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## **Finding aid of the Johnnie Phelps Papers and Memorabilia**

Lilly Insalata

ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives

909 West Adams Boulevard

Los Angeles, California 90007

Phone: (213) 741-0094

Fax: (213) 741-0220

Email: [askone@onearchives.org](mailto:askone@onearchives.org)

URL: <http://www.onearchives.org>

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## Finding aid of the Johnnie Phelps Papers and Memorabilia

### Collection number: Coll2008-068

ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives  
Los Angeles, California

Processed by:

Lilly Insalata

Date Completed:

December 4, 2008

Encoded by:

Loni Shibuyama

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### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia

**Dates:** 1943-1999

**Bulk Dates:** 1975-1998

**Collection number:** Coll2008-068

**Creator:** Phelps, Nell Johnnie, 1922-1997

**Collection Size:** 2 archive cartons + 3 flat archive cartons + 1 oversize envelope + 1 map drawer. 7.1 linear feet.

**Repository:** ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

Los Angeles, California 90007

**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.

**Languages:** Languages represented in the collection: English

### Access

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

### Publication Rights

Researchers wishing to publish materials must obtain permission in writing from ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives as the physical owner. Researchers must also obtain clearance from the holder(s) of any copyrights in the materials. Note that ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives can grant copyright clearance only for those materials for which we hold the copyright. It is the responsibility of the researcher to obtain copyright clearance for all other materials directly from the copyright holder(s).

### Preferred Citation

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

### Acquisition Information

Gift of Grace Bukowski, date unknown.

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### **Processing Information**

Collection processed by Lilly Insalata, December 4, 2008.

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### **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 of Collection**

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.

### **Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

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

### **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.

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<p>Box: 1 : 1 - 18 ; 2 : 1 - 13 ; 6 (oversize envelope) ; Drawer 8.5 (map case)</p>	<p>Series 1. <b>Personal Papers 1958-1999</b></p> <p><b>Physical Description:</b> 2 linear feet + 1 map drawer.</p> <p><b>Series Scope and Content</b></p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Box: 1 : 1 Box: 1 : 2 - 4 Box: 1 : 2 Box: 1 : 3 Box: 1 : 4</p> <p>Box: 1 : 5 Box: 1 : 6 - 7 ; 6 (oversize envelope) Box: 1 : 6 Oversize Envelope 6 Oversize Envelope 6 Oversize Envelope 6 Oversize Envelope 6 Box: 1 : 7</p> <p>Box: 1 : 8 - 9 Box: 1 : 8 Box: 1 : 9 Box: 1 : 10 Box: 1 : 11 - 13 Box: 1 : 11 - 12</p>	<p><b>Articles about Johnnie Phelps 1980 - 1993</b></p> <p><b>Johnnie Phelps' death 1998</b></p> <p><b>Correspondence - Sympathy notes about Johnnie Phelps to Grace Bukowski 1998</b></p> <p><b>Memorial tributes for Johnnie Phelps 1998</b></p> <p><b>The Senate California Legislature. Memorial Resolution for Johnnie Phelps by the Honorable Hilda L. Solis March 20, 1998</b></p> <p><b>ApolloMedia Corporation Release of <i>Conduct Unbecoming</i> on CDRom 1994</b></p> <p><b>Awards, certificates and commendations 1975 - 1996</b></p> <p><b>General 1976 - 1989</b></p> <p><b>Alice Paul Certificate of Feminist Achievement 1981</b></p> <p><b>Baltimore County Department of Health Bureau of Mental Health, Communications Skills Training Workshop 1975</b></p> <p><b>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</b></p> <p><b>County of Los Angeles Commendation N. Johnnie Phelps, Los Angeles County Veterans' Advisory Commission 1996</b></p> <p><b>Veterans for Human Rights. 1st Annual Sgt. Johnnie Phelps Dinner and Awards November 11, 1993</b></p> <p><b>Alcoholism Center for Women 1987 - 1992</b></p> <p><b>General 1987 - 1992</b></p> <p><b>Board list 1989</b></p> <p><b>Before Stonewall press material 1987</b></p> <p><b>Correspondence 1982 - 1997</b></p> <p><b>General 1982 - 1997</b></p> <p><b>Physical Description:</b> 2 folders.</p> <p><b>Torres, Esteban E. (Rep.) 1989 - 1998</b></p> <p><b>Guestbook 1982 - 1998</b></p> <p><b>k.d. lang Ingénue Tour program 1992</b></p> <p><b>[Los Angeles County] Veterans' Advisory Commission 1991 - 1998</b></p> <p><b>Memorial service programs 1986 - 1997</b></p> <p><b>Name tags 1979 - 1997</b></p> <p><b>Name tags and button - Grace Bukowski 1980 - 1981</b></p> <p><b>Name tags and business card - Johnnie Phelps circa 1979 - 1997</b></p> <p><b>National Organization for Women 1980 - 1983</b></p> <p><b>General 1981 - 1983</b></p> <p><b>Training manuals 1980 - 1982</b></p> <p><b>Newsletters 1988 - 1999</b></p> <p><b>Norton Sound Eight 1980 - 1994</b></p> <p><b>General 1980 - 1994</b></p> <p><b>Clippings 1980</b></p> <p><b>One Hundred and One Famous Poems, An Anthology , by Roy J. Cook 1958</b></p> <p><b>Personal 1997</b></p>
<p>Box: 1 : 13 Box: 2 : 12 Box: 1 : 14 Box: 1 : 15 Box: 1 : 16 Box: 1 : 17 - 18 Box: 1 : 17 Box: 1 : 18 Box: 2 : 1 - 2 Box: 2 : 1 Box: 2 : 2 Box: 2 : 3 Box: 2 : 4 - 5 Box: 2 : 4 Box: 2 : 5 Box: 2 : 13 Box: 2 : 6</p>	<p><b>General 1982 - 1997</b></p>

- Box: 2 : 7                   **Phelps for Treasurer flyer Date unknown**  
Box: 2 : 8                   **Photographs circa 1980 - 1998**  
Box: 2 : 8                   **Johnnie Phelps Date unknown**  
                                  **Physical Description:** 1 photograph : col.
- Box: 2 : 8                   **Johnnie Phelps' grave circa 1998**  
                                  **Physical Description:** 1 photograph : col.
- Box: 2 : 8                   **1993 SCWU Awards Banquet 1993**  
                                  **Physical Description:** 2 photographs : col.
- Box: 2 : 8                   **Unidentified man Date unknown**  
                                  **Physical Description:** 1 photograph : b&w.
- Box: 2 : 8                   **Unidentified boy Date unknown**  
                                  **Physical Description:** 1 photograph : col.
- Oversize Envelope       **A Short Course in Human Relations Date unknown**  
6  
Box: 2 : 9 ; Drawer       **Southern California Women for Understanding 1979 - 1993**  
8.5 (Map Case)  
Box: 2 : 9                   **General 1979 - 1993**  
Map Case: Drawer       **Poster April 17, 1993**  
8.5  
Oversize Envelope       **The Sweetheart of the Year Award 1978**  
6  
Box: 2 : 10 - 11           **Clippings 1985 - 1994**  
                                  **Physical Description:** 2 folders.
- Box: 3 : 1 - 16 ; 4 :       Series 2. **Memorabilia and Textiles 1943-1995**  
1 - 10 ; 5 : 1 - 4       **Physical Description:** 3.9 linear feet.  
                                  **Series Scope and Content**  
                                  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 3 : 1 - 2               **50th Anniversary of World War II 1989**  
                                  **Physical Description:** 2 medals.
- Box 3 : 3                   **50th Leyte Landing Anniversary 1994**  
                                  **Physical Description:** 1 key chain.
- Box 3 : 4                   **AA 31 Years; The Best of Everything is Getting Well Date unknown**  
                                  **Physical Description:** 1 key chain.
- Box 5 : 1 - 3               **Awards and trophies 1986 - 1993**  
Box 5 : 1                   **Alcoholism Center for Women plaque 1986 - 1989**  
Box 5 : 2                   **Johnnie Phelps - Veteran for Human Rights circa 1993**  
Box 5 : 3                   **Southern California Women for Understanding and the San Gabriel Valley Chapter  
Community Service Award April 17, 1993**
- Box 3 : 5 - 6 ; 4 : 1       **Equal Rights Amendment and the National Organization for Women 1979 - 1982**  
- 5

Box 4 : 1	<b>California NOW 79 1979</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 1 yellow cloth with blue text.
Box 3 : 5	<b>79 National N.O.W. Conference; Johnnie Phelps, CA October 1979</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 1 name tag with attached ribbon.
Box 4 : 2	<b>National ERA March '80 (sash); California NOW (cloth); ERA YES (buttons) 1980 - 1982</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 1 yellow sash with attached yellow cloth and 4 buttons.
Box 4 : 3	<b>California ERA Chicago March (cloth); I Was There! National ERA March Chicago, Illinois (button) May 10, 1980</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 1 yellow cloth with 1 green button attached.
Box 4 : 4	<b>California NOW circa 1980 - 1982</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 1 yellow cloth with blue text.
Box 4 : 5	<b>California NOW (cloth); Jane Wells-Schooley (button); Timmer, NOW Indianapolis 1982 (button); Go Foat (button); Webb Secretary (button) 1982</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 1 yellow cloth with 4 buttons attached.
Box 3 : 6	<b>ERA Date unknown</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 1 pin.
Box 3 : 7	<b>Gay, Lesbian &amp; Bisexual Veterans of America circa 1995</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 1 pin.
Box 3 : 8	<b>Ink stamps Date unknown</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 4 stamps.
Box 3 : 9 ; 4 : 6 - 9	<b>Military uniform circa 1943 - 1945</b>
Box 4 : 6	<b>Belt circa 1943 - 1945</b>
Box 3 : 9	<b>Buttons circa 1943 - 1945</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 4 gold buttons.
Box 4 : 7	<b>Garrison cap circa 1943 - 1945</b>
Box 4 : 8	<b>Necktie circa 1943 - 1945</b>
Box 4 : 9	<b>Patches circa 1943 - 1945</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 2 patches.
Box 3 : 10	<b>Pocket watch with engraving of the Statue of Liberty Date unknown</b>
Box 3 : 11	<b>Purple Heart medal circa 1945</b>
Box 3 : 12	<b>Red, white and blue ribbon Date unknown</b>
Box 3 : 13	<b>Ronald Reagan coin 1989</b>
Box 3 : 14	<b>Rosary prayer ring Date unknown</b>
Box 4 : 10	<b>United States flag circa 1998</b>
Box 3 : 15	<b>VFHR; 11 Nov 1993 November 11, 1993</b> <b>Physical Description:</b> 1 silver chain with pendant.
Box 3 : 16	<b>Wallace Silversmiths shoehorn Date unknown</b>
Box 5 : 4	<b>Wood engraving: "Johnnie Phelps" Date unknown</b>