Asian-American Conference of Broadcast Women, Detroit chair of the 1968 Conference of the Americas, and American delegate to the 3rd World Conference of Women Journalists and Writers in Israel in 1973.

Harris became the first female member of the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame in 1986, received an Emmy from the Michigan Chapter of the National Academy of TV Arts and Sciences in 1987, and was admitted to the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 1988. Nationally Fran Harris was the first woman promoted to editor and publisher in Gannett Newspaper history.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE:

Consisting primarily of correspondence, organizational records and photographs, the Fran Harris Papers document the evolution of the honorary society for women within the field of communications. As first vice president in charge of development and later as president, Harris

oversaw the reorganization of Theta Sigma Phi into Women in Communications, Inc., in 1971 and these records make up the bulk of the collection. The papers are arranged into two series.

**Correspondence** contains letters, memoranda, notes, conference programs, budgetary data and other documents arranged by administrative unit of WICI and chronologically thereunder unless noted otherwise. Included are the Executive Officer, Chapter, Regional, and National Office correspondence offering an in-depth view of the day-to-day operations of a national organization. The logistics and social issues involved in transforming a traditional, honorary society into a culturally diverse professional association feature prominently in these four sections of the series. Chapter correspondence is arranged alphabetically by chapter name.

Theta Sigma Phi news stories and public relations releases; the Task Force on Restructuring; publication information for MATRIX, the society's periodical; and material pertaining to the planning and staging of the 1968 Conference of the Americas, an international conference for women in communications, are also contained within this series. Insight is provided into the women's movement in the 1970s as female journalists struggled for professional respect, equality in compensation, and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Additionally the attempts made by the Nixon Administration to restrict access to information and impose limitations on the press are addressed.

The **Photograph** series comprises 24 black and white prints pertaining to Harris's career in print and broadcast journalism. Although dating from 1930 to 1972, the bulk is concentrated in the 1940s and 1950s. These images portray not only the evolution of women's experiences within the industry but also provide a glimpse into the technological history of early radio and television. Of particular interest are the early '50s pictures of Van Heflin, Charleton Heston, and Bob Hope, one of Gloria Swanson in 1949, and pictorial evidence of the changing styles of microphones as technology evolved over the decades.

FOLDER LIST

**Correspondence Series**

- f. 1 Executive Officers, President Elect Margot Sherman, 1971-1974
- f. 2 Executive Officers, 1st Vice President Linda Winkler, 1971-1975
- f. 3 Executive Officers, 2nd Vice President Christy Bulkeley, 1971-1974
- f. 4 Executive Officers, 3rd Vice President JoAnn Albers, 1971-1976
- f. 5 Executive Officers, Treasurer Anne Hecker, 1971-1974
- f. 6 Task Force on Restructuring, November 1970-April 1973
- f. 7 Task Force on Restructuring, May-July 1973
- f. 8 Task Force on Restructuring, August-December 1973
- f. 9 Task Force on Restructuring, 1974-1975
- f. 10 Theta Sigma Phi news stories, 1971-1974
- f. 11 MATRIX, 1971-1975
- f. 12 Region 1, Dee Jones, 1970-1974
- f. 13 Region 2, Jan Eberle, 1971-1974
- f. 14 Region 3, Helen Schubert, 1971-1974
- f. 15 Region 4, Pat Macquire, 1971-1974
- f. 16 Region 5, Jean Daugherty, 1970-1973
- f. 17 Region 6, Carol Simons, 1970-1974
- f. 18 Region 7, Helen Sims, 1969-1973
- f. 19 Region 8, Mary Uttings, 1970-1974
- f. 20 Chapter, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1971-1974
- f. 21 Chapter, Atlanta, Georgia, 1973
- f. 22 Chapter, Austin, Texas, 1971-1973
- f. 23 Chapter, Birmingham, Alabama, 1970-1971
- f. 24 Chapter, Boston, Massachusetts, 1970-1973
- f. 25 Chapter, Chicago, Illinois, 1971-1973
- f. 26 Chapter, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 1971-1973
- f. 27 Chapter, Ft. Collins, Colorado, 1971-1974
- f. 28 Chapter, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1970-1972
- f. 29 Chapter, Houston, Texas, 1972
- f. 30 Chapter, Kansas City, Missouri, 1971-1972
- f. 31 Chapter, Kansas State University, 1970-1972
- f. 32 Chapter, Miami, Florida, 1971-1973
- f. 33 Chapter, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1972-1973
- f. 34 Chapter, Muncie, Indiana, 1970-1973
- f. 35 Chapter, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1971-1972
- f. 36 Chapter, New York, New York, 1971-1973
- f. 37 Chapter, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1970-1972
- f. 38 Chapter, Phoenix, Arizona, 1971-1973
- f. 39 Chapter, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1971-1973

**Correspondence Series (con'd)**

- f. 40 Chapter, Portland, Oregon, 1970-1973
- f. 41 Chapter, Rochester, New York, 1971-1972
- f. 42 Chapter, Seattle, Washington, 1968-1972
- f. 43 Chapter, St. Louis, Missouri, 1970-1971
- f. 44 Chapter, Toledo, Ohio, 1973
- f. 45 Chapter, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1969-1973
- f. 46 Chapter, Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul), Minnesota, 1970-1973
- f. 47 Chapter, Washington, DC, 1971-1974
- f. 48 Chapter, Wichita, Kansas, 1971
- f. 49 Chapter, Miscellaneous, 1970-1974
- f. 50 National Office, 1967
- f. 51 National Office, 1971
- f. 52 National Office, January-March 1972
- f. 53 National Office, April-June 1972
- f. 54 National Office, July-December 1972
- f. 55 National Office, January-March 1973
- f. 56 National Office, April-June 1973
- f. 57 National Office, July-December 1973
- f. 58 National Office, 1974
- f. 59 Conference of the Americas, 1966
- f. 60 Conference of the Americas, 1967
- f. 61 Conference of the Americas, January-September 1968
- f. 62 Conference of the Americas, October 1968
- f. 63 Conference of the Americas, November 1968-March 1969

### Photographs Series

- f. 64 1930-1970

### INDEX TERMS

Subject	Folders	Image
Associations--Management, 1970s	1-10,12-15,37,45,52,55-57	
Bulkeley, Christy C. (1942-2009)	3,8,9,58	
Conference of the Americas, 1968, Dearborn, Michigan	59-63	
Discrimination in employment, 1970s	53-55,57	
Elam, Maxine Smith	1, 7, 8, 51-56	
Equal pay for equal work, 1970s	3, 11, 19, 54-57	
Equal Rights Amendment, 1970s	1, 2, 37, 47, 55-57	
Fairness doctrine (Broadcasting), 1970s	11	

Subject	Folders	Image
Fraternities and sororities, 1960s, 1970s	1-10, 50-54, 59-63	
Freedom of information, 1970s	55-57	
Freedom of the press, 1970s	54-57	
Harris, Fran (1909-1998)	1-64	
Harris, Fran (1909-1998)	64	y
Hecker, Anne	1, 5, 9, 10, 51-56	
Microphones, 1930s-1960s	64	y
Missouri, Columbia	1	
National Women and Media Collection	1-64	
Sherman, Margot	1,2, 6, 8, 9, 17, 51-58	
Sherman, Margot	64	y
Theta Sigma Phi, Austin, Texas	1-10, 50-54, 59-63	
Trade and professional associations, 1970s	1-64	
Women In Communications, Inc., Austin, Texas	1-64	
Women journalists, 1970s	1-64	
Women--civil rights, 1960s-1970s	1, 2, 37, 47, 53-57	
Women--Mass Media, Congresses and conferences, 1960s	59-63	