

Ellen Starr Brinton: Archivist and Activist for Peace in Time of War

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ABSTRACT

Ellen Starr Brinton served as the first Curator of the Swarthmore College Peace Collection from 1935 to 1951. She combined her professional work establishing the special collections library and archives at Swarthmore College outside Philadelphia, collecting and preserving records of peace movements around the world dating from the seventeenth century onward. Brinton was successful in this endeavor due to her own background as a Quaker and her activism in the US peace movement from the 1920s onward. In the late 1930s Brinton traveled to Europe to attend international peace conferences and to rescue the records of peace organizations and the papers of peace activists already in danger of destruction by governments and from the spread of fascism across the continent. She was also involved in efforts to assist European peace activists themselves also in personal danger from their governments. Brinton's work in the first years of establishing the Peace Collection continues to the present, with staff retaining her original organizing principles for primary resources, and her mission to collect, preserve, and make accessible historical materials about the work of peace activists around the world.

In 1937, Ellen Starr Brinton, the curator of the Swarthmore College Peace Collection (SCPC), convinced her employers to send her to Europe for three months to attend two international peace conferences and to collect publications, local peace organization records, and peace activists' papers. This was no ordinary collecting trip. By the late 1930s, many were concerned with the rise of fascism in Nazi Germany and Italy. These regimes had already proven themselves antithetical to the concepts of peace and opposition to anti-militarism established by dedicated activists from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Several German peace activists had gone into exile in 1933 when Adolf Hitler rose to power. Many believed that the publications, records, and papers detailing decades of efforts opposing all wars were in danger of destruction as the influence of fascism spread across Europe. As an American, Brinton had more freedom to travel across the continent in 1937 and, with the approval of Swarthmore College, could offer a safe and secure home for peace materials at the newly established library outside Philadelphia.

Brinton was a multifaceted woman—archivist, activist, internationalist, historian, and world traveler—who played an important part in establishing the historical record of peace, social justice, and women's history. She integrated her professional life with her personal beliefs in peace and justice, collecting primary and secondary materials in danger of destruc-

tion from the spread of fascism and the Nazi regime. Brinton was also a long-term peace activist known and trusted by her fellow peace workers. In this essay, I explore the story of Ellen Starr Brinton—historian, librarian, and archivist—and how her political beliefs and experiences led her to take action to preserve crucial and important records.

It is also the story of the early years of the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, a special collections research library and archives dedicated to collecting, preserving, and making accessible materials on nongovernmental actions for peace worldwide. Swarthmore College is located about twelve miles southwest of Philadelphia. It was established as a coeducational, four-year institution in 1869 and was founded by a group affiliated with the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). A basic tenet of Quakerism is opposition to war, and for some Quakers, this meant taking a public stance in working for peace. By the 1930s, Swarthmore was no longer officially tied to the Society of Friends, but many traditions, beliefs, and personal connections remained, including dedication to teaching about social justice and peace, as well as promoting internationalism and the global connections of all humanity.

Just a few months after it was announced that Jane Addams—cofounder of Hull House in Chicago and president of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)—would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, she was invited to Swarthmore and given an honorary degree. Addams planted an oak tree that still stands on campus and bears her name. During the visit, Frank Aydelotte, president of the college, discussed his ideas with Addams about establishing a special library collection based on materials about internationalism and peace.¹ Aydelotte convinced Addams to send her own papers to Swarthmore. Because so much of her peace work was connected to WILPF, where she served as international president, they agreed those records would also be sent to the college, to be cared for in the new Jane Addams Peace Collection. This is one version of the genesis of what is known today as the Swarthmore College Peace Collection.²

Hiring Brinton as the first curator of the new library would ensure its success in those early years. She was one of the many professional women whose careers spanned the first half of the twentieth century. In the Peace Collection, three document boxes (about 1 1/4 linear feet) house some of Brinton's correspondence, diaries, and writings, mostly of a professional or semiprofessional nature. One has to read between the lines for any personal information. And yet, even this small collection reveals Brinton's great desire to combine her work in social activism and politics, her unique view of the historical importance of her contemporaries, her desire to save nineteenth- and twentieth-century records of the peace movement, and her devotion to a "second career," begun in her mid-forties, as an archivist and historian.

Born in 1886 in rural Chester County, Pennsylvania, Ellen Starr Brinton was the only girl among five brothers. Her middle-class parents owned a small farm specializing in fruit growing (Schoonover 1924, 506). The family was part of the Religious Society of Friends. Ellen herself followed this religious tradition, and that heritage was reflected in her lifelong

¹ Swarthmore had already established the Friends Historical Library, which housed records of well-known Quakers (such as Lucretia Mott), and records of Quaker religious bodies. As one of the historic peace churches, the Friends Library contained materials on peace efforts from the seventeenth century onward. The collection of peace materials Aydelotte imagined would be administered as a subsection of the Friends Library. Today, the Peace Collection is a separately administered library and archives with millions of documents, images, sound and visual records, centered on nongovernmental peace efforts around the world. It is unclear exactly when Addams agreed to send WILPF records and her own papers to Swarthmore. Letters dating to 1928–29 in the SCPC's own archives reveal that materials were already being sent to the college by that time.

² Over time, the collection was renamed as the vast resources housed there reach well beyond the WILPF and Jane Addams's own work to encompass many other organizations and activists.

commitment to social justice. Brinton was educated in Chester County at local private Quaker schools, and as an adult, she attended the University of Pennsylvania. She worked in a series of professional jobs—government employee, newspaper reporter, and national field secretary for WILPF—before becoming the first curator of the Peace Collection in the mid-1930s.³

During World War I, Brinton worked in the educational department of the Pennsylvania Food Administration (Howes 1939, 110). This work was likely a compromise for a woman raised in the tradition of the Quaker peace testimony and notions of community service. Jane Addams—one of the founders of the Woman's Peace Party in 1915 (later the US branch of WILPF)—made a similar compromise, working for the federal Food Administration once the United States entered the war.

Brinton's passion for history and the collection of historical documents developed during the war years and into the early 1920s. For ten years, she worked on publishing a genealogy of the Brinton family in her spare time. All the people involved with the creation of this publication acknowledged that Brinton had been the guiding force:

Ellen Starr Brinton . . . held the committee together, faithfully attended all meetings, and was always helpful in supplying any missing material for the book. [If] it had not been for the intelligent effort, loyalty, and personal sacrifice of Ellen Starr Brinton, this genealogy would probably never have been completed and published. (Schoonover 1924, 9)

Throughout the 1920s, Brinton pursued her other major interest: international politics. She worked as a reporter for newspapers in Philadelphia and traveled to Mexico, Cuba, Trinidad, and the Soviet Union. Her trips were not only for pleasure, but also for self-education and to further her knowledge of world affairs. Brinton published articles in progressive magazines about what she learned on those travels and spoke before civic and women's groups. Her correspondence with friends made during her journeys shows Brinton's grasp of the international scene and her concern with social justice. Brinton collected government-issued posters in the USSR, as well as a large hand-painted banner given to her by Soviet factory workers.⁴ In the 1930s, Brinton corresponded with Herminio Portell Vilá, a Cuban scholar and activist. They wrote about the failed revolution and subsequent repression in that country. Brinton questioned Vilá closely about his part in Cuban politics. In turn, Vilá often wrote of his exasperation with Brinton's hesitation to fully support the Cuban revolution. He accused her of "comfortable" North American prejudices, but Brinton held to her own beliefs. She wrote to him in 1935:

Will we not need to do something regarding the economic system under which your people and mine are suffering? The more I dig into this whole thing, I come to [the] conclusion the whole economic structure needs to be changed. But I am not ready to say it should come by revolution (that is, by violence) as I am firmly convinced

³ The position of curator at Swarthmore College remains in the British archival tradition of leading archivist or director of a subject collection of primary material. Brinton became the part-time curator sometime in 1935.

