Traditional Practices, Transformed Identities: 
Rhetoric and the Rise of New Women in the Pacific Northwest

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This research project will investigate how women in the Pacific Northwest used traditional practices to develop progressive political identities for themselves and the region. Preliminary research suggests that despite the benign appearance of activities such as the development of community cookbooks and performance of spiritual music, such activities facilitated significant changes. By recovering records of these practices, situating them in geographical and historical context, and tracing their effects, this project reveals how traditionally feminine activities played an important part in the development of political identities among women—as well as an ethos of gender equity—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Pacific Northwest. Moreover, this line of research illuminates the dynamic relationship between tradition and transformation, as well as the relationship between individual, political, and community identity.

This project, which constitutes one chapter of my current book project, is at a well-developed stage. In addition to gathering material for the project from several local and digital repositories, in 2009 I completed extensive archival and interdisciplinary research at the weeklong faculty seminar on “Reading Historic Cookbooks: A Structured Approach” at Harvard University.

If our LARC collaborative is funded, I will complete this chapter during summer 2011. Specifically, I will gather and analyze the few remaining primary sources needed from the Oregon Historical Society and University of Washington Special Collections, expand my current draft, and revise and edit the chapter.

My undergraduate mentee, Angela Leone, will contribute to the project’s evolution by obtaining and analyzing primary sources that illuminate the role of traditional forms of music in the transformation of Northwest women’s political identities. In addition, Angela will bring her considerable intelligence, creativity, and interdisciplinary perspective to bear on the project as we analyze primary and secondary sources as well as discuss drafts of our own manuscripts. Based on my previous work with Angela her teacher and academic advisor, I am confident she will be an asset to this project and that participation in LARC 2011 will advance her skills and goals.