

Remembering Carol Ann Donahue:

A Story of Love, Loss, and Legacy

Written by Jeremiah Morgan

I initially became aware of the Carol Ann Donahue Memorial Fund through my internship with CreativityUnleashed. I was made known to it because it funded the magazine I was serving as an editor for, [The Rev](#), Russell Sage's literary and creative arts magazine. Her name kept popping up on posters, in paperwork, and, in all the accumulated knowledge afforded to a senior, it was one of the only names I didn't recognize from my time at the college so far.

I'm a curious person when I have time to be. I decided to see what I could find on my own.

My first session of 'research' into Carol Ann ended up being quite brief, as there really isn't much to find out about her on the public internet. On that first pass, I found her gravestone on Find-A-Grave. From that site, I learned her birthday (the 25th of July), that her parents were buried on the same plot as her when they passed several decades after her death, and a few details surrounding the car accident that ended her life. From that same initial search, I found her memorial trust fund listed on a Sage alumni website; only the name, no details regarding what the fund represents or supports. That was all.

Everything else I learned about Carol Ann, I had to find by sifting through the Russell Sage archives and connecting with members of Carol Ann's graduating class at Northampton High School, who graciously offered me their personal recollections of Carol Ann, her family, her story, and how her passing affected the community. Even still, there isn't nearly enough written down about her to paint a vivid picture of who she was; perhaps an understandable consequence of trying to resurrect the living memory of somebody who's been gone nearly sixty years.

This is what I know about her, at the end of all my research:

Carol Ann was the only child of Donald and Alicia Donahue and the beloved niece of Dorothy and Irene Donahue. She attended Northampton High School, graduated in the class of 1964, and went on to attend Russell Sage with the graduating class of '68, during the time when the Troy campus was exclusively a women's college, and the Albany campus was a separate division that educated men. She had an interest in poetry, according to some comments in



Dorothy Donahue's letters; though, regrettably, all my attempts to locate examples of her work were unsuccessful.

She passed away in an automobile accident with former NHS classmate John Duffney when their car went over the Coolidge Bridge's railing and landed in the Connecticut River. It was August 24th, 1965– not too long before she would have returned to Troy for the beginning of her sophomore year, which she was already enrolled for.

A former classmate of Carol Ann's recalled in an email to me that John and Carol Ann's wakes were hosted at the same time, on the same street, the funeral homes diagonal from each other. She recalled students from Carol Ann's graduating class, as well as students still attending the school, crossing the street under the protection of traffic cops to attend both events and pay respects to the families of both young individuals. John Duffney was referred to by at least one source as her "boyfriend," though I hesitate to apply labels to the relationships of the deceased without any further evidence.

Grief presents itself differently across individuals, but rarely has it ever been so swift to business as it was in Dorothy Donahue's case. By October 1st, 1965, when Carol Ann might have been getting back into the rhythm of a new school year, Dorothy had already informed the college of her intention to contribute funds in Carol Ann's memory and was in communication with Sage Library Director Dr. Stephen H. Goode about using those funds to establish a poetry collection.

An October 6th letter to Dr. Goode outlined the initial agreement: Dorothy would contribute a starting sum of 500 dollars, which the school could invest and use the interest annually to add a volume to the collection, housed as a part of the Mary J. Hare Memorial Collection (or, as the Sage Alumni website currently calls it, the Mary Josephine Hare Library Fund), which was a previously-established memorial fund dedicated to the library's development. Dr. Goode was also able to begin acquiring federal funds for the collection and was able to build the collection with contributions from several presses, including Gehenna, Black Sparrow, Unicorn, and Pyn Randall.

A month later, in November, Dorothy Donahue wrote to Dr. Goode again, detailing the first round of donated volumes to the collection. Irene Donahue, Dorothy's partner in contributing to the collection, donated an Amherst, MA, poet's recently published volume, and other Northampton locals were reaching out with contributions as well.

I saw a "poetry corner" referred to in these early days as the home of Carol Ann's memorial collection, but found limited specifics on how the collection was kept before the summer of 1967. That summer, Dr. Goode informed Dorothy that a room in the library had been officially secured for the purpose of housing the collection, and the Donahue sisters agreed to contribute 2000 dollars for the initial furnishing of the room. There is mention of the collection having outgrown its original storage, and Dr. Goode mentions hoping that the collection would someday warrant its own building on campus (perhaps even its own archivist, to tend to it) in one of his letters to Dorothy Donahue.

Carol Ann's parents had originally planned to contribute the furnishings, but her aunts stepped in to contribute when Donald Donahue's health became a concern, removing an element of stress and financial burden from their brother and sister-in-law in trying times.

Dorothy and Irene had one more important item to donate to the room before the dedication: An oil painting of Carol Ann's senior yearbook photo by local Northampton artist Eleanor Dow Green. NHS Class of 1964 graduate Dorothy DeRose informed me that they had a similar painting made around the same time, and kept that one hung in the living room of their shared home in Florence, Massachusetts.

The room was officially dedicated on May 10, 1968, with Carol Ann's aunts in attendance, right before Carol might have graduated with a bachelor's degree. By the end of that year, the collection had already grown to 1500 titles.

Regularly, Dorothy would send sums of money to be used to buy any volumes the library located and deemed appropriate. The college would occasionally reach out with a specific request, and Dorothy would reply with a note and a check after confirming that the volume seemed appropriate for the 20th-century American and British poetry collection. Other times, the checks rolled in for special occasions—Dorothy sent a regular contribution for the Christmas season, remarking that she would have once used the funds to gift Carol Ann books for the holiday, and would now be leaving the money to grow the collection that bore her niece's name. Sometimes, the money was from Dorothy; other times, it was a joint effort between her and Irene. Almost always, it was Dorothy writing the letters.

Dorothy and Irene Donahue travelled relatively often throughout their lives. Their letters to the Sage library directors over the years mention multiple trips to Ireland, a visit to Cairo, and trips up North to Canada, and almost every trip was marked by the acquisition of some new material for the Donahue Poetry collection back in Troy. A family friend, Edith Miller, would often contribute as well. Sometimes, the ladies hunted specific volumes requested by the librarians. Other times, they kept their eyes out for notable publishers, often paying special attention to volumes bearing the mark of Gehenna Publishing, one of America's oldest fine arts printers.

The volume searching would also extend past shopping, however. There are many records in the Sage archives indicating that Dorothy contacted poets directly and often procured first editions, autographed copies, and other rarities. By 1981, the collection had 5500 titles, and included T. S. Eliot's doctoral thesis (with annotations and page proofs in Eliot's handwriting), first and/or signed editions of Robert Frost, Denise Levertov, and William Butler Yeats (and many, many others), and many limited editions of rare titles. Still others contacted Dorothy on their own after hearing about the memorial collection and wanting to contribute.

Dorothy maintained her various support methods for decades after the Collection's initial establishment. Her involvement with the collection outlasted several Sage Library Directors' tenures at the college; she was a collaborator passed down from predecessor to successor and was known to several members of the college staff. During my research in the Sage library archives, I came across records of several staff members' notes thanking Dorothy Donahue for a visit to their office, and one note of a time Sage staff had visited Dorothy and Irene's home in

Florence, Massachusetts, declaring the women to be worth keeping in contact with. Dr. Stephen H. Goode passed the maintenance of the collection to Donald L. Ryan, who picked up contact with Dorothy where Dr. Goode left off.

Due to the influence of the library directors who worked with Dorothy to curate the collection, the Carol Ann Donahue Memorial Collection became one of the largest archives of concrete poetry to exist. The style, combining the verse of poetry with a form of visual art, often including typographic poems, fell out of style during the curation of the Collection, and found a faithful archivist in Dr. Goode. Donald L. Ryan made a concerted effort to curate heavily in favor of women poets—honoring not only the young woman the collection memorialized, but the women who created, curated, and funded it, as well.

Dorothy P. Donahue passed away in 1997, at age 81, marking the departure of a remarkable career woman and devoted aunt. She joined her brother, Donald Donahue, and her sister, Irene Donahue, on their family plot, having outlived them both. She got to see the Memorial Collection grow well above 10,000 volumes before her passing and to receive national attention for its impressive selection and powerful story.

The Collection, in line with Dorothy and Irene's goal, continued to grow past their deaths. The latest update I found was the addition of approximately 500 volumes in 2004; by then, it was split between the Troy and Albany campuses due to its size. The majority remained in the Troy campus, where it all began. Each year, the English department at Sage dedicated at least one new volume to the shelves, eventually extending the collection into the 21st century.