⁴ Brinton's collection of posters now forms part of the Peace Collection's Soviet Poster Collection, which dates from the 1920s to the mid-1930s.

it can be attained by education. (Brinton to Herminio Portell Vilá, January 19, 1935, Brinton Papers, box 1)

Despite Brinton's reluctance to believe in only one version of events in Cuba, she remained good friends with Vilá and his wife and wrote many letters of concern and support when he was imprisoned.

In 1929, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom hired Brinton as its national field secretary, allowing her to combine her interests in and knowledge of international politics with her outgoing personality and drive. WILPF had been founded by internationalist-minded feminists during World War I. In 1915, led by Jane Addams—already known worldwide for her work at Hull House in Chicago and her peace politics—hundreds of women from belligerent and neutral countries met at The Hague in the Netherlands to discuss how they could work to bring about a negotiated settlement to the war. By the time Brinton joined WILPF's US national office in the late 1920s, the organization was well established with a legislative lobbying office in Washington, DC, and a satellite administrative office in Philadelphia. WILPF was internationally known for its support of women's issues and leadership in the widely supported peace movement. The movement had a great deal of national support throughout the US during the 1920s as the public reacted to the worldwide devastation caused by World War I and its aftermath. However, WILPF had gained a reputation for radicalism because of its international peace proposals, its support for the World Court and the League of Nations, and its call for the US to recognize the Soviet Union. Although Jane Addams won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, she was vilified in the US press and hounded by conservatives and members of veterans' groups.⁵ Becoming WILPF's field secretary was perfect for the politically active Brinton. As part of her work, Brinton attended a peace and anti-war rally with fellow members of the Pennsylvania branch of WILPF outside City Hall in Philadelphia in the mid-1930s.

By the early 1930s, Brinton was known to many of the Pennsylvania women already leading WILPF through progressive and Quaker circles in Philadelphia, and these networks were instrumental in securing her a new job at Swarthmore College. When Brinton was hired part-time by the college a few years later to establish the library collection, she found boxes of unsorted materials, no organization, no policy on what should be collected, and no money to expand the collection. With the retirement of the internationally minded Aydelotte and the hiring of John Nason as the college's new president, the Jane Addams Peace Collection lost some of its initial support and impetus. However, Brinton was encouraged by Nason to continue gathering new material for the collection.

Brinton did not have any formal training in library or archival work; however, she was intelligent, familiar with WILPF, deeply connected to the peace movement, and knowledgeable about international affairs. She was also extremely interested in the position and historical matters in general, and had phenomenal organizational abilities. Additionally, Brinton was a Quaker and a local woman, which made her well known to people at Swarthmore College,

⁵ More conservative women's organizations, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) called for ousting Addams, which sparked a storm in the press among feminists and women activists. Although suffrage activist and politician Carrie Chapman Catt—long a colleague of Addams—challenged the DAR's decision, WILPF had been denied membership in the US peace organization Catt established after World War I, the National Council on the Cause and Cure of War (NCCCW). The council's membership was made up of women's organizations.

such as fellow Quakers Hannah Clothier Hull and Lucy Biddle Lewis, both serving on the college's board of managers and WILPF leaders.⁶

Brinton soon realized that she needed formal training and expert advice to succeed in establishing the Peace Collection. She asked the college to send her to a course in archival management offered by the National Archives in Washington, DC. In that course, Brinton learned the basics of arranging, processing, and preserving archival materials, as well as how to establish the foundation of an archive. When she returned to Swarthmore, Brinton concentrated on establishing a board of directors to help advise her. She was fortunate to gain the assistance of Ernst Posner, professor of archival administration and history at American University (Wikipedia, n.d.).⁷ While Posner gave invaluable advice on how to organize the ever-increasing amounts of material that arrived at Swarthmore, it was Devere Allen, peace activist and amateur historian, who guided Brinton through the early years and helped her collect some of the more valuable nineteenth-century materials now housed at Swarthmore. Allen, a well-known socialist and newspaper editor in the 1930s and 1940s, also wrote one of the first histories of the US peace movement. In this capacity, he was an invaluable friend, teacher, and supporter of Brinton.⁸

Although Brinton had guidance from members of her advisory council, her own interests in peace issues and their history shine clearly in those early years. Brinton had her own sure sense of historicism, which guided her collecting. By the time the first printed guide to the Peace Collection was published in 1947, only a dozen or so years after Brinton began collecting, over two hundred organizations and individuals involved in the peace movement had their papers deposited at Swarthmore. These included Jane Addams, Belva Lockwood, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the War Resisters League, and the National Council for Prevention of War (Brinton 1947, *passim*). There were materials from over twenty-seven countries, a large portion of which Brinton had collected herself on trips abroad. She was especially interested in collecting materials related to the eighteenth-century Benjamin West painting depicting the treaty signing between William Penn and the Lenape Indians of Delaware and Pennsylvania. Brinton also collected stamps and postal covers about peace issues and the abolition of slavery.

Brinton's best instincts were directed to collecting the materials of her contemporaries and fellow peace workers, especially the women she knew personally or whose work she knew from various social justice movements around the world. It is not always easy to accurately judge the endurance or the lasting value of the work of one's contemporaries. Sometimes, the case was an easy one for Brinton to decide, as with the papers of Jane Addams. Addams died of intestinal cancer in 1935, before she could make final arrangements for all of her papers to be sent to Swarthmore. Brinton spent many years corresponding and taking trips to Illinois to convince Addams's family members to have all of Jane's papers housed at Swarthmore. Brinton recounted several of her trips through family barns and attics to recover

⁶ Hannah Clothier Hull, later the president of the US Section of WILPF, was also an alumna of Swarthmore and was married to William I. Hull, professor of history and religion. William Hull taught some of the first peace studies classes offered at Swarthmore. Hannah's wealthy Quaker family, the Clothiers, were also known for their financial support of the college. Lucy Biddle Lewis had served as the first president of the US Section of WILPF and lived near Swarthmore.

⁷ Posner was a refugee from Nazi Germany who had spent six weeks in a concentration camp before being released. In the 1940s Posner became an American citizen and would later serve as the president of the Society of American Archivists (1955–56).

⁸ Historian Merle Curti was also instrumental in assisting Brinton in the 1930s. He donated his own collection of materials on the history of the peace movement to the Peace Collection.

valuable Addams materials (Brinton, "Letter to Many Friends," December 5, 1949, and "1951 Midwest Trip" file, Brinton Papers, box 1). Other materials originally sent to the Library of Congress were later sent to the Peace Collection. It was only through her tireless efforts that the Addams papers exist in their present complete form at Swarthmore.

By the late 1930s, Brinton was concerned about the fate of peace activists and records in Europe. The records of the international branch of WILPF were located in Geneva, Switzerland, and while that country was neutral at the time, no one knew if it would be invaded by Germany in the future. WILPF leaders were aware of how many of their members in Germany had already disappeared into concentration camps or had been sent into exile. Feminists Lida Gustava Heymann and Anita Augspurg, leaders of the German branch of WILPF, had been in exile in Switzerland since 1933, when Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany. Head of the German Peace Society and Nobel Peace Prize winner Ludwig Quidde was also in exile in Switzerland. German peace activist and feminist supporter of birth control for women Helene Stoecker moved to Great Britain, then to Scandinavia in the early 1930s, and finally to the US by the early 1940s. Stoecker had support from influential US WILPF members.

As part of her 1937 trip to Europe, Brinton attended the War Resisters' International (WRI) conference in Denmark and the WILPF International Congress in Luhačovice, Czechoslovakia. She renewed contacts with international peace activists at those meetings and offered a safe haven for their papers and publications at Swarthmore. During this trip, Brinton rescued hundreds of peace documents from individuals and organizations, realizing that if these materials came under German control, they would disappear and their authors and owners might be imprisoned or worse. Brinton visited peace leaders in England before she traveled to the WRI conference and the WILPF Congress. During her stopover in Geneva, at the WILPF international office, Brinton arranged with Gertrud Baer, the international executive secretary, that all WILPF international records would be sent to Swarthmore. Several boxes arrived there in 1941, thus ensuring their survival.⁹ The international records contained information about women peace activists all over the world. This information could have posed a danger for those living in countries controlled by the Nazi regime or its supporters.

Brinton kept a journal of her 1937 trip filled with details of her journey and the places she went, but only in England did she list the names of the peace activists she visited. Most of the journal was written in the same ink, but some entries include additional paragraphs in pencil that were clearly added at a later date. The original entry for July 24 noted that Brinton attended the WRI Congress in Copenhagen. The later penciled note reads, "Did not dare make notes—[on] account [of] going through Germany again." (Brinton, Journal, July 24, 1937, Brinton Papers, box 3). Two days later, we learn that Brinton was in Berlin. While there, she met discretely with peace activists. The added penciled entry for July 26 reads, "Men and women who stayed until 11 p.m. told lots about Germany and Hitler 'treasonable,' but doors, walls, phone were safe!" (Brinton, Journal, July 26, 1937, Brinton Papers, box 3).

Brinton's fears about the conditions in Europe and the coming war were realistic. While in Germany, she tried to obtain the papers of Ludwig Quidde from the authorities. Quidde had left Germany quickly in fear for his life several years before, and he had asked Brinton to help find the papers he had to leave behind. Brinton described several trips to the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin and Munich on this quest. As an American citizen accompanied by a consul from the US embassy, Brinton apparently felt safe enough to try to track down this material (Brinton, Journal, July 19, 1937, and July 20, 1937, Brinton Papers,

⁹ Baer herself would leave Europe about the same time and spend the duration of the war in New York City.

box 3). However, she did note in her journal that she let “Mr. Llowcock” from the embassy do all the talking during their visits to the Gestapo.

Occasionally, Brinton was not entirely sure about her decisions on which materials to collect for the Peace Collection. In 1943, the archive had the opportunity to obtain the papers of German feminist, pacifist, and birth control advocate Helene Stoecker. Following Stoecker’s death that same year in New York City, her WILPF friends and colleagues wanted her papers at Swarthmore. Stoecker had been one of the supporters of the German peace movement in the 1920s, a founder of the German branch of War Resisters’ International, and had attended the founding WILPF meeting held after the First World War. Brinton was unsure whether to accept Stoecker’s papers due to her reputation for sexual relationships outside marriage. However, relying on her own sense of the historical value of the materials for the Peace Collection, Brinton accepted Stoecker’s papers. Today, scholars from all over the world interested in German feminism, especially the early birth control movement, consult the Stoecker collection.

