

## Rosemary Seymour - Links and Legacies

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### Preamble

The dedication of my doctoral thesis *For and About Women: Women's Studies in New Zealand Universities 1973-1990*<sup>1</sup>, is to the founder of the New Zealand *Women's Studies Journal* and of the New Zealand Women's Studies Association. It reads:

*To Rosemary Seymour (1919-1984)*  
*Pioneer and Visionary.*

This is because Rosemary Seymour has influenced my life and its direction in many ways. Neither of us could have imagined at the time of our first meeting in 1982 just how our respective pathways would become intertwined. Back then, she was a senior lecturer in Sociology at the University of Waikato and I was a postgraduate student seeking access to her Women's Studies Resource Room. It was with some trepidation on my part as Rosemary had a reputation within the Social Sciences as a woman with a quirky and slightly eccentric disposition. Later, I would realise that as the only senior woman in the faculty, she often received unfair criticism and that the brusqueness was a type of defence. Rosemary Seymour lived up to her reputation at our first meeting. I received a short sharp lecture on how books and articles in her Resource Room had gone missing. I was not even a Sociology student. I was though, I told her, a feminist educational historian, indeed, working part-time organizing the Education Department Archives one-floor below. I was interested in her collection of papers. I added that I was also the new tutor in Women's Studies. That seemed to change things. I was permitted to use the Resource Room in order to locate material that could be used in tutorials but was left in no doubt that this access was an extraordinary privilege.

Perhaps more than most, I came to appreciate Rosemary's efforts to collect every conceivable article, monograph, research paper and the like that had women as its prime focus. She had started the collection prior to feminist literature being available in New Zealand. At the time of her death in 1984, her collection filled her office, a resource room, a workroom (all within the Sociology Department), half her town house, her study at her bush-retreat and most of her car. I know this because prior to her death she asked if I would ensure that the Rosemary Seymour Collection plus about 3,000 books be preserved and made accessible for researchers.

Through the generosity of her son, Dr Bill Sewell, funding was made available to collate and catalogue the collection. It took months. The Rosemary Seymour Archives are now housed at the University of Waikato Library and the books, with a dedicated nameplate, are available to students as part of the wider Library collection.

I read a great deal of Rosemary Seymour's papers as I sorted and packed. It became clear to me, almost as if she was guiding me towards the realisation that the collection not only docu-

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<sup>1</sup> Morris Matthews, Kay (1993) *For and About Women: Women's Studies in New Zealand Universities 1973-1990*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis in Education, University of Waikato.

mented Rosemary Seymour's unique life and her professional activities, but also the formative stages of a new field of university study. Here were stories associated with the struggle to establish feminist scholarship in New Zealand universities; a coming to terms with a range of newly emergent issues and the resulting debates between feminists inside and outside the university. My academic background alerted me to the importance of these events in the history of an emerging academic discipline. It was in this way that I knew that I would write my doctoral thesis on the development of Women's Studies in New Zealand Universities between 1973 and 1990. This train of events led to my appointment as a junior and then full lecturer in Women's Studies at the University of Waikato, and later, to my leading the Women's Studies programme at Victoria University of Wellington.

Professionally then, I have much to thank Rosemary for. However, there is another very special part of my life linked to hers. At home in Bretton Terrace, Hamilton, Rosemary enjoyed the company of her neighbours, Shirley and Peter Penfold. They talked politics over glasses of wine and were good listeners on a number of university issues over twenty years. I met them whilst packing Rosemary's papers. Again, I could not have known how this meeting with them and, at about the same time, with Bill Sewell, would impact on my life. This is because they encouraged me to go to Rosemary's bush retreat on the Coromandel for a weekend. I did this in late 1985. From the minute I first arrived I did not want to leave. Twenty-four years later, I look up from my writing and I still do not. Perhaps a spring flood and a high tide will combine to block the only road back to civilization? This is because, in 1989, Bill Sewell sold some of Rosemary's Opoutere property to the Penfolds and to the Morris Matthews. We built houses either side of 'Rosemary's place' where the guava trees she planted in the bush thrive. We often raise our glasses and toast Rosemary. We *know* she is there.

## Family and Schooling

Rosemary Yolande Levinge Seymour was born in Gisborne on the 16 June 1919, the youngest child of Mabel and Walter Seymour of 'Kohata' station at Whangara, inland from Gisborne. Rosemary's mother, Mabel Mardan, was from Matamata and she had married Walter in 1910. Walter was the second son of Charles Seymour and Caroline Levinge Seymour.<sup>2</sup> In 1875, the Seymour family had purchased the lease of 21,450 acres at Whangara and in 1881, Charles and Caroline moved from South Australia to live and farm there.<sup>3</sup> Rosemary's father, Walter, along with his three siblings, were raised at 'Kohata' where:

The property lay on the main coast track.... It was situated between the Pakarae and Waimoko Rivers, which could only be crossed when the tide was right.... The Whangara homestead became a haven for people waiting to cross the rivers and being of a most hospitable nature Caroline and Charles added a great long dining room to the cottage so that there would always be room for casual guests.<sup>4</sup>

2 According to Miriam MacGregor (1973) both Caroline and Charles had been born and raised in Athlone in Ireland. Charles had immigrated to Australia in 1841 where his lawyer father had acquired Mount Benson, a substantial property near Robe in South Australia. He returned to Athlone in the 1870s to marry Caroline, who he had known in his youth. They returned to Mount Benson.

3 The land was Ngati Porou tribal land confiscated by the Government. There were twelve substantial blocks of land, in all, that were leased to Pakeha farmers. (MacKay, Joseph (1949) *Historic Poverty Bay East Coast*, Poverty Bay East Coast Centennial Committee.) Not surprisingly, Ngati Porou were keen to have the land returned and challenged bids to freehold blocks. The Seymour family eventually sold their Australian property at Mount Benson and Charles began to freehold the Whangara land. However, under a new Land Act, Charles Seymour's freeholding transaction was declared null and void. It was only after Charles took his case to the Privy Council in England for a second time, that he was finally awarded 5000 acres freehold of his choice from the original property. Miriam MacGregor (1973) 'Caroline Seymour' (1846—1907) *Petticoat Pioneers: New Zealand Women of the Colonial Era*, Book One. Pp170-172.

4 Miriam MacGregor (1973) p. 172.



Rosemary Seymour (left) with her sister Jane. (Seymour Family Collection)

Walter was sent to school at Wanganui Collegiate and returned to work and eventually manage the East Coast farm. It was into this setting that he and Mabel raised their family of four children.<sup>5</sup>

With her brother and two sisters, Rosemary Seymour grew up in privileged circumstances; the large country house at Whangara, a town house in Gisborne, horses to ride, animals galore and nearby beaches as a playground. However, from the start Rosemary resisted the expectations for girls of the 1920s as illustrated in the family story that “at Christmas, she would weep tears of frustration at getting a doll instead of a Meccano set.”<sup>6</sup> Rosemary attended the local Whangara Household (Primary) School and at age thirteen, was sent, with her sister Jane, to Woodford House, an Anglican boarding school in Havelock North.<sup>7</sup>

By all accounts, Rosemary enjoyed her years at Woodford and was later to mention the influence of two women in particular. A favourite teacher was Gerda Bell, who, having gained a PhD in Germany in 1928, needed to leave a worsening political situation there. She answered the Woodford House advertisement for a German language teacher, not holding out much hope that she would be appointed, given strong anti-Germanic attitudes of the time. However, she and a number of other German women scholars were fortunate that Miss Holland, the Woodford

5 *New Zealand Biographies* (1960) ‘Walter Kohata Seymour’, Volume 2. p.86. The National Library of New Zealand.

6 Bill Sewell (1997) *from* ‘Replication’, Unpublished. A Meccano set would have been regarded as an appropriate gift for her brother, consisting of coloured metal rods and bolts for constructing model bridges, vehicles etc.

7 Bill Sewell, 1 August 2002; see also Sewell, Bill (1997) *from* “Replication” (unpublished); Mary Varnham (1994) *Beyond the Blue Hills- One Hundred Years of Woodford House*. Hawke’s Bay: Woodford House. P.254



Rosemary Seymour as Gisborne debutante, circa 1948. (Seymour Family Collection)

Principal, was warmly disposed to their plight and supported their applications.<sup>8</sup> Gerda Bell made a strong impression on the young Rosemary Seymour. She was a highly educated woman who taught languages but also a lot about the world, including international relations and human rights. Later, Gerda was to be a referee for Rosemary but by this time Gerda had gained a lectureship and then a Senior Lectureship in German at Victoria University of Wellington. The two women corresponded for nearly forty years and letters suggest that Rosemary would often visit Gerda in Wellington.<sup>9</sup>

The other woman of significance to Rosemary during her Woodford years was the Principal, Miss Mary Holland or 'Holly', as she was affectionately known. Rosemary and other former pupils considered 'Holly' an enlightened head teacher for the time. Mary Holland had studied philosophy at Canterbury University College, graduating with a Master of Arts in 1911<sup>10</sup> and was a strong advocate of higher education for women. So much so, that, by the end of 1941, she could back the claim that "my girls go to university".<sup>11</sup> In addition to her goals for her students, Mary Holland modelled a life of independence, including what was unusual for the time, the adoption of two babies who she raised at Woodford House whilst carrying on with her administrative duties.<sup>12</sup> These events were no doubt watched with great interest by Rosemary and in this encouraging academic environment she achieved well at Woodford House, leaving in 1937 bound for university.<sup>13</sup>

### University years and beyond

Rosemary Seymour was not alone when she went up to Auckland University College in 1938. Her best friend from Woodford, Sheila von Dazelden, was also there and they boarded together. These two young women made quite an impression

on other freshers on campus. Both Margot Roth (Hogben) and Margaret (Peggy) Clarke (Armstrong) who studied English alongside Rosemary, can still recall the high fashion standards set by the 'Woodford girls' Rosemary and Sheila, in their "tweed skirts with pleats and twin sets".<sup>14</sup> According to Margot Roth, "Rosemary was beautiful with blonde hair". She was also

8 Mary Varnham (1994) notes that despite the support of Miss Holland, the German women staff members were asked to leave their teaching positions at Woodford House during the early years of the Second World War.

9 *Rosemary Seymour Collection*, 36/2g; Dr Gerda Bell received the Officers' Cross of the Ordination of merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1986. This was, in part, recognition of her publications and research on Germanic/New Zealand relations.

10 University of New Zealand (1959) *List of Graduates of the University of New Zealand*, Wellington: UNZ, p. 57.

11 Mary Varnham (1994).

12 Mary Varnham (1994).

13 Mary Varnham, (1994) p.92.

14 *Reminiscences 1938-1943*, Peggy Clarke, Hamilton, 14 August 2002.

“a brilliant English student”.<sup>15</sup> In 1940, Rosemary demonstrated her ability as a scholar, winning a Senior Scholarship in English. She went on to complete a Bachelor of Arts and then a Master of Arts in English Literature at Auckland University College. During her final two years in 1942 and 1943, Rosemary was also a Junior Lecturer within the Department of English.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout their university studies, it is clear that the young English Professor, Arthur Sewell, fascinated Rosemary, Margot, Peggy and others. Margot Roth recalled his “wonderful lectures verging on performance” while outside of class, she admired his “left-wing and radical political views”.<sup>17</sup> Peggy Clarke “loved tutorials with Professor Sewell, where it was less formal”. She described him as “magnetic and charming”.<sup>18</sup> In Rosemary’s case, the attraction to Professor Sewell was very strong indeed. Although married and sixteen years her senior, he and Rosemary began a relationship that would scandalize the Auckland university community and lead to Professor Sewell’s resignation in 1945. While some were shocked, many of Rosemary’s student contemporaries were impressed. Margot Roth, remembers “Rosemary and Professor Sewell going off together and were always seen. He not only had a relationship with a student, ostentatiously, but left his wife and then the university as well!”<sup>19</sup>

Reflecting upon these events, Bill Sewell observed that his father had “a certain disdain for the social niceties, and lacked much sense of property” that were important to his then wife Peggy. He explained that “she had tried to make him into something he was not, and increasingly the contradictions became too extreme.”<sup>20</sup> By contrast with Peggy, Bill continued:

My mother, on the other hand, was more than his intellectual match, though perhaps without his flair, and she was if anything even more contemptuous of the social niceties than Arthur was; and although she did have a sense of property, it was hardly orthodox. In addition, she was young and beautiful when their relationship ignited, and one of his students. Nowadays, affairs between professor and student are not tolerated because of the power imbalance which they imply. But from what I know of Arthur and my mother, I find it difficult to accept that there was any element of exploitation in their relationship: she was too tough, intellectually and emotionally.<sup>21</sup>



On the occasion of her B.A. graduation, Auckland University College 1941. Rosemary gained a MA in English Literature in 1943. (Seymour Family Collection)

15 Interview with Margot Roth, Margot Roth, Women’s Studies Tutor, Centre for Continuing Education, The University of Auckland, 5 October 1990.

16 Rosemary Seymour Archives, 37\2a, University of Waikato Library.

17 Interview with Margot Roth, 5 October 1990.

18 *Reminiscences 1938-1943*, Peggy Clarke, Hamilton, 14 August 2002. Over fifty years later, Peggy Clarke purchased 37 Bretton Terrace in Hamilton. It was only after she had moved into the house that Peggy discovered that this had also been the home of her former Professor, Arthur Sewell, and her contemporary, Rosemary Seymour.

19 Interview with Margot Roth, 5 October 1990.

20 Bill Sewell (1991) ‘Arthur Sewell’ in Bill Sewell (ed) *Son of the Fathers: New Zealand men write about their fathers*, pp 144-167.

21 *Ibid*.

Perhaps to escape the controversy in Auckland and perhaps to accumulate some funds, Rosemary took up a position as Senior English Mistress back at her old school Woodford House in 1944. It was from here that she left to join Arthur Sewell, firstly in London and then in Greece. Their son Bill captured the events that were to unfold:

My mother joined Arthur in Athens in 1947, and lived in an adjoining flat with his landlady; but they didn't marry until 1951, and then only after I - much to everyone's surprise - was conceived. The story of their wedding is as remarkable as the course of their relationship up to that time. Arthur was very nearly married to Winnie Davin, one of the wedding party, because she was the only one wearing a hat. They had to borrow a wedding ring at the ceremony, and it was returned to its owner in full view of the (already bemused) Kensington Registrar. The bride and groom then went their separate ways because they both had business to attend to. The registrar - who had admonished Arthur before the ceremony by saying, 'You realize, Professor, that marriage is for life!' - was left wondering what marital irregularity he had been party to. But the marriage endured for over 20 years, until Arthur's death.<sup>22</sup>



Rosemary Seymour and her husband Professor Arthur Sewell, Barcelona, 1954. (Seymour Family Collection)

Rosemary and Arthur lived in Greece and the Middle East for eighteen years. Arthur Sewell was appointed Byron Professor of English at the University of Athens (1946-1951), was the Director of the British Institute in Barcelona (1952-53), and then held Chairs in English at the University of Ankara (1954-56) and at the American University of Beirut (1956-65). With their son Bill, they arrived in Hamilton, New Zealand in 1965 where Arthur Sewell was Visiting Professor of English and then foundation Professor of English at the University of Waikato. He retired in 1969 and died in Hamilton in 1972.<sup>23</sup>

Meantime, Rosemary Seymour newly arrived in England in 1945, had registered at Queen Mary College at the University of London for a post-graduate degree in English Literature. She did not complete this in 1946, citing family reasons. Instead, she accompanied Arthur Sewell to Athens. Here, Rosemary taught courses for the British Council, including Cambridge Diploma Courses (1946-1951) and headed Diploma Studies in 1950 and 1951. In Ankara, she taught part-time in 1953 and 1954 and presented occasional lectures within the English Department.

<sup>22</sup> Bill Sewell (1991) 'Arthur Sewell' in Bill Sewell (ed) *Son of the Fathers: New Zealand men write about their fathers*, pp 144-167.

<sup>23</sup> Sewell, Bill. 'Sewell, William Arthur 1903-1972'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Volume Four, 1998; Personal Reminiscences, Jenny King, Chief Librarian, University of Waikato, 1985. Jenny King was also a student of Professor Sewell's at the University of Auckland at the same time as Rosemary Seymour. She recalls Professor Sewell as one of the greatest teachers at university and Rosemary as a very bright and beautiful young woman. Years later, Jenny and Rosemary would meet again at the University of Waikato. It was Jenny King who facilitated the housing of the Rosemary Seymour Archives within the University of Waikato Library.

She would do the same at the University of Beirut for a number of years and it was from here that she had published 'The Man from Mars and other poems'.<sup>24</sup> Rosemary would later account for this time as when she read widely and studied "the cultures in which I was 20 years resident - Greece, Spain, Turkey and Lebanon 1946-1966."<sup>25</sup> Whilst in Lebanon, Rosemary studied in the Philosophy department for two years prior to her return to New Zealand.<sup>26</sup>

Coming home was no doubt a mixed blessing for Rosemary. On the one hand, she enjoyed certain notoriety as 'the student mistress who married the Professor'<sup>27</sup> but her having done so, had meant enforced exile from her country and family. It is not clear just what her family had thought of the circumstances that led to her leaving nearly twenty years earlier. However, she had kept in contact and returned to visit on several occasions from the Middle East. The family had sent regular gifts from New Zealand, including a range of children's literature for the young Bill Sewell. He recalled the re-connection back to the East Coast farm when Rosemary took him to visit the family there:

Often, after my parents came back to New Zealand to live, my mother and I would make the pilgrimage to visit the family, driving for hours towards and into country where the hills became less and less tolerant of the road, the bush less and less cowed, and the farmland less and less at ease with itself. This part I think she liked. And I think she appreciated the familiar, if rather perfunctory welcomes at our destination. But once the conversation settled into its usual format of who had married whom, who was pregnant, who wasn't pregnant *yet*, who had got very frail, and who had died, I could see her eyes begin to glaze over, a slightly tetchy look form in her features, and her distracted response (if any): *why was she wasting her time with such trivia?* Even reminiscing had its limitations, because there came a point when she had stopped sharing experiences with the family. She didn't really want to bother with their restricted ambit; and they didn't really want to broach the unruly outside world which she represented.<sup>28</sup>

All the while, Rosemary retained and mostly used her family name of Seymour, another distinctly radical act. However, the numerous receipts and invoices within her papers indicate that in some situations, such as in matters of finance and purchase of goods, she seemed happy to refer to herself as Mrs Sewell. Although Rosemary derived a modest income from the Seymour family farm, her economic dependence as a married woman meant that she was tied to many of the more conventional orthodoxies of the time. It may have just been easier to go along with those, but the issue of economic independence for women, including within marriage, was one she thought a lot about, later researching, writing and lecturing on the topic. Perhaps she had thought of more of an academic career for herself whilst her husband was alive. However, even if she had, it may have been difficult within her home discipline of English, given that Arthur was a senior academic and often head of the department. Instead, she decided to change academic direction.

### Academic life and work

According to Professor David Bettison of the Sociology Department at the University of Waikato, Rosemary Seymour contacted him shortly after her arrival back in New Zealand. "She was immensely interested in becoming a sociologist and from talking to her it was clear

24 *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 37\2a, University of Waikato Library.p.8; Seymour, Rosemary (1964) *The Man from Mars and other poems*, London: Outposts Publications.

25 *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 37\2a, University of Waikato Library. P.7

26 Ibid.

27 Reminiscences, Peggy Clarke. This comment was made to Peggy Clarke's partner by another fellow Auckland student upon hearing of the marriage of Rosemary and Arthur.

28 Bill Sewell (1997)

that she was already well read in this area”.<sup>29</sup> Rosemary did not pursue sociological studies for some years and it was not until after Arthur Sewell had died that she enrolled for a Masters of Social Sciences degree. In 1972 and 1973 she was also employed as a Sessional Assistant (Tutor) within the Sociology Department. In 1973, having completed her Masters degree with first class honours and won a University Grants Committee postgraduate scholarship, she embarked on a doctoral thesis that explored women’s roles in a variety of world religions. Her study was begun at a time when student numbers rose rapidly and temporary staff appointments needed to be made. As Professor Bettison explained it, “there was genuine interest in Rosemary’s work, in forging ahead with new ideas...women’s studies offered something different. She was a mature person capable of doing extensive work, registering for a PhD”.<sup>30</sup>

David Bettison knew Rosemary’s capabilities as she had worked with him as part of her post-graduate study. He was also her doctoral supervisor and would later comment that:

It was an involvement of which I am very proud. There was a lot of an apprenticeship, I mean, I learnt more about women’s studies by apprenticing myself to supervision of Rosemary’s thesis than I could ever have done.... She was a marvellous scholar. . She had me reading all sorts of feminist theory. It was marvellous and it’s stood me in good stead ever since”.<sup>31</sup>

It was from this base that Rosemary gained a part-time junior lectureship in the Sociology Department and having trialled a course ‘The Sociology of Women’ as a Continuing Education course in 1973, introduced it as a level three sociology course the following year. It was in this way that Rosemary Seymour pioneered the teaching of academic women’s studies in New Zealand.

The course outline of ‘Sociology of Women’ offered students the opportunity to study over a full year “a comparative analysis of social participation and status of women by means of sociological concepts and data”. The specific content was not detailed, although the headings suggest that Rosemary provided historical and cross-cultural overviews, feminist and anti-feminist theories of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries in relationship to philosophy, politics and economics. She also covered what she termed “active feminism (aims and methods) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” as well as ongoing issues.<sup>32</sup>

To teach such a course in New Zealand in 1975 with a minimum of feminist literature and no formal feminist scholarship meant that Rosemary was self-taught. Her library suggests that she was an avid reader of the feminist literature that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and, as she once told me, she bought as many books back to New Zealand from her trips overseas as she could possibly carry. Her writing indicates that she was a supporter of women’s liberation and considered herself a feminist. That she experienced difficulty in relating to ‘grass-roots’ feminism is clear. Some colleagues at Waikato reported in interviews her distaste for collective decision-making and described her overall approach as hierarchical, dogmatic and directive. In retrospect, Beryl Fletcher noted that perhaps “she had to be single minded and one-eyed and perhaps that was the only way to do it (establish courses) in those days”.<sup>33</sup> While some were quick to acknowledge Rosemary’s support for new women members of the larger academic community and for any feminist teaching or research endeavours, they also pointed

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Professor David Bettison, Head of the Sociology Department, University of Waikato, 28 March 1990.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 3/27c. ‘Women’s Studies Courses in New Zealand Universities in 1975’, New Zealand University Students’ Association, 1975. p.6.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Beryl Fletcher, former staff member, Sociology Department. University of Waikato, 8 June 1990.



out that she did not ever consider working with them as a group to bring about change.<sup>34</sup>

However, in other areas outside of the university, Rosemary was also pioneering new initiatives and with apparent success. She was a founding member of the Waikato branch of the Society for Research on Women (SROW), helped establish branches of the Women's National Abortion Action Committee (WONAAC) and the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL). In 1974, she presented a submission to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Discrimination Against Women in New Zealand and was also President of the New Zealand Sociological Association. It was also in 1974 that she chaired the Regional Women's Convention in Hamilton, and is remembered to this day for her 'fashion statement'. Sometime earlier that year, Rosemary had shown her neighbour and friend, Shirley Penfold, a long garment in her favourite emerald green. Much to Shirley's dismay and the astonishment of many others, Jane Ritchie later recalled "Rosemary coming onto the stage to open the conference in that velour, front-zipped green dressing gown!"<sup>35</sup> Undeterred, Rosemary wore this garment to university for many years. Her doing so, added to her growing reputation 'as that woman in Sociology'.

Back in January 1974, Rosemary was about to embark on teaching women's studies and as the only woman in her department wrote to Phillida Bunkle at Victoria University. "I am desperately over-burdened with commitments and feeling very much on the fringe - but very anxious to know what the whole picture is, and to keep up with as many as possible".<sup>36</sup> By the end of the year, she believed that her temporary status as a part-time junior lecturer for the following year equated to being "sneaked in, as it were, for that single course and I am in a weak position".<sup>37</sup> Rosemary's comments reflected her feelings of vulnerability, both for herself as an aspiring academic and for women's studies. She was dependent on the sponsorship and goodwill of her departmental head. Professor Bettison's agenda was clear. He required graduates and graduate work of high calibre to promote the status of sociology, still a relatively new university subject, as well as his leadership within the university community.

He was supported by Professor James Ritchie, who as Dean of Social Science was in an influential position to create staff positions in the school as a whole. He was "certainly sympathetic" to the idea of women's studies as part of a new and exciting development within the school, one that would give social science at the University of Waikato a distinctive character. But he pointed out that in the early 1970s, "the university was still not very receptive. You still had to put up with the faintest smirks around the corners of the mouth when you mentioned the matter".<sup>38</sup> James Ritchie knew full well that once a course had been introduced it only required reasonable numbers in order to retain it. As with all the women's studies courses introduced at Waikato in the 1970s however, students flocked in large numbers to women's studies courses. Demand meant that by 1975, Rosemary was also teaching 'Sociology of Women' as a master's course and in that year became a tenured lecturer within the Sociology Department.<sup>39</sup>

She received a mixed reception from her colleagues and there were episodes, such as in 1976 and 1977, where she fell out with most of them. This was a time when she believed that her mail had been tampered with and insisted that it not be left in her departmental mailbox but

34 *Interviews* with Professor David Bettison, op.cit. Beryl Fletcher, former staff member, Sociology Department, University of Waikato, 8 June 1990; Dr Sue Middleton, Senior Lecturer, Education Department, University of Waikato, 4 July 1990.

35 *Interview* with Dr Jane Ritchie, Associate Professor, Psychology Department, University of Waikato, 1990.

36 *Correspondence*, Rosemary Seymour to Phillida Bunkle, 3 January 1974. Personal file, Phillida Bunkle, Women's Studies, Victoria University of Wellington.

37 *Ibid*, 2 December 1974.

38 *Interview* with Professor James Ritchie, former Dean of Social Science, University of Waikato, 16 March 1990.

39 *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 37\2a.

at the Central Registry instead. It was also the year that she and Professor Bettison resorted to writing each other notes about where and how to meet. This was because Professor Bettison, as head of department, had suggested she was making unreasonable demands of the departmental Secretary, had criticised the Secretary publicly and that Rosemary appeared to be using vast quantities of departmental stationery. Rosemary was outraged. Of this year, Professor Bettison reflected, "Rosemary was prickly. There's no argument about that. The extent of tolerance that was required academically, personally, as you know, I ended up with a whole year of not talking to her".<sup>40</sup>

She followed this with a period of elusiveness over both departmental and thesis matters but was definitely productive in academic matters. In 1977, she had written and presented four different papers at four different disciplinary conferences.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps to gain some quiet research and writing time, Rosemary began to come into the university at night. However, she also took advantage of the absence of her colleagues in the wee small hours. Over time she surreptitiously commandeered the departmental workroom and internal storeroom to house her expanding collection of papers and books. Because any space is jealously guarded territory in most academic departments, such acts did not further endear her to immediate colleagues.

There was also the issue of her dog, Teddy. Quite simply, he was famous in J Block and, much to the amusement of students, including me, the small black and white dog would follow Rosemary around and between her three offices on the third floor. Apparently, dogs were not permitted inside the university buildings, not even at night when staff were working late. Polite notes from the Buildings Registrar and her head of department pointing this out did not discourage Rosemary in any way. It was only when the university introduced formal regulations banning dogs (or one dog in particular) that she reluctantly conceded.

Reflecting on his mixed relationship with his former colleague, David Bettison provides interesting insights.

We were both bloody-minded, and of course in the middle of there was Margaret Oaten (the Secretary), who I eventually married, as you know. Margaret was not the most conducive person to getting on with Rosemary but she went and looked after old Teddo, Rosemary's dog. I went round to Rosemary's house many nights at a time to pacify old Teddo and dear old Rosemary was away probably in Dunedin collecting records. The thing was total chaos, and utterly inconsiderate was Rosemary. She would put us out for hours, days at a time, without a thought or gesture that she had inconvenienced us in any way. And yet the most charming person in the world the next minute. Totally inconsistent.<sup>42</sup>

At one point, her elusiveness tested Professor Bettison's patience once and for all. For some weeks Rosemary had not attended any of the departmental planning meetings and without her input courses, times and general administration could not be completed. These usually took place out of term time and when not teaching, Rosemary would go to her Opoutere house on the Coromandel Peninsula for weeks at a time. She would read and write, walk and fish. She had no telephone there and the only way of contacting her was to send mail or ring the general store. Professor Bettison had tried ringing and leaving messages and writing notes to her via the store but to no avail. One day, in total exasperation, David Bettison got in his car and made the four hour round trip from Hamilton to Opoutere in a bid to finalise the next year's arrangements. She was nowhere to be seen.<sup>43</sup>

40 *Interview* with Professor David Bettison, op.cit

41 *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 36/1/a. The papers were presented at the annual conferences of the New Zealand Demographical Society, the Association of Social Anthropologists, the New Zealand Sociological Association and the Women and Health Conference.

42 *Interview* with Professor David Bettison, op. cit

43 *Afterword to Interview* with Professor David Bettison, op.cit.

For Rosemary, women's studies was an all-consuming passion. Concerned at the lack of New Zealand research on women she founded the New Zealand Women's Studies Association in 1978 and in the same year organised its first conference and edited *Research Papers '78: Women's Studies*, a collection of the papers presented at the conference. It was a busy year. On her trusty typewriter she also produced that year a 500-page Women's Studies Bibliography. All the while, she added to her Women's Studies Resource Collection and was writing articles for a range of publications and attending and presenting papers at sociology conferences. She was also working on her doctoral thesis.<sup>44</sup> She no doubt believed she was well placed to gain promotion to senior lecturer and was very disappointed when this did not eventuate. While it



Rosemary Seymour in her University of Waikato office, Sociology Department, 1982. (Herstory Diary 1982)

was true that she had not published sociological articles internationally, her lack of success was perhaps due to other reasons. A negative referee's report from her head of department and thesis supervisor provides some clues. "She teaches effectively but is abrasive to some [sociology] students due, I suspect, to an over emphasis on women's studies." Perhaps recalling all the difficulties he had with this particular staff member, the referee added, "she continues to work very long hours; in fact this seems to be all she does".<sup>45</sup>

By late 1978, Rosemary had applied for another position, that of Co-ordinator of Women's Studies at the Australian National University. In January 1979, the same referee now clearly saw some merit in Rosemary's academic work to date.

The prominent feature of Rosemary's activities is her capacity for scholarly work. She appears to be quite tireless. My advice to you for years had been to take on less; but there appears instead to be an annual increment. Her life is dedicated to women's studies in a thoroughly academic and scholarly sense. She has little time for a political or lighthearted feminist movement. She has amassed at this university the finest archive of women's literature in New Zealand.<sup>46</sup>

The founding of the Women's Studies Association, the first conference and the research papers that Rosemary edited for a number of years was not all plain sailing. Rosemary had very definite ideas about the purpose and aims of the Association and, in the main, these differed from the other members. Claire-Louise McCurdy and Margot Roth were both part of the Auckland branch from the outset. They challenged Rosemary's *modus operandi* which, as far as they were concerned, was not particularly feminist. For example, Claire-Louise recalled, "battling Rosemary" over due feminist process in relation to the preparation and presentation of the Constitution. Margot was more critical. "As an academic wife", Margot argued, "Rosemary was more credible to the boys of a similar age but she was often in opposition to women in the Association...she wanted to own Women's Studies, to control everything".<sup>47</sup>

44 *Ibid.* Rosemary's initial doctoral thesis research was entitled 'A Model of ideological cross-currents in feminism and anti-feminism'. She changed the title and focus in 1979 to 'Women at Stake: ideological Cross-CURRENTS in Misogyny and Philogyny'.

45 *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 36/1a.

46 *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 37/1d.

47 *Interviews* with Claire-Louise McCurdy, Women's Studies Tutor, Centre for Continuing Education, The University of Auckland, 5 October 1990; with Margot Roth, Women's Studies Tutor, Centre for Continuing Educa-

They and many others also recalled Rosemary's perceived inefficiency and lack of organization. She could certainly give this impression, but, on the other hand, if she was asked where anything was in her three university rooms, she could usually find it. It was physically disorganized, but she knew where everything was. There was one exception. On her last trips to the university, she was convinced someone had stolen her typewriter, as she could not find it anywhere. Later, when I came to pack the contents of these rooms I discovered that although there was definitely an order and the piles of papers formed subject continuity, one rather large pile completely hid the missing typewriter.

David Bettsion, as her head of department, had thought carefully about this side of Rosemary and in a reference for her wrote that:

Though greatly improved in recent years, her ability to administer her voluminous affairs often proved inadequate to the task. It is not a forgetfulness or carelessness - indeed she is meticulous - but insensitivity to the various matters that become involved when she pursues a course of action. It is as if the world is expected to fall automatically into line when something so eminently sensible is undertaken!<sup>48</sup>

Rosemary also set out with a dogged determination to put in place her vision for women's studies at the University of Waikato. A position paper, written in 1979 on the status of women's studies in New Zealand, provides tangible evidence of her commitment to feminist scholarship:

More and more confident women are entering positions of direct and indirect influence. Thus ignorance is being dispelled and women are becoming visible and differentiated as their various needs and interests are being understood and presented... Women's Studies and their influence are developing and being directed to application in significant areas. They need to be supported whenever, wherever, and in whatever form they are being taught.<sup>49</sup>

Her aim was to develop a core programme such as she had seen in overseas universities. She worked in tandem with the Dean, James Ritchie, 'keeping things together' within subjects and within one school. They wanted to take the disciplines in which they were trained (sociology and psychology) and to develop courses within them that would highlight the contribution of women. Those in authority higher up in the university system viewed these developments with suspicion.

A Women's Studies Advisory Committee was established as an ad hoc committee of the Academic Board in 1978. It became a Standing Committee in 1980.<sup>50</sup> From the outset, deans of schools outside of social science questioned its status. Norman Kingsbury, the university Registrar at that time, offered an explanation:

A lot of academic people have a very clear view about what their subject is, what they have defined it to be. The idea that somehow there was going to be an entirely new perspective is actually very threatening.... There was also a bit of disgust with the social sciences generally...that this was another trendy thing social science people were doing.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, do it they did. A level three course entitled 'Psychology of Women' was introduced in 1975 and by 1979, Rosemary Seymour was co-coordinating an inter-disciplinary level two

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tion, The University of Auckland, 5 October 1990.

48 *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 37/1d.

49 *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 3/27a. Seymour, Rosemary (1979) 'Women's Studies: What for: What now? What next?' Discussion Paper prepared for the second inaugural conference of the Women's Studies Association, University of Waikato.p.8

50 *Minutes of the Academic Board of the University of Waikato*, 1978; 1980 80/577 and 80/498; *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 38/1A.

51 *Interview with Dr Norman Kingsbury, Former Registrar and Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor, University of Waikato*. 5 August 1990.

course 'Women's Studies: An Introduction'. She was very reluctant to pass it over to anyone whilst she went on study leave in 1980, but, for some reason, she particularly did not want to hand it over to a youthful newcomer, Robyn Rowland. Robyn had been appointed to the Psychology Department in 1978 and had first-hand experience of the popularity of women's studies courses in Britain, the United States and Australia. In her early twenties, she had come to the University of Waikato from the University of Wollongong where she had introduced a master's course entitled 'Psychology of Sex Roles' and an undergraduate interdisciplinary women's studies course. Professor James Ritchie, in his dual role as departmental head and Dean of Social Science, was keen to develop an interdisciplinary women's studies programme within the school and required more experienced feminist academics to make it possible.

During 1979, Robyn Rowland attended the Women's Studies Advisory Committee meetings chaired by Rosemary Seymour. They did not get on well. However, it was Robyn Rowland who would take up temporary stewardship of the level two course while Rosemary was away on study leave in 1980.<sup>52</sup>

Prior to her departure, Rosemary applied for practical assistance from an expert through the Fulbright Fellowship scheme to work with the cataloguing of her women's resource collection. By this time it consisted of sorted and loosely classified boxes of magazines and newspaper clippings as well as hundreds of books. Her application was successful and Washington based Jenrose Felmley duly arrived to assist with the task of cataloguing the collection. At first, the two women got on famously, but in many ways collegial relations and the project were doomed to failure. Rosemary was to be away for long periods on study leave during this time and each time she returned so too did the levels of disquiet at what was happening to her beloved project. Jenrose Felmley, on the other hand, had inherited an impossible task in the six months her fellowship allowed. As a result, the cataloguing was not completed. The material however, continued to flow in from a range of sources and it was amongst the piles that I met Rosemary, struggling to cope with them and her doctoral thesis, now in its final stages.

Upon her return to the University of Waikato in 1981, Rosemary focused on the establishment of a level three interdisciplinary women's studies course and was content to let Dr Jane Ritchie take over the co-ordination of the second level course. By 1982, there were five women's studies course offered within existing departments of the social sciences, the most comprehensive listing of any New Zealand university. This was still the case in 1985 when fourteen women's studies courses were taught at the University of Waikato in that year.<sup>53</sup>

Rosemary Seymour, sadly, did not live to witness 'her' women's studies programme become a degree major. Her ongoing battle with cancer meant that she had to take sick leave to undergo surgery in mid-1981. She was back at work eight weeks later wanting to complete her doctorate. By 1982 she had done so and in July of that year, applied for and attained promotion to Senior Lecturer.<sup>54</sup> By mid-July it was discovered that she had cancer of the trachea. She wrote to friends, "This is incurable but can be checked by cobalt therapy. I am to have a three week course".<sup>55</sup> Despite ongoing medication, Rosemary continued to teach four papers, prepared and presented two research papers on the effects of technology on women's work and collated the rapidly growing collection of material in her Women's Resource Room. In 1982,

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Dr Robyn Rowland, Associate Professor of Women's Studies, Deakin University, Geelong, Australia. November 16 1991. (Later, Robyn would be appointed to a Chair in Women's Studies at Deakin University).

<sup>53</sup> Morris Matthews, Kay (1993) 'For and About Women: Women's Studies in New Zealand Universities 1973-1990'. Appendix C. pp.289-291.

<sup>54</sup> *Rosemary Seymour Archive*, 37/2a. Application for Promotion by Dr Rosemary Seymour to the University of Waikato Promotions Advisory Committee, July 1982.

<sup>55</sup> *Rosemary Seymour Archives*, 36/1 i. Letter to Honey and Frank, 13 July 1982.

Media Women nominated Rosemary for a Johnson and Johnson Award for Women. She also featured in the 'Herstory' diary of that year. In the notes she provided for Media Women she outlined the rationale for women's studies and her contribution thus far.

My aim has to been to create structures for promoting and disseminating soundly based knowledge of women's thoughts, feelings and activities. These structures have been needed as prerequisites for filling in gaps in our knowledge and for correcting unbased, and often harmful, myths and generalisations about women.<sup>56</sup>

Rosemary then listed what she regarded as pioneering work:

1. The Women's Studies Resource Room: a location for assimilation and preservation of material about women.
  2. The Women's Studies Committee and Programme: an academic structure for promoting and teaching and research about women.
  3. The Women's Studies Association: a community structure for promoting teaching teaching and research about women.
  4. Women's Studies in New Zealand, an annual bibliographical series: an academic and community service for recording and disseminating research and teaching about women in New Zealand.
- If I must select one of these aspects it is the Women's Studies in New Zealand - the annual bibliographical volumes.<sup>57</sup>

She decided to travel during the six months sabbatical leave to which she was entitled in July 1983. Her leave report indicates that she presented lectures and seminars and attended conferences in Canada, the United States and Kuala Lumpur.<sup>58</sup> By this time she was very ill but continued with her academic duties until early 1984. The news of her death came as the Women's Studies Association Conference gathered in Blenheim in August. It was from here that the Rosemary Seymour Award for Research in Women's Studies was instigated. Within the Sociology Department at the University of Waikato hangs a photograph with a listing of Rosemary's academic achievements but the real memorial to her pioneering work is the Rosemary Seymour Archives, housed in the University of Waikato Library.

In terms of her personal support needs as her health deteriorated, Rosemary remained as independent as ever. She was grateful, however, for assistance rendered by her son and daughter-in-law, long time friends and neighbours, Shirley and Peter Penfold and others, including Jane Ritchie. Although Rosemary often seemed ambivalent towards her siblings and their families, they came as a group to visit her shortly before she died and she was pleased they had done so.

Bill Sewell wrote:

But for me the most compelling evidence that her roots were of importance to her, was the clause in her will directing that her ashes be buried in the family plot on the family farm. This direction was duly carried out. One bitterly cold September day, with the wind cutting in from the South, a group of us drove up to the [family cemetery] plot on the top of a hill; my uncle dug a hole; and I emptied the small cardboard box of ashes into her ancestral soil. It seemed the right thing to do.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 36/3a Application for Fulbright Fellow, 14 July 1982.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, Summary of Study Leave 1 July 1983 – 31 January 1984.

<sup>59</sup> Bill Sewell (1997) from "Replication". (unpublished). A noted poet, editor and lawyer, Dr Bill Sewell died of cancer in 2003.

## Generation to Generation

*If you come to my death-bed,  
Know that I'll know there's nothing to be said.*

*Come once: and on my shoulder or my head,  
Sparely, rest your hand;  
Then stay away - know I will understand.*

*And do not try to follow with surmise  
My dying; as farewelling eyes a plane  
Long after watching is in vain  
When it has plunged into the skies.*

*When my time's come  
Let me not want to take  
For talking's sake  
Time from my son.*

*And you know that every time you came  
You would bring me back again  
To the dying of farewell.*

*But when you hear my years toll their knell  
If you can, come once to my death-bed;  
Knowing I'll know there's nothing to be said.*

*If you honour my generated dust  
Kiss my forehead, hold my hand*

*Go, go away! you are the living,  
And the dying, unforgiving, never understand.<sup>60</sup>*

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60 Rosemary Seymour (1964) in *The Man from Mars and other poems*, London: Outpost Publications, p.11.