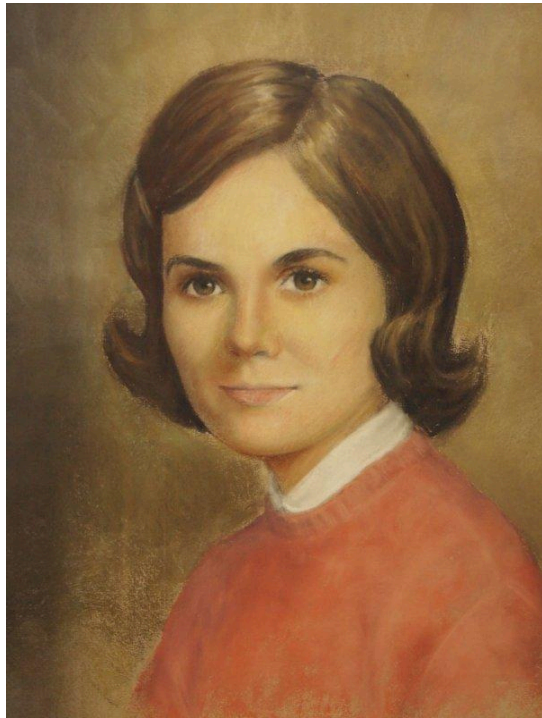
The Memorial Fund existed as a means to store and grow the money donated to the development of the Collection, and was eventually expanded to cover new endeavors in Sage's English department. A yearly visiting poet, for example, was established quite early on in the Memorial Fund's existence, and brought poet and author Margaret Atwood to the Troy campus in the 1970s.

I confess that more recent information on the Fund and Collection was not the bulk of what I found; I assume those records are stored differently from the folders of correspondence I made my way through in the library archives.

I've only been in the Carol Ann Memorial Collection room in the Shea Learning Center once. Ironically, despite being an English major, I rarely had much reason to spend time in the campus library. Most of my textbooks were stored neatly in .EPUB and .PDF files on my long-suffering laptop's memory, and the peer-reviewed articles I needed for most of my research

were available remotely. One of my classes in my senior year held a final showcase in the room, and gave me a chance to see the collection I had been researching.

Most of the learning center is uniformly furnished with modern sectional couches, plastic chairs on caster wheels pushed in under identical rows of computer tables. Stepping into the Collection's room was like leaving the building behind entirely, with heavy, wide-set chairs of dark wood and leather right at the center. The walls themselves had been made into shelves and display spaces, pushing into the construction of the building— save for where Carol Ann's portrait is hung, accompanied by heavy curtains.



I would like to thank the remarkable people who granted me access to the information I needed in order to complete this project. Given the lack of public knowledge about Carol Ann and the events surrounding her memorial fund and collection, I needed the help of many people to get as much of the picture as I could!

A bulk of what I know and use here comes from the Sage archives, and I was incredibly lucky to have the support of Marcella Falquez, Sage's Senior Library Specialist, in accessing that information, as well as helping me figure out what to even begin reading. Her familiarity with the subject, willingness to deal with my strange project timeline, and patience with my questions were crucial to this project, and it cannot be overstated.

Similarly, I would like to thank Ellen Nigrosh with the Northampton Education Foundation, who was kind enough to connect me with two of Carol Ann Donahue's high school classmates and Dylan Gaffney at the Forbes Library, after I found the Class of 1964 Northampton High School website and contacted her. Not everybody would do so much for a college student who randomly appeared in their inbox out of the blue, but the interactions I had as a result were invaluable to this project.

I would like to thank the classmates of Carol Ann Donahue who responded to Ellen's email and shared their memories with me. Dorothy Carnall DeRose supplied several pieces of information that I used in this editorial, and I am exceptionally grateful to her, as well as the unnamed informants, for everything they shared. Hearing their stories made it all the more important to me that Carol Ann's was given a chance to be heard again, and allowed me to preserve that much more of the Donahues' story than I would have been able to piece together from Russell Sage's side of the story alone.

It's my hope that Carol Ann Donahue's memorial collection can be admired for its compelling story and high-quality content. The immense love and grief that it represents, as well

as the achievement it is. The story deserves to be told, to be known. It's an honor to be able to bring this information together and present it to an audience.

We are grateful to Carol Ann Donahue and her family for enabling us to continue this good work and make all facets of The Rev program possible. It is an honor to support her legacy.

