


2007

'Remember Me?' The Life and Legacy of Jean Byers Sampson

University of Southern Maine

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“Remember Me?”
The Life and Legacy of Jean Byers Sampson

Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine

Exhibition 2007



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE





Special Collections Reading Room

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Learning through Effective Engagement

The Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine offers a remarkable demonstration of what USM stands for—a university rich in possibilities where highly engaged faculty members and a diverse student body meet, broadening the horizons of all. Education, of course, is the mission of the University, but successfully accomplishing education requires active engagement around ideas—learning, in other words.

Learning is what we expect of our faculty. As a university, USM is distinguished not only for the quality of knowledge its faculty transmits, but also by the quality of the knowledge its faculty creates and expects its students to create. We know that effective learning—learning that is durable and leads to more learning—stems from consciously active engagement with ideas.

At USM, we promote and demonstrate effectiveness of student learning in multiple ways: through connecting our students to partnerships with local businesses and organizations, and

through the research and cultural opportunities available through the Sampson Center for Diversity.

It is in the context of the diversity of experiences, identities, and ideas that people bring to the educational enterprise that learning is most meaningful. That is why the Sampson Center is such an important University resource. The Center promotes learning through effective engagement with materials that magnificently reflect a diversity of the human experiences, identities, and ideas in Maine. In doing so, the Center exemplifies what USM stands for and ensures successful accomplishment of its mission of education.

—Joseph S. Wood
USM Interim President



Joseph S. Wood

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The Mosaic of Maine Life

The establishment of the Jeans Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine occurred incrementally through all of its components—the African American Collection of Maine, the Judaica Collection, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Collection. It was born out of a common root commitment to see that the experiences of some of Maine’s diverse communities would become central to the academic mission of the University. To be led by scholars who would build the collections and draw from them for their and other’s teaching and scholarship, each part of the Center has added immeasurably to the quality and texture of the life of USM and the larger community. Beyond enriching the scholarly life of the University, the Center has attempted, along with the Franco-American Collection at Lewiston-Auburn College, to better integrate the experiences and challenges faced by some of Maine’s more identifiable communities into the larger fabric of Maine. It ought no longer to be possible to speak of Maine and Maine people without including the important past roles and ongoing contributions made by her African

American, Jewish, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender and Franco-American communities. Along with the Acadian Archives at the University of Maine at Fort Kent and the Wabanaki Center at the University of Maine at Orono, the Sampson Center at the University of Southern Maine—named after a courageous champion of academic freedom, women’s and minority rights—stands today at the forefront of the rich mosaic that is Maine life and society.

—Mark B. Lapping
Provost and Vice President of
Academic Affairs 1994-2000
Interim Provost and Vice President of
Academic Affairs, 2007-08



Mark B. Lapping

History of the Jean Byers Sampson Center



Susie R. Bock

*T*he 10th anniversary of the Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine is the appropriate time to honor our namesake. In April 1961, Jean Byers Sampson wrote to the director of branches of the NAACP notifying him that she was involved with establishing a branch in Lewiston-Auburn. Because Jean had worked for the national branch of the NAACP in the late 1940s, she began her letter with a friendly “Remember me?” It is a short, intimate phrase that characterized how Jean worked throughout her life. “Remember Me? The Life and Legacy of Jean Byers Sampson,” the third annual event of the Sampson Center, is a tribute to how one person’s life changed Maine.

In 1997, the University of Maine System’s Board of Trustees voted in favor of the University of Southern Maine’s proposal to unite the African American Archives, the Gay and Lesbian Archives, the Franco-American Heritage Collection at the

Lewiston-Auburn College, and a planned Jewish Archives, into a Center for Diversity in Maine. It took some time to build an administrative structure, but by the fall of 2004 there was a governance document, a steering committee had begun meeting, and by the spring they had set the Center’s mission: to collect material documenting the ongoing histories of diverse communities (current collections represent the African American, Jewish, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities) and to advocate for diversity and civil rights through research, education, and outreach.

The Sampson Center’s success has been in its programming. In 2005, the faculty scholars conceived an annual event which would combine an exhibition, with lectures, and a printed catalog based on the first two. By 2006 we made the annual event the foundation of a series of events to educate and empower students and members of

the community. Now in our 10th year and implementing our third annual event, people have come to expect not only a major Sampson Center event in the fall, but yearly programs to celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr., women's history, LGBT Pride festivals in Maine, books related to our collections or diversity in general, as well as an annual exhibition on African Americans in Maine.

The First Catalyst for Change Award

This October the Jean Byers Sampson Center will present its first Catalyst for Change Award to honor a citizen of Maine who has been a catalyst for change regarding diversity, equality, human and civil rights, particularly (but not exclusively) as it relates to the Center's collection populations. Jean Byers Sampson founded Catalyst, a program to expand employment and education opportunities for women. Naming the award "Catalyst for

Change" is another memorial to a woman who did so much for Maine. It is with great pleasure that the Sampson Center honors Rabbi Harry Z. Sky as the first recipient of the Catalyst for Change Award.

—Susie R. Bock
Director, Jean Byers Sampson Center
for Diversity in Maine
and Head, USM Special Collections



Jean photographed on her fourth birthday. June 12, 1927.
Courtesy of Stephen Sampson.

“Remember Me?” The Life and Legacy of Jean Byers Sampson

by Margaret Ann Brown with Abraham J. Peck

In the midst of a raging world war, on March 24, 1943, America’s First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, addressed Smith College students and faculty. In the audience that day was 19-year-old Jean Byers, who wrote to her parents that evening: “Mrs. Roosevelt was here today and she gave a short speech in chapel!!!”¹ It was not what Eleanor Roosevelt said that impressed the young student and made her a role model, but what she stood for. Eleanor spoke out for the admission of young Jewish refugees from Nazi Europe and against the grave injustices committed against African Americans, including social segregation and lynchings.

For Eleanor Roosevelt, and later for Jean Byers, actions counted, not words. Education meant a greater opportunity and a greater responsibility to stand up for the rights of all Americans.²

Who was Jean Byers Sampson, a woman who would champion the rights of African Americans, members of the gay community, women, and the civil liberties of millions?

A Tranquil Childhood

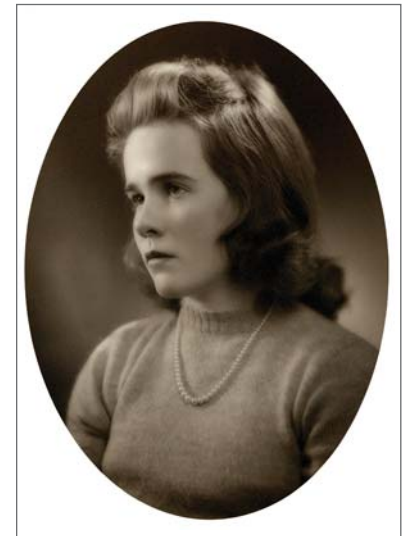
Jean Byers was born in Somerville, Massachusetts, on June 12, 1923. Her parents, Matthew Arthur and Alice Gannon Byers, provided her with a childhood of security, warmth, and

encouragement. Alert, curious, a tomboy, Jean’s favorite activities included playing outdoors and reading. Arthur, outgoing and with a playful streak, was a telegraph service manager for Bell Telephone Company. Alice, the youngest of nine children and somewhat shy, enjoyed reading and playing bridge with friends. Both parents supported Jean as she forged a personal and professional life very different from their own.³ The family attended church together until Jean was in high school, when she decided that religion did not have a place in her life.⁴

Attractive, petite, perky, and popular, she enjoyed her teenage years as a high school student in Newton, Massachusetts. She did well academically and played tennis. Jean loved to dance and also played the piano, focusing on the popular songs of the day. Years later, she would sing those songs from memory accompanied by her sons on the piano.

The Smith College Years: Fun in a Time of Turmoil

Jean Byers was the first person in her immediate family to attend college. A cousin, Sally (Sarah) Hill, 14 years Jean’s senior, was close to Jean and encouraged her to attend Smith College in Northampton. Sally was a Smith graduate and

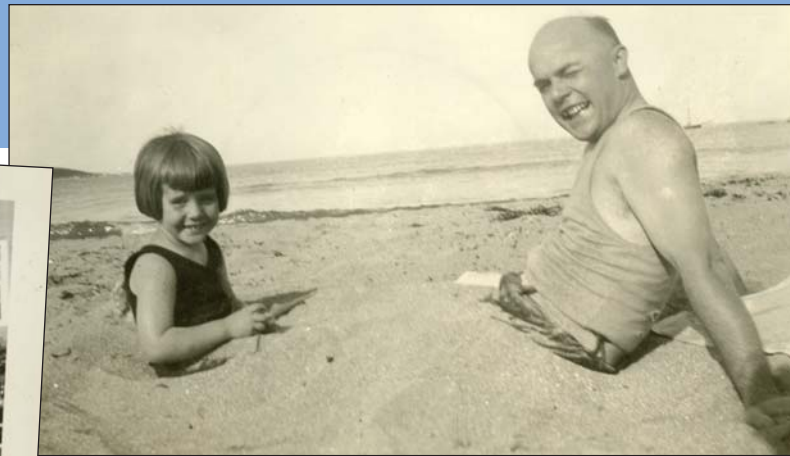


Jean shortly before her high school graduation, 1941.

Courtesy of Stephen Sampson.



Jean and her mother Alice at Jean's graduation from Smith College in 1944.
Courtesy of Stephen Sampson.



Jean and her father Arthur in a happy moment on the beach at York, Maine, August 1927.

Courtesy of Stephen Sampson.



Passport photograph of Jean and her parents before they left for England in 1928.
Courtesy of Stephen Sampson.



Jean and friend Faith Harding at Hillsboro Camp, New Hampshire, summer of 1939.
Courtesy of Stephen Sampson.

became a professor of astronomy at Wellesley College—an example for Jean of an independent woman with a successful career.⁵

Jean entered Smith in 1941. She thoroughly enjoyed her college years, choosing to concentrate her studies in history and government, making lifelong friendships, dancing, singing, hiking, and skiing. As an extracurricular activity, she read literature to a ninety-three-year-old woman, Amelia Clark, who lived in Northampton, and credited this experience with enhancing her education.⁶ During the spring of 1943, she was a proud member of a Smith troupe called the Factory Follies that performed at Westinghouse and other factories in the Springfield area. The star of the show was future First Lady Nancy Davis Reagan. Wearing short blue dresses with pink ruffles, the girls danced and sang their way across the stage. It was their way of recognizing the sacrifices workers were making for the war effort.⁷

But in the years just prior to and during World War II, Smith College was anything but a campus devoted to fun and frolic. The year that Jean entered Smith, in 1941, an older student named Bettye Goldstein was a fervent campus crusader for social justice. She would later be known as Betty Friedan, one of the founders of the American feminist movement.⁸

The atmosphere at Smith College was shaped by its president, William Allan Neilson, who led



Jean spent some of her extracurricular activity at Smith College reading literature to 93-year-old Amelia Clark. 1942.

Courtesy of Stephen Sampson.



Jean and Weesie [Louise Clarke], her closest Smith friend and later her roommate in New York City, at Smith College in 1942.

Courtesy of Stephen Sampson.

the school from 1917 to 1939. It was because of Neilson's vision that Smith "maintained leadership among American educational institutions in ignoring artificial lines of demarcation based on race, social position, wealth or place of birth."⁹

Jean's unwavering concern for social justice and civil rights, particularly for African Americans and women, developed at Smith and never wavered. Her professors nurtured Jean's independent thinking and interest in race relations.¹⁰

"A Study of the Negro in Military Service"

With a goal of eventually working at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) headquarters, Jean moved to New York City. She and her closest Smith friend, Louise Clarke, whom she called Weesie, searched diligently to find an apartment. Jean landed a job as a writer for Time Inc. in February 1945, writing for an internal publication for TimeLife employees called "FYI."¹¹

Every weekday morning, Jean would head for her office at the Time and Life Building in Rockefeller Center, and in the evening she would enjoy post-war New York. Concerts, lectures, foreign films—including Nazi propaganda films made between 1933 and 1939—she found it all exciting. She continued to correspond faithfully with her parents, and her letters spill over with

activities they could only imagine: a rally of the Harlem Citizen's Committee, a visit to a Harlem "jive" joint, President Harry Truman's motorcade whizzing by on Navy Day in October, 1945.¹²

Through a college contact, Jean met with Dr. Louis Tompkins Wright, chair of the NAACP national board of trustees.¹³ Wright arranged for Jean to meet Walter White, executive secretary of the national organization. White's daughter, Jane, was a Smith graduate and Dr. Neilson was a close friend and a member of the board of directors of the NAACP.¹⁴ White offered Jean the temporary post of "special researcher" to write a study of the Negro in military service.¹⁵ One of three white employees working on the NAACP's national staff of 61, Jean's appointment made headlines in black newspapers: "White Girl Doing Negro War Story," "NAACP Compiling TRUE STORY OF TAN YANKS."¹⁵

While writing her report, Jean gained access to the records of the various military branches and interviewed personnel from privates to generals. She did a thorough and conscientious job of researching the contributions made by African American soldiers as well as the barriers they experienced in a segregated military and nation. Her report, "A Study of the Negro in Military Service," was completed in June 1947, and strongly recommended desegregation of the armed forces.¹⁶

press in order to serve most of its readers.—The Publishers.

NAACP Compiling

TRUE STORY OF TAN YANKS

History of Our Boys to Be Listed by White Girl

By EVELYN COPPOU

NEW SEABOARD EDITION OF PITTSBURGH COURIER YORK

VOL. XXXVII—No. 8 PITTSBURGH, Pa., SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1946 PRICE TEN CENTS

FEPCC Killed in Senate

Cloture Attempt Loses by 8 Votes

MULZAC DEMANDS APOLOGY

PRESS WEEK PLANS SET

INNOCENT OF CHARGE

VICTIMS OF POLICEMAN—Spaniard 3/C Joseph Ferguson (left), who was wounded by a shot fired by Patrolman Romeka of Freepost, L. I., last week, is confined to the brig at Lido Beach Separation Center, and is expected to be court-martialed following a grand jury hearing of the case. In the center photo is Richard Ferguson (left), who is now serving a sentence of 100 days for "disorderly conduct" in the Nassau County Jail, Mineola, L. I., and (right) Pfc. Charles Ferguson, who was killed immediately when Richard discharged ITO veteran, alone was absent. At the right is Alfonso Ferguson, who was shot fatally by the rabble patrolman.

TAN GI HISTORIAN—Miss Jean Byers, 22-year-old white girl, has been commissioned by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to write a complete history of the Negro in World War II.

Broadcasts Arranged

PRESS WEEK PLANS SET

KANSAS CITY, Mo.—A radio program originating in New York

From Coast Guard

MULZAC DEMANDS APOLOGY

By LILLIAN WALCOTT

NEW YORK—At a press conference held at the National Negro Congress headquarters here in New York last Friday, Hugh N. Mulzac, captain of the Liberty ship SS Thomas T. Washington, reported that he intends to send a formal letter of protest to the U. S. Coast Guard office in Washington demanding apology for mistreatment suffered by him at the hearing in Marseille. On Nov. 22 he had been charged with stowing away a German agent aboard his ship with the intention of illegal passage to the United States.

INNOCENT OF CHARGE

"I feel that I have been innocent of the whole charge that they had against me and I

WASHINGTON—They buried the FEPCC bill here Saturday . . . The measure that would have established a Permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission was charged to death and dumped unceremoniously into a grave dug weeks ago by loud-mouthed, Hy-white Southern senators.

Like the anti-lynching and anti-poll tax bills before it, the measure for a permanent FEPCC was announced to die in the Senate death house.

Death of the FEPCC came by way of a cloakroom agreement to let debate limitation go to a vote with

NEW YORK—Realizing the need for a complete history of the Negro in World War II, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has commissioned a 22-year-old white girl, Miss Jean Byers, to write such an account.

A graduate of Smith College, where she majored in history and government, writes Miss Byers was former research assistant of Time and Life magazines. A native of Boston, she was for a brief period affiliated with the Association of Colored Graduate Nurses as a part-time research worker. She has worked in the field of history and research since her graduation from college in 1944.

TO BE BOOK LENGTH

The work was originally planned in pamphlet form but data involving Negro troops is so extensive that the history will probably be book length when completed, Miss Byers said. In compiling material for the study, she is using accounts gathered from old newspapers, from first hand information gained through discussions with Army and Navy officials and from knowledge received through conversation with many Negro servicemen. At present she is attempting to get statements from Army officers who were in charge of colored troops.

Miss Byers will include in the story detailed accounts of the Army's treatment of colored troops and the rejection of Negroes in Selective Service, special attention will be given to the activities of combat troops, she said. Research work on the history began last month.

VERY ENTHUSIASTIC

Quite personable and attractive, Miss Byers is very enthusiastic about her new assignment. For a long time she has been desirous of working with the NAACP, she said.

Headline from the Pittsburgh Courier, February 16, 1946. Courtesy of The New Pittsburgh Courier.

Although Harper Brothers considered bringing the report out as a book with an introduction by the author Richard Wright, it remained unpublished.¹⁷

Did Jean's report make a difference? Consider the following: in 1948, President Harry Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces; in 1950, the Department of Defense distributed 150 copies of Jean's work throughout its offices and loaned copies to various universities for research projects.¹⁸ The civilian assistant to the Secretary of Defense, James C. Evans, likened Jean to Harriet Beecher Stowe and felt her work could "lead toward a second and final emancipation." He stayed in touch with Jean for years after her report was made public, and in 1959 still believed her work to be the best one of its kind.¹⁹ From 1946 to 1948, Jean continued to work for the NAACP and became assistant director of public relations. She traveled and gave speeches representing the NAACP on issues dealing with segregation and civil rights.²⁰

She carried on her devotion to civil rights after she moved to Maine. In the 1950s, with a direct but respectful tone, one that would serve her well, she alerted the Lewiston Jewish community in a letter that it was improper to stage minstrel shows with performers in black face. The letter "created quite

a lot of havoc in the Jewish community, because no one had realized there was anything wrong with it, but they didn't have any more minstrel shows."²¹ In the early 1960s, she helped found the Central Maine branch of the NAACP and served as its president from 1966 to 1970.

A Family and a College

While a student at Smith, Jean Byers met her husband, Richard W. Sampson. Dick was a mathematics student at Bowdoin College. They continued to date and when Dick joined the military and Jean was in New York City, they saw each other as often as possible.

After graduating from Bowdoin, Dick Sampson studied meteorology at MIT and the University of Illinois and then received a commission in the Air Force as a meteorologist.²² On July 24, 1948, Jean and Dick were married in a small wedding at the Martha Mary Chapel in South Sudbury, Massachusetts.²³ The couple moved to Cambridge, where Dick taught high school mathematics. and Jean was hired as the executive secretary of the Friends of Framingham Reformatory for Women, a group that worked to improve the treatment of women inmates.²⁴ Their first son, Stephen, was born in 1951.

The following year, Dick was hired to teach mathematics at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. The family moved into an old, rambling farmhouse and a second son, Caleb, was born in 1953.



Jean at the annual NAACP staff conference in October 1946. Left to right: Bob Carter, Catherine Freeland, Jean, Gloster Current

Courtesy of Stephen Sampson.

Politely declining invitations to faculty wives' teas, Jean Byers Sampson found other ways to establish lifelong friendships and interests. Her involvement in Democratic politics began as a member of the Androscoggin County Democratic Women's Club.²⁵ There she met newcomer and Holocaust survivor, Judith Isaacson:

Shortly after I joined, Jean became president, and she called to ask if I would be program chairman. I said, "Well, I don't know. I have two babies and I am busy just getting acquainted." Jean said, "Oh, don't worry about it. I'll help you. I know people and together we will get the work done." I was a newcomer, Jewish, Hungarian...a minority, and so Jean helped me. She understood that I missed my country and my education and invited me to join a book club that consisted almost entirely of Bates College faculty wives. I was thrilled...

Jean was fun and brilliant and interesting and widely read, and in discussions she was never an antagonist. She was imbued with interest in education and equality of all kinds: equality of the sexes; equality of the races; equality of backgrounds—a poverty stricken family or one of wealth—she considered human beings on their own merit. She wasn't looking for a legacy as a celebration of herself, but as an influence for the future. And that continues.²⁶

Jean and Dick Sampson made good friends within the Bates community. Jean attended Bates events with Dick and admired his teaching abilities and his real interest in all aspects of his students' lives. The couple often had Bates students over to their home for dinner and invited foreign students to join the family for Thanksgiving. Dick was the faculty advisor of the Bates Outing Club, and the entire family went along on hiking and skiing trips. Dick encouraged Jean's community activism and often expressed admiration for her organizational and intellectual abilities.²⁷

The Jean Byers Sampson Legacy: Creating a Level Playing Field for the People of Maine

Lewiston businessman Shepard (Shep) Lee got to know Jean because they were both active in Democratic politics and neighbors on Labbe Avenue. His son Jonathan became best friends with Caleb Sampson and together they attended Lewiston public schools. From 1958 to 1960, Jean was co-chairman of the Maine Democratic Platform Committee, and helped organize the platform in such a way that it made a real contribution to the whole political process.²⁸

Shep Lee was also an early supporter of Maine political personality Frank Coffin, and in 1960 he chaired Coffin's gubernatorial campaign. While Jean and Dick knew Frank and Ruth Coffin



A happy Richard and Jean Sampson pose for their first photograph as a married couple, July 24, 1948.

Courtesy of Robert W. Stillwell, Taunton, MA.



Jean fishing off the stern of the family sailboat in 1972.

Courtesy of Stephen Sampson.

through their Bates College connections, their friendship grew when Jean agreed to become research director for Coffin's campaign. She acted as a coordinating force to explore campaign issues. She assembled experts on various issues to write papers for Frank, who would then incorporate them into his speeches, which, according to Coffin "had a shelf life much longer than my ill-fated campaign," one that he lost to John S. Reed.²⁹ Nearly 50 years later, Coffin, who was eventually elected to the United States Congress and became chief judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the First District, reflected that:

*It seems to me that Jean was a very unusual individual. Usually great progress in the realization of ambition and great accomplishment and high achievement is accompanied by a big ego... But Jean had all of the ambition and ability and determination and drive, but without the ego. She was able to be a profound influence for causes, but without putting herself forward. She would have wanted to see all of her enterprises succeed. They all have a common theme of creating a level playing field for people...*³⁰

Peter Cox, managing editor of the *Times Record* and founder of the *Maine Times*, and his wife Eunice also became friends, as did Paula and Louis Scolnik. He credited Jean with getting him actively involved in civil rights. Scolnik became a

civil liberties lawyer, and in 1974 was appointed as a judge of the Maine Supreme Court. With Jean, he helped found the Central Maine branch of the NAACP and acted as its legal counsel. He was also the Maine Civil Liberties Union's (MCLU) only cooperating attorney in Maine for 16 years, working on a pro bono basis:

There were three black servicemen from Bucks Harbor who were charged with criminal trespass because they were trying to go to a dance at a local high school, and they were kept out. And so they made a big ruckus. They were charged with assault and battery and a few other things. The NAACP authorized me to represent them, which I did pro bono, and Jean Sampson and Elizabeth Jonitis [also a member of the Bates College community] came up, too ... I guess it was in Calais where the court was. So we defended them successfully.³¹

In 1962, Jean teamed up with her friend and Smith College classmate, Felice N. (Ducky) Schwartz to create Catalyst, a national organization devoted to helping women create better lives.³² Five college presidents (from Lawrence, Mills, Sarah Lawrence, Smith, and Wellesley) endorsed the idea of an organization that worked to expand options for women, and met as Catalyst's first board of directors. In its early years, the organization focused on lobbying employers to

allow women to combine family and part-time work, and pioneered several job-sharing pilot projects. Ducky remained Catalyst's president for 30 years, retiring in 1993.³³

From 1962 to 1970, Jean directed a national program within Catalyst to encourage the development of training and employment opportunities in the field of teaching for female liberal arts college graduates. According to her friend, Judith Isaacson, "Catalyst was one of Jean's proudest involvements. She felt that it was extremely important."³⁴

Jean also played a role in Maine's educational programs. She served as a member of the Maine Advisory Committee on Teacher Certification, and as a member of the Maine State Board of Education.

In 1970, she developed a proposal for the Lewiston Career Opportunities Program, which was funded by the U.S. Office of Education. Its purpose was to train low-income people for positions in the public schools. She served as a counselor for the 30 program participants, working with their personal and academic development.³⁵

In 1968, Jean Byers Sampson became a charter member of the University of Maine System's board of trustees, and served as its vice-chair until 1974, when she became its first female chair.³⁶ Her tenure was marked by controversy that made national headlines. In April 1973, the Wilde-Stein

Club, the gay student group at the University of Maine at Orono, organized a highly publicized conference on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, which led a year later to the first statewide gay symposium. Rev. Herman C. Frankland of the Bangor Baptist Church fulminated against the "Sodom and Gomorrah conclave on our Maine campus." A letter-writing campaign spilled into the state legislature, threatening a \$35 million appropriation for the University of Maine System unless University trustees shut the gay symposium down. Jean presided over the board when it voted unanimously to uphold the right of gay students to hold the conference.³⁷

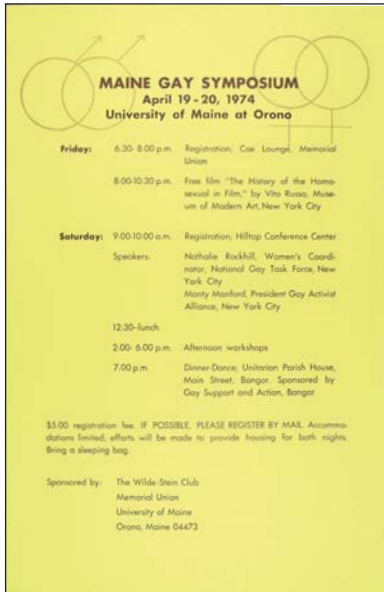
Governor James B. Longley ordered the board of trustees to resign: Jean led the resistance to the governor's pressure, and all 15 trustees stood firm. In 1975, the trustees received the American Association of University Professors' Alexander Meiklejohn Award, national recognition of their contribution to academic freedom.

Accepting the award, Jean quoted Thornton Wilder: "Every good and excellent thing stands moment by moment on the razor-edge of danger and must be fought for."³⁸

From 1977 to 1982, Jean Byers Sampson served as the executive director of the Maine Civil Liberties Union. Shep Lee recruited her to hold



Jean and Frank Coffin at New Year's Eve party, December 31, 1991.
Jean Byers Sampson Papers, Sampson Center.



Poster for the controversial Maine Gay Symposium held by students at the University of Maine and supported by the University of Maine System Board of Trustees and its chair, Jean Byers Sampson. Sturgis Haskins Papers, LGBT Collection, Sampson Center.

the office together for a brief period after the newly hired executive director resigned just one day into the job:

She ended up staying for five years, and she put MCLU on the map. I was always amazed at how she was able to get “establishment people” involved in doing something good for civil liberties. She could call a sheriff or the sheriff’s department and talk about a person whose civil liberties had been violated. She was so credible, acceptable, reasonable, and intelligent; she didn’t turn people off in the way that many civil libertarians could. She would never demand. She solved a lot of problems that didn’t then need to go to the courts by the force of her personality and the way she would present things.

*Jean represented the best in what a human being could be. She was a believer in civil rights without any personal gain in what she did.*³⁹

In 1972, Bowdoin College began admitting women. For 18 years, Jean helped guide the school in its efforts to become a truly coed institution, serving as both an overseer and trustee. She chaired the academic affairs committee and recommended Judith Isaacson, who was the first woman dean of students at Bates and had received her master’s degree in mathematics from Bowdoin, for a position on the board of Bowdoin overseers. Together with a handful of other exceptional

women trustees and overseers, they spoke for the full integration of women at Bowdoin.⁴⁰

During Bowdoin’s 1995 Commencement, Jean Byers Sampson was awarded an honorary doctorate. In presenting Jean with the award, Professor Daniel Levine spoke about sailing with the Sampsons on Penobscot Bay, with Jean sitting on the stern deck, patiently fishing for tinker mackerel. By the time they reached Rockport, they had enough for an entire fish dinner. He cited this as an example of Jean’s ability to listen quietly, patiently fishing for a resolution on a contentious problem.⁴¹

From 1983 through the mid-’90s, Jean was a mediator for the Maine Court Mediation Service. Now regarded as a necessary adjunct to the court system, mediation is a way of getting equitable results without overburdening the Maine courts.⁴² In 1985, Jean was honored for her work with the Maine Court Mediation Distinguished Service Award.

Family and friends continued to enrich Jean and Dick’s lives. For years, their best friends would gather at their home for an annual Christmas party. Louis Scolnik would play his saxophone, Jean would sing, and everyone would dance.⁴³ In 1986, Stephen Sampson married Elisa Wike Hurley. Jean and Dick, as proud grandparents, enjoyed their grandchildren, Annika Dorothea and Ian Byers Sampson.

Soon after Caleb married Kathy Hickey in October 1995, Jean visited her friends and tranquilly informed them of her terminal pancreatic cancer. Throughout her illness, she enjoyed each day and gathered her strength for events with friends and family.⁴⁴ Jean was never to know Caleb's son, Oliver.

Jean Byers Sampson died on November 4, 1996, after weeks of pain that she endured with calmness and courage. She still managed to vote by absentee ballot shortly before her death.⁴⁵

If we could imagine Jean's response to the tenth anniversary of the Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity, it would be to ask us not to celebrate her life, but rather to seek justice and fairness in the world with hope, courage, and resolve. Her son Stephen spoke for his mother:

She would have wanted the Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity to promote and to appreciate diversity, to recognize the importance of protecting the rights of individuals regardless of race, religion or sexual orientation, to provide a forum for the exchange of these ideals, and to encourage others to become active as she was to correct injustice when they see it: to recognize it; to act on it; to appreciate and to use the archives towards these goals.⁴⁶

In remembering the extraordinary life of Jean Byers Sampson on the tenth anniversary of the

founding of the Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine, we hope we have answered the question she posed in a 1961 letter to her former NAACP co-worker, Gloster Current: "Remember me?"⁴⁷ Through the work of the center that bears her name, the life and legacy of Jean Byers Sampson will not soon be forgotten.

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Shep Lee and Jean (with unidentified friend) at party in July 1979.

Jean Byers Sampson Papers, Sampson Center.



Jean and Louis Scolnik at a 1981 Christmas party.

Jean Byers Sampson Papers, Sampson Center.

Notes:

1. Letter from Jean Byers to her parents, 3/24/43, addition to Jean Byers Sampson papers, 2007, Sampson Center for Diversity at USM.
2. For an excellent discussion of Eleanor Roosevelt as a reform leader, see Gary Wills, *Certain Trumpets: The Nature of Leadership* (New York, 1994) 55-62.
3. Stephen Sampson, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 6/9/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
4. Richard Sampson, interviewed by Meredith Gethin-Jones and Marisa Burnham-Bestor, 2/14/1999. (Muskie Oral History Project)
5. Stephen Sampson, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 6/9/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
6. Richard Sampson, interviewed by Meredith Gethin-Jones and Marisa Burnham-Bestor, 2/14/1999. (Muskie Oral History Project)
7. Letter from Jean Byers to her parents, March-April, 1943, addition to Jean Byers Sampson papers, 2007, Sampson Center for Diversity at USM
8. On Betty Friedan's time at Smith College see Judith Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life* (New York, 1999) and Rafael Medoff, "Betty Friedan and the Holocaust," www.wymaninstitute.org/articles/2006-2-betty-friedan.php.
9. Quoted in Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (Athens, Georgia, 1995) 337. For more on the life of William Allan Nielson see Peter Rose, "Citizen of the World," in *SAQ Online*, Spring 2002.
10. Yet Smith maintained an 8 percent quota for Jews until the late 1940s, Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 21. And in 1913, a controversy erupted at Smith when the school accepted a young African American woman, without knowing that she was black, and put her in a room with a white woman from Tennessee. The roommate complained and Smith barred the black woman, Carrie Lee, from its housing. The only way she could enter College-certified boarding houses was as a servant who entered through the back door. Julia Caverno, Smith College professor of Greek, took Lee into her own home as she had taken in other Black students over the years, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater. Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (Amherst, Mass., 1993) 155.
11. Letter from Jean Byers to her parents, 2/21/45, addition to Jean Byers Sampson papers
12. Letter from Jean Byers to her parents, 11/1/45, addition to Jean Byers Sampson papers
13. Letter from Jean Byers to her parents, 10/45, addition to Jean Byers Sampson papers
14. White, *A Man Called White. The Autobiography of Walter White*, 337.
14. Letter from Walter White to Jean Byers, 12/4/45, Box 7, folder 63.
15. "White Girl Doing Negro War Story", *New York Amsterdam News*, 2/23/46, Box 8, folder 76; "True Story of Tan Yanks", *New York Seaboard Edition of the Pittsburgh Courier*, 2/16/46, Box 8, folder 70.

16. Jean Byers, *A Study of the Negro in Military Service*, Reproduced [by the Department of Defense], 1/1950, Box 8, folder 70.
17. Letter from Jean Byers to her parents, 7/20/45, addition to Jean Byers Sampson papers
18. Letter from office of the Secretary of Defense to Jean Byers Sampson, 2/2/50, box 7, folder 63.
19. Letter from office of the Secretary of Defense to Jean Byers Sampson, 2/12/59, box 7, folder 63.
20. Letter from Jean Byers Sampson to her parents, Feb.-April, 1948, addition to Jean Byers Sampson papers.
21. Quoted in Charles L. Lumpkins, "Civil Rights Activism in Maine from the 1940s to 1971: Black Mainers, Black and White Activists, and the Resistance Against Racism." MA thesis, University of Maine, 1992, 14.
22. Richard Sampson, interviewed by Meredith Gethin-Jones and Marisa Burnham-Bestor, 2/14/1999. (Muskie Oral History Project)
23. Pictures of Sampson wedding in blue scrapbook, 1948, courtesy of Stephen Sampson.
24. Jean Byers Sampson résumé, Box 9, folder 80.
25. Frank and Ruth Coffin, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 6/9/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
26. Judith Isaacson, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 7/20/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
27. Stephen Sampson transcript, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 6/9/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
28. Shepard Lee, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 7/7/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
29. Richard Sampson, interviewed by Meredith Gethin-Jones and Marisa Burnham-Bestor, 2/14/1999. (Muskie Oral History Project)
30. Frank and Ruth Coffin, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 6/9/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
31. Louis Scolnik, interviewed by Marisa Burnham-Bestor, 3/05/1999. (Muskie Oral History Project)
32. Ducky had founded the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students in 1945, and Jean was one of the incorporators. The organization lobbied colleges and universities to open their doors to minorities and provided financial aid for college-bound African American students. Letter from Jean Byers to her parents, 7/20/47, addition to Jean Byers Sampson papers
33. See Web site: www.eternallflame.com/schwartz.htm article by Enid Nemy
34. Judith Isaacson, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 7/20/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
35. Jean Byers Sampson resume, Box 9, folder 80.
36. Jean Byers Sampson resume, Box 9, folder 80.
37. See Howard Solomon, "Coming Out, Going In: Spirituality and Religion in Maine's LGBT Communities," *Liberating Visions: Religion and the Challenge of Change in Maine, 1820 to the Present* (Sampson Center for Diversity, University of Southern Maine, 2006) 29-37.

38. From University of Southern Maine President Richard L. Pattenaude's Commencement speech, 5/10/97, Box 11, folder 102.
39. Shepard Lee, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 7/7/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
40. Judith Isaacson, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 7/20/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
41. From speech by Professor Daniel Levine, Bowdoin College Commencement, 1995. Courtesy Stephen Sampson.
42. Frank and Ruth Coffin, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 6/9/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
43. Frank and Ruth Coffin, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 6/9/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
44. Frank and Ruth Coffin, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 6/9/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
45. Frank and Ruth Coffin, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 6/9/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
46. Stephen Sampson, interviewed by Margaret Ann Brown, 6/9/2007. (Jean Byers Sampson Tenth Anniversary Project)
47. Jean Byers Sampson to Gloster Current, 4/25/61, NAACP Branch Files, Arp III, Box C55, Folder, Central Maine Branch, 1961, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

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