

The MHR Collection at UNL

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Some of you were present at the MEI Membership Meeting in March 2009, when I mentioned that I was speaking with the Oberlin Conservatory librarian. For several years now, folks have sent me their “archives” from ETM days: books, photos, video tapes, course materials, and so on. So, I have been storing them in my Montana home.

In speaking with Fleurette, I also realized that, as she said, “We are the holders of the history of Education Through Music.” What was to become of all these documents and memories of our formative years? At one time, I believed that I should write “the story,” and would rely on these materials to craft and document that story. But, other interests have now taken me away from that path. Again, what would become of all these historical relics of the development of work that was so important to us?

After some consideration, the Oberlin librarian decided that we just have no more room for an additional collection. She also recommended that I donate the collection to a university that offered both masters and doctoral programs, so that the materials could be accessible for those with research interests.

I took several months to ponder the question of “where should this material go?” Then, one day in my office, I realized that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was the logical choice. UNL is not only Mary Helen’s alma mater (she received her Bachelor of Music in Education in 1944), UNL also awarded her an honorