



## **JOHNNIE PHELPS PAPERS AND MEMORABILIA**

**Coll2008-068**

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### Date Completed

December 4, 2008



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## Descriptive Summary

### Title

Johnnie Phelps Papers and Memorabilia

### Creator

Phelps, Nell Johnnie, 1922-1997

### Extent

Number of containers: 2 archive cartons + 3 flat archive cartons + 1 oversize envelope +  
1 map drawer  
Linear feet: 7.1 linear feet

### Date

1943-1999 (bulk 1975-1998)

### Repository

ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California

### Abstract

Correspondence, awards, certificates, articles and other material from Johnnie Phelps, World War II veteran and lesbian activist. The majority of the collection dates from 1975-1998, with most materials pertaining to Phelps' involvement with the National Organization for Women, Southern California Women for Understanding, the Los Angeles County Veterans' Advisory Commission, and the Alcoholism Center for Women; along with personal correspondence and newspaper articles written about Phelps' involvement in World War II. The collection also contains various organizations' textiles and buttons, trophies and certificates awarded for service, military materials, and photographs.



## Administrative Information

### Access

The collection is open to researchers. There are no access restrictions.

### Publication Rights

Researchers wishing to publish material must obtain permission in writing from ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives as the physical owner of the material. Note that permission to publish does not constitute copyright clearance. ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives can grant copyright clearance only for those materials for which we hold copyright. It is the responsibility of the researcher to obtain copyright clearance for all other materials from the copyright holder(s).

### Preferred Citation

Box #, folder #, Johnnie Phelps Papers and Memorabilia, Coll2008-068, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California

### Indexing Terms

This collection is indexed under the following terms:

- Phelps, Nell Johnnie, 1922-1997
- Gays in the military
- Lesbian activists—United States
- Lesbians—California—History
- Lesbians—Services for
- National Organization for Women
- Veterans
- Women veterans
- World War II

### Acquisitions Information

Gift of Grace Bukowski, date unknown.



Processing Information

Collection processed by Lilly Insalata, December 4, 2008.

Separated Material

Two books—*Thoughts and Meditations* (1960) by Kahlil Gibran and *Secrets of the Heart* (1968) by Kahlil Gibran—have been separated from the Johnnie Phelps collection.

## Biography

Johnnie Phelps was born Nell Louise Phelps in North Carolina on April 4, 1922 and was raised with an adoptive family. Her adoptive parents were abusive, and Phelps spent many of her teen years in and out of jail.

By the 1940s, Phelps married a Navy man, but they constantly fought, and she sought to escape by joining the military in 1943. She served as part of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) and was honorably discharged in 1945. She re-enlisted in 1946 and was honorably discharged a second time. Phelps left the army to establish her own printing business, which she ran for years. Living in Southern California, Phelps became politically active in the 1970s. It was around this time that she met her partner, Grace Bukowski.

Phelps joined the National Organization for Women and founded the San Gabriel Valley - Whittier chapter in 1979. She chaired the California Lesbian Task Force (a branch of NOW), and spearheaded protests on behalf of the Norton Sound Eight--eight female crew members aboard the USS Norton Sound who were charged with "homosexual misconduct." In addition, she joined the Southern California Women for Understanding organization and served on the Los Angeles County Veterans' Advisory Commission. A recovering alcoholic, she also served as president of the Alcoholism Center for Women.

Phelps died on December 30, 1997 at the Veterans Home in Barstow, California at the age of 75. She is buried in Veteran's Cemetery in Westwood, California.

## **Scope and Content**

Awards, correspondence, clippings, photographs, textiles, medals, buttons and other memorabilia from lesbian activist and World War II veteran, (Nell) Johnnie Phelps. The bulk of the material relates to Phelps' military service and her activism in women's rights groups and dates from the late 1970s until her death in 1997. The collection is divided into two series: (1) Personal Papers and (2) Memorabilia and Textiles. The Personal Papers series includes printed material related to Phelps' activities in veterans and women's rights organizations, such as the Los Angeles County Veterans' Advisory Commission, the National Organization for Women and the Alcoholism Center for Women. This series also includes correspondence with Phelps' partner, Grace Bukowski, after Phelps' death. The Memorabilia and Textiles series includes buttons, medals, trophies, military uniform paraphernalia, key chains, a United States flag and other material related to Phelps' military service, activism and other accomplishments.

## Series Description and Container List

### Series 1: Personal Papers

Dates: 1958 - 1999

Extent: 2 linear feet + 1 map drawer

This series compiles correspondence, clippings, photographs, newsletters, name tags, a book and other typescripts from Johnnie Phelps and her partner, Grace Bukowski. Included are materials from Phelps' activism, such as her involvement with the Alcoholism Center for Women, the National Organization for Women, the Norton Sound Eight, Southern California Women for Understanding and the Los Angeles County Veterans' Advisory Commission. This series also contains awards and commendations, photographs and memorial tributes presented to Grace Bukowski upon Phelps' death in 1997.

### Box Folder

1	1	Articles about Johnnie Phelps, 1980 - 1993
1	2-4	Johnnie Phelps' death, 1998
1	2	Correspondence - Sympathy notes about Johnnie Phelps to Grace Bukowski, 1998
1	3	Memorial tributes for Johnnie Phelps, 1998
1	4	The Senate California Legislature. Memorial Resolution for Johnnie Phelps by the Honorable Hilda L. Solis, March 20, 1998
1	5	ApolloMedia Corporation Release of <i>Conduct Unbecoming</i> on CDROM, 1994
1	6-7	
6		Awards, certificates and commendations, 1975 - 1996
1	6	General, 1976 - 1989
6		Alice Paul Certificate of Feminist Achievement, 1981 (oversize envelope)
6		Baltimore County Department of Health Bureau of Mental Health, Communications Skills Training Workshop, 1975 (oversize envelope)
6		County of Los Angeles. Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles does hereby join in the celebration of the 70th Birthday of Johnnie Phelps, 1992 (oversize envelope)
6		County of Los Angeles Commendation N. Johnnie Phelps, Los Angeles County Veterans' Advisory Commission, 1996 (oversize envelope)
1	7	Veterans for Human Rights. 1st Annual Sgt. Johnnie Phelps Dinner and Awards, November 11, 1993
1	8-9	Alcoholism Center for Women, 1987 - 1992
1	8	General, 1987 - 1992
1	9	Board list, 1989
1	10	<i>Before Stonewall</i> press material, 1987
1	11-13	Correspondence, 1982 - 1997
1	11-12	General, 1982 - 1997 (2 folders)
1	13	Torres, Esteban E. (Rep.), 1989 - 1998
2	13	Guestbook, 1982 - 1998

- 1 14 k.d. lang Ingénue Tour program, 1992
- 1 15 [Los Angeles County] Veterans' Advisory Commission, 1991 - 1998
- 1 16 Memorial service programs, 1986 - 1997
- 1 17-18 Name tags, 1979 - 1997
- 1 17 Name tags and button - Grace Bukowski, 1980 - 1981
- 1 18 Name tags and business card - Johnnie Phelps, circa 1979 - 1997
- 2 1-2 National Organization for Women, 1980 - 1983
- 2 1 General, 1981 - 1983
- 2 2 Training manuals, 1980 - 1982
- 2 3 Newsletters, 1988 - 1999
- 2 4-5 Norton Sound Eight, 1980 - 1994
- 2 4 General, 1980 - 1994
- 2 5 Clippings, 1980
- 2 14 *One Hundred and One Famous Poems, An Anthology*, by Roy J. Cook, 1958
- 2 7 Personal, 1997
- 2 8 Phelps for Treasurer flyer, Date unknown
- 2 9 Photographs, circa 1980 - 1998
- 2 9 Johnnie Phelps [1 photograph: col.], Date unknown
- 2 9 Johnnie Phelps' grave [1 photograph: col.], circa 1998
- 2 9 1993 SCWU Awards Banquet [2 photographs: col.], 1993
- 2 9 Unidentified man [1 photograph: b&w.], Date unknown
- 2 9 Unidentified boy [1 photograph: col.], Date unknown
- 6 A Short Course in Human Relations, Date unknown (oversize envelope)
- 2 10
- Drawer 8.5 Southern California Women for Understanding, 1979 - 1993
- 2 10 General, 1979 - 1993
- Drawer 8.5 Poster, April 17, 1993
- 6 The Sweetheart of the Year Award, 1978 (oversize envelope)
- 2 11-12 Clippings, 1985 - 1994 (2 folders)

**Series 2: Memorabilia and Textiles**

Dates: 1943 - 1995

Extent: 3.9 linear feet

This series compiles textiles and memorabilia related to Phelps' military service, her activism and her personal life. Included are memorabilia from the National Organization for Women and the campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment; awards and trophies, such as the Veterans for Human Rights award; and military memorabilia. Notably, this series includes a Purple Heart medal, military uniform paraphernalia, and a United States flag.

**Box Item**

- 3 1-2 50th Anniversary of World War II [2 medals], 1989
- 3 3 50th Leyte Landing Anniversary [1 keychain], 1994

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- 3 4 AA 31 Years; The Best of Everything is Getting Well [1 keychain], Date unknown
  - 5 1-3 Awards and trophies, 1986 - 1993
  - 5 1 Alcoholism Center for Women plaque, 1986 - 1989
  - 5 2 Johnnie Phelps - Veteran for Human Rights, circa 1993
  - 5 3 Southern California Women for Understanding and the San Gabriel Valley Chapter Community Service Award, April 17, 1993
  - 3 5-6
  - 4 1-5 Equal Rights Amendment and the National Organization for Women, 1979 - 1982
  - 4 1 California NOW 79 [1 yellow cloth with blue text], 1979
  - 3 5 79 National N.O.W. Conference; Johnnie Phelps, CA [1 name tag with attached ribbon], October 1979
  - 4 2 National ERA March '80 (sash); California NOW (cloth); ERA YES (buttons) [1 yellow sash with attached yellow cloth and 4 buttons], 1980 - 1982
  - 4 3 California ERA Chicago March (cloth); I Was There! National ERA March Chicago, Illinois (button) [1 yellow cloth with 1 green button attached], May 10, 1980
  - 4 4 California NOW [1 yellow cloth with blue text], circa 1980 - 1982
  - 4 5 California NOW (cloth); Jane Wells-Schooley (button); Timmer, NOW Indianapolis 1982 (button); Go Foat (button); Webb Secretary (button) [1 yellow cloth with 4 buttons attached], 1982
  - 3 6 ERA [1 pin], Date unknown
  - 3 7 Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Veterans of America [1 pin], circa 1995
  - 3 8 Ink stamps [4 stamps], Date unknown
  - 3 9
  - 4 6-9 Military uniform, circa 1943 - 1945
  - 4 6 Belt, circa 1943 - 1945
  - 3 9 Buttons [4 gold buttons], circa 1943 - 1945
  - 4 7 Garrison cap, circa 1943 - 1945
  - 4 8 Necktie, circa 1943 - 1945
  - 4 9 Patches [2 patches], circa 1943 - 1945
  - 3 10 Pocket watch with engraving of the Statue of Liberty, Date unknown
  - 3 11 Purple Heart medal, circa 1945
  - 3 12 Red, white and blue ribbon, Date unknown
  - 3 13 Ronald Reagan coin, 1989
  - 3 14 Rosary prayer ring, Date unknown
  - 4 10 United States flag, circa 1998
  - 3 15 VFHR; 11 Nov 1993 [1 silver chain with pendant], November 11, 1993
  - 3 16 Wallace Silversmiths shoehorn, Date unknown
  - 5 4 Wood engraving: "Johnnie Phelps," Date unknown