



## Wise Woman Archives Trust Inc.

Since the beginning of the publicly funded maternity service in New Zealand in 1939, there have been many changes to the way maternity services have been delivered. Some of the documentary evidence that marks these changes is kept by Archives New Zealand, particularly administrative files of government departments such as the previously named Department (now Ministry) of Health, and some hospitals, for example, the now closed St Helens Hospitals. Other documents, such as personal manuscripts, are kept at the Hocken Library in Dunedin, and museums and other libraries around the country. Two noteworthy collections of personal manuscripts are those of Joan Donley in the Auckland Museum and in Special Collections at the Auckland Medical School Library. It is not unusual, however, for the manuscripts of private individuals and organisations, both professional and consumer, to

be relegated to less permanent and safe storage. These are frequently housed in cardboard boxes in attics or basements, and can be exposed to excessive heat, moisture and dust which can irretrievably damage documents. Further, collections may even be dumped, rather than relocated, when families or organisations shift premises.

In October 2006, the Wise Woman Archives Trust Inc. (WWAT) was established in the Waikato with the mission of collecting and preserving historical materials relating to maternity services in New Zealand, and to ensure these collections become accessible to interested people for research purposes. These interested people may be, for examples, midwifery researchers, professional and local historians, authors and biographers, and others pursuing a specific interest in New Zealand maternity history. WWAT's lofty

goal has come to fruition with the support of Birthspirit Ltd, which houses the archive and provides all the necessary sorting, preservation, cataloguing, development of finding aids, and promotion of collections.

Two significant and irreplaceable collections held by WWAT are those of the Auckland Home Birth Association and the Domiciliary Midwives Society of New Zealand (Inc.). Both of these organisations existed from 1974 and 1981 respectively, and were foundational in the politicising of women (and families), midwives, politicians (and others) that lead to the passing of the 1990 Nurses Amendment Act, and the return of midwifery autonomy in New Zealand. These two groups lived the practice of partnership - women and midwives together - working to ensure the home birth option remained alive when it had all but disappeared. Central to securing viability of the home birth option was the need to rectify the penury of domiciliary (home birth) midwives, which - as they say - is now history.



Kate Spenceley examines manuscripts at WWAT in preparation for her 2008 International Congress of Midwives Conference presentation.

Access to the archives is by appointment and collections are viewed on site. The majority of collections can be accessed without restriction. However, in some cases, restrictions are necessary for the purpose of protecting personal privacy. The repository is at the Cottage, 15 Te Awa Road, Tamahere on the outskirts of Hamilton. Accommodation may be available (by negotiation) for out of town researchers.

Donations to WWAT are welcomed, whether material be unpublished personal papers or organizational records - minutes of meetings, correspondence, submissions, diaries, photographs, scrapbooks, memoirs and reminiscences. Historical



materials in all formats are considered; some may be arts and crafts, and audio or video recordings.

Collections can be either donated (legal ownership is transferred to WWAT) or deposited (legal

ownership remains with the transferring organisation or person). It is anticipated that if someone 'deposited' materials this would be in perpetuity as funds are spent on the preservation and management of materials.

To discuss your contribution to the Wise Woman Archives Trust, please contact Maggie Banks, 15 Te Awa Road, RD 3, Hamilton, Phone 07 856 4612 or email her at [wwat@ihug.co.nz](mailto:wwat@ihug.co.nz).

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## How Things Change...

In 1974 there were two ultrasound scanning machines in New Zealand – one in Auckland and one in Christchurch – and it was a technology that was viewed as being applicable only to a small number of pregnancies.<sup>1</sup> Today ultrasound scanning machines are available in every city in New Zealand and in many smaller centres.

The most comprehensive and recently published national maternity data (2004) indicates that, excluding scans done in tertiary care hospitals and those paid for privately by women, of the 44,992 women in its data, the number of women having ultrasound examinations, by the number of ultrasound examinations, was as follows:

- 9.1 percent of women had no ultrasound examinations in pregnancy;
- 24.4 percent had one;
- 28.6 percent had two;
- 18.3 percent had three;
- 9.6 percent had four;
- 9.6 percent had between 5-9; and,
- 0.5 percent had ten or more.<sup>2</sup>

### References

1. Wright JL. Standards of ante-natal care. *Therapeutic Notes No. 137*. Wellington: Department of Health, 1974.
2. New Zealand Health Information Service. *Report on Maternity: Maternal and Newborn Information 2004*. Wellington: Ministry of Health, 2007. The data cited here is available on p. 25.