Brinton had a deep belief that it was necessary to save peace activists as well as their papers from the ravages of war. She was a member of the US WILPF refugee committee, which had helped Helene Stoecker enter the country. In Brinton’s own collection of papers, there are two folders of correspondence containing about two hundred letters, some written on the thinnest of wartime paper. These letters document the desperate attempts Brinton made to rescue four women from Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s. At the WILPF International Congress in Luhačovice, Brinton met and became friends with Rosa Kulka, a local WILPF leader. Over the next four years, the two women corresponded, and Brinton did everything she could to help Rosa, her sister Julia, and their nieces Ella and Susie escape Czechoslovakia and reach the United States. Brinton wrote encouraging letter after letter, offering her own house outside Philadelphia as a haven for the women. Brinton called on her WILPF contacts, who worked tirelessly during the onset of the war to secure the admission of refugees to the United States, and she ultimately gained the support of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. for the Kulka case. It was no use. Wartime conditions, low US quotas for Jews and Eastern Europeans, and State Department bureaucracy foiled Brinton in her attempts to aid the women. At one point, Brinton was told that her Swarthmore salary was not considered high enough to provide an economic guarantee for four refugees. Julia and Rosa were most concerned about finding a sanctuary for their nieces. At first, their letters were hopeful, giving details about life that became more and more restricted for Jews and pacifists in Eastern Europe. Their later letters reflected their growing desperation as the Germans invaded their country and all hopes of escape seemed to vanish. By the beginning of 1941, Brinton’s letters went unanswered. She sent a Red Cross telegram, hoping her words would still get through to the women. The final letter in the correspondence folder, dated 1946, was sent to Brinton by Lola Hanousková, a relief worker in Czechoslovakia and a WILPF member. It was a reply to Brinton’s inquiry into the fate of the Kulka women:

The results of my investigation were sad: Rosa Kulka died in the Concentration Camp in Terezin. Julia Kulka and her niece Ella were moved from Terezin to Poland into the district of Lublin, and what that meant we know by now only to [sic] well. They have not returned. . . . It is all so dreadful. We have lost so many good friends, we miss them very much. (Lola Hanousková to Brinton, January 6, 1946, Brinton Papers, box 1)

We can only imagine how Brinton felt when she received this letter. She did not record her feelings about the loss of her friends; however, she did keep all the letters and one small, lovely photograph of Ella Kulka. Although Brinton was no longer officially a staff member of WILPF by the end of World War II, she had maintained her close connections with the organization and continued to assist in its important efforts to help thousands of refugees fleeing persecution in Europe. Brinton was well aware that the Kulka women were only one example of the ravages of that war, but we know of them and their story because she retained their letters for future generations to read.

During the war years, Brinton also wrote to another friend she had made on that 1937 trip, Benny Cederfeld of the Danish WILPF. In the letters to Cederfeld, Brinton revealed more personal information about her own weariness during the war. In 1945, she wrote that her favorite brother Robert had died after experiencing a breakdown in his mental health and then a short illness. She was further devastated that same year, writing to Cederfeld, “My best friend, a driver in a Friends’ Ambulance Unit, is buried in China” (Brinton to Benny Cederfeld, May 9, 1945, Brinton Papers, box 1).¹⁰ Brinton noted that these losses of her friends and family had left her feeling disoriented. Ever the collector of important materials, in the same letter, Brinton encouraged Cederfeld to resume sending Scandinavian peace materials to Swarthmore.

During her final years as curator of the Peace Collection, Brinton went on several trips in search of materials. Although she was close to retirement age by 1947, Brinton embarked on another three-month trip to Europe, which was still reeling from the war. This journey was undertaken once again to collect valuable materials for the Peace Collection and to reestablish ties with surviving peace activists. Brinton also kept a detailed journal on this trip, noting that she visited German WILPF leader Anita Augspurg in Switzerland, among other peace activists. Absent from this volume are the notes about fears of reprisals or the discovery of “treasonable” activities. We learn, with Brinton, the fate of Ludwig Quidde’s papers in Germany. His papers had been carefully stored by the Gestapo in Munich, only to be destroyed later in an allied bombing raid. Brinton was more successful in locating some nineteenth-century peace books and Jane Addams family papers on later trips through the Midwest, to Illinois and Ohio, in 1949 and 1951 (Brinton to Emily Picon, October 8, 1951, Brinton Papers, box 1).

With her retirement from the Peace Collection in 1951, Brinton did not turn away from the issues that had interested her for many years. She worked with Fellowship House, a community organization dedicated to racial equality and inclusion, near her home in Media, Pennsylvania.¹¹ Brinton continued to help smooth relations between the Peace Collection and Jane Addams’s descendants. She planned to write a biography of Addams, but that project was never undertaken. Brinton did complete short magazine articles and pieces for scholarly journals, and she published on topics ranging from Quaker meeting houses to a history of the Daughters of the Revolution (DAR). Brinton wrote four of the eight chapters of a history of the peace movement, *Dreamers of Dreams*, which was considered for publication by Harper’s.

¹⁰ The Friends’ Ambulance Unit was sponsored by the British Religious Society of Friends during World War I and World War II. About two hundred volunteers from around the world, including the US, worked with Chinese nationals to bring supplies to China and rebuild medical facilities, as part of the China Convoy. Most of the foreign men were conscientious objectors.

¹¹ Fellowship House is still in existence in 2026, and its mission includes civic engagement to empower the community while advancing equity and social justice (Media Fellowship House, n.d.).

The book was unfinished in 1954 when Brinton died of a heart attack suffered while she was gardening at her suburban Philadelphia home.

There are many reasons why we might examine Brinton's life. She was part of that first generation of women, born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, who came of age and found the professions open to them at last. It was acceptable and economically possible for Brinton, a woman who never married and relied on her own resources, to live on the money she earned doing work she enjoyed. Brinton's generation benefited from the pioneering efforts of the previous generation in opening the doors of professional work for women—women such as Jane Addams, Dr. Alice Hamilton of the Harvard Medical School, and M. Carey Thomas, president of Bryn Mawr College, who struggled to pass on that legacy. We might look at the archival work Brinton performed in establishing the Peace Collection at Swarthmore College and in tracing her influence in founding the fundamental archival organizing principles that are still in use at that institution today. Subsequent curators, archivists, and staff of the Peace Collection, continuing Brinton's vision, never shied away from collecting, preserving, and making accessible a wide range of materials supporting the history of peace activism, social justice, and an alternative history to war. These include the records of such groups as Women Strike for Peace, an antinuclear and anti-war organization whose leaders were called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in the early 1960s; the records of the citizens who participated in the San Francisco to Moscow Peace Walk, which challenged the US government's Cold War rhetoric; the records of various anti-war organizations and activists during the Vietnam War; the records of groups that supported ending nuclear weapons; the records of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which combined racial justice work with nonviolence and included activists such as Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King Jr.; and many, many others.

Brinton would not recognize today's Peace Collection, now located in a newer building with many millions more documents than she had collected, and with digitized documents, photographs, posters, and even audio and visual materials instantaneously available to anyone around the world. She might wonder how the small staff manages to do all this work. Brinton would recognize the staff's dedication to organizing and providing access to these materials, and I like to think she would approve of the new collections and other materials that have been obtained in the seventy-five years since her retirement. Brinton's life work provides historical lessons on how a woman could combine peace activism, humanitarianism, and satisfying, absorbing professional work within an international circle of friends and activists, and on how that woman—through that life—could leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

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About the Author

Wendy E. Chmielewski is a historian specializing in US women’s history and peace history. She is a professional descendant of Ellen Starr Brinton, having served as the George R. Cooley Curator of the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, 1988 through 2020. Dr. Chmielewski was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Peace History Society in 2019 and the Anna K. Nelson Prize for Archival Excellence from the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations in 2023. Her most recent publication (2023) in peace history is a chapter on nineteenth century women peace activists published in the *Oxford Handbook of American and British Women Philosophers in the Nineteenth Century*. Chmielewski is a co-founder (with Dr. Jill Norgren) of the digital history project “Her Hat Was in the Ring.” Together they have written a book on the history of US women’s elective rights: *Her Hat Was in the Ring: How Women Won the Right to Run for Office in the United States* (NYU Press, 2026). Like Brinton, Chmielewski combines her professional work with ongoing political activism.