Finding Aid to the Brownie Mary Collection, 1981-2001, SFH 379

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2019
Title: Brownie Mary Collection

Date (inclusive): 1981-2001

Collection Identifier: SFH 379

Creator: Rathbun, Mary (Mary Jane), 1922-1999

Physical Description: 3 boxes, 2 oversized flat boxes, 1 framed art piece (2.1 cubic feet)

Contributing Institution: San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library

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Abstract: Contains news clippings, flyers, and brochures about Rathbun, the cannabis brownies she served to people with AIDS and other serious illnesses, and the medical marijuana legalization movement; awards, some photographs, and items including her signature vest.

Physical Location: The collection is stored on site.

Language of Materials: Collection materials are in English.

Access

The collection is available for use during San Francisco History Center hours, with photographs available during Photo Desk hours. Collections that are stored off site should be requested 48 hours in advance.

Publication Rights

All requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the City Archivist. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the San Francisco Public Library as the owner of the physical items.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Brownie Mary Collection (SFH 379), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Custodial History

Collection received in 3 accessions, from 2000 to 2001. Bulk of collection was collected by Mary Rathbun, turned over to Beth Moore, and donated by Karen Masonheimer. Shirt and vest, framed proclamation, oversized photograph, and carved wooden keepsake box with trinkets donated by Larry W. Bittner as executor of the estate of Mary Rathbun. Charcoal portrait and stuffed bear donated by Beverly Baber.

Biographical Note

Mary Jane Rathbun, popularly known as Brownie Mary, was a medical marijuana activist. Born in 1922, she arrived in San Francisco from Minnesota in the late 1940s. She was briefly married and had a daughter who died in a vehicle accident in 1974. She worked as a waitress and began a side cottage business of selling cannabis brownies, baking them in her kitchen, posting flyers for "magically delicious...original recipe brownies," and selling them from a basket in her Castro neighborhood. Rathbun was described as grandmotherly, and she wore a marijuana-themed vest and pendant. With no grandchildren of her own, she called the patients with AIDS that she befriended her "adopted kids." She was twice arrested in San Francisco for possession, receiving community service. This led to volunteering with the Shanti Project, launching her career as an AIDS activist. She volunteered with and delivered her special brownies to San Francisco General Hospital's Ward 86, the AIDS outpatient clinic. Rathbun was arrested a third time in Sonoma County in 1992; the charges were dropped.


Scope and Contents

Collection has news clippings, flyers, and brochures about Rathbun, her cannabis brownies, and the medical marijuana legalization movement; awards, some photographs, and items including her signature vest. A copy of her cookbook and some handwritten cookie recipes are included; the brownie recipe is not included. Records of the San Francisco Cannabis Buyers Club are not included.

Materials Transferred

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**Arrangement**
Organized alphabetically.

**Processed by**
Tami J. Suzuki

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**
Rathbun, Mary (Mary Jane), 1922-1999 -- Archives
Cooking (Marijuana)
Marijuana -- Law and Legislation -- California
Marijuana -- Law and Legislation-- California -- San Francisco
Marijuana -- Therapeutic use -- Recipes

**Files, 1981-2000**

**Scope and Contents**
Newspaper articles, brochures, flyers, recipes, and some correspondence documenting Rathbun's work as a medical marijuana activist.

- Box 1, Folder 1
- Box 1, Folder 2
- OV-flat-box 5, Folder 1
- Box 1, Folder 3
- Box 3
- Box 4
- Box 1, Folder 4, OV-flat-box 5, Folder 1
- Box 1, Folder 5
- Box 1, Folder 6, OV-flat-box 5, Folder 1
- Box 1, Folder 7
- Box 1, Folder 8, Oversize-box 5, Folder 1
- Box 1, Folder 9
- Box 1, Folder 10
- Box 1, Folders 11-12
- OV-flat-box 5, Folder 1
- Box 2, Folder 13
- Box 1, Folder 14
- Box 1, Folder 15
- Box 2, Folder 1
- Box 2, Folder 2, OV-flat-box 5, Folder 1
- Box 2, Folder 3

**Arrest in San Francisco, 1981**
**Arrest and Case in Sonoma County, 1992**

**Awards, 1990-1995**
- Mayoral Proclamation, 1999
- San Francisco General Hospital, Ward 86 Volunteer of the Year Plaque, 1986

**Biographical Articles, 1993-1999**

**Biographical: Memorial Service, May 2, 1999**
*Brownie Mary's Marijuana Cookbook and Dennis Peron's Recipe for Social Change, 1996*

**Correspondence, 1992-1995**
**Fundraising, 1993-1996**

**Magical Brownie Flyers, 1981**

**Manuscript, "This Little Old Lady Bullshit,，“ undated**

**Marijuana March Poster, 1984**

**Medical Marijuana**
- Articles, 1992-2000
- *Project CODA Video, 2001*

**Moore, Beth, 1999-2000**

**Biographical/Historical note**
Beth Moore was one of Rathbun's "adopted kids." The cremains of both women were released into the Gulf of Mexico upon Moore's passing in 2000.

**News Clippings and Brochures**
- AIDS, 1992-1996
Box 2, Folder 4  
**War on Drugs, 1993-1996**  
**Objects, [1981?-2001?]**  

**Scope and Contents**  
Items mostly belonging to Mary Rathbun. Some have a marijuana theme. Included is Mary's signature shirt and vest, as well as a volunteer award from San Francisco General Hospital's Ward 86. A marijuana pendant is among objects in a box with a marijuana leaf carved into the top.

Box 2, Folder 5  
Box 2, Folder 6  
Box 4  
Frame SFA-0669  
**Cannabis Club Identification Cards of Karen Masonheimer, [199-?-2001?]**

Box 4  
**Paper Marijuana Art, no date**  
**Cap, undated**  

**Framed Drawing of Brownie Mary, 1996**  
Dimensions: 18"x23" art work in 24"x19" frame.  

**Scope and Contents**  
Color charcoal portrait by Harrington.

OV-flat-box 6  
**Free Brownie Mary T-shirt, [1981?]**  
**Keepsake Box with Trinkets, undated**  

**Scope and Contents**  
Brownie Mary Name Pin, AIDS Ribbon Pin, $.28 in change, 8 seashells, and marijuana leaf pendant.

OV-flat-box 6  
**Shirt and Vest,**  

**Scope and Contents**  
Vest is adorned with embroidered “Brownie Mary” name and marijuana leaves, and marijuana-themed pins. Another pin is in one of the vest pockets.  

**Materials Transferred**  
A small baggie of M&M candies was removed from a pocket.

Box 4  
Box 4  
Box 2, Folders 7-9, OV-flat-box 5, Folder 2  
**Stuffed Bear with Medical Marijuana March Button, 2000**  
**Volunteer Plaque, SF General Hospital Ward 86, 1986**  
**Photographs, undated**  

**Scope and Contents**  
Color snapshots and one black-and-white image (of Rathbun with a plate of brownies). Subjects include Rathbun, Dennis Peron, and Karen Moore.  

**Technical Requirements**  
Some photos were digitized in various formats and saved on a compact disc (CD). Images were printed from the CD for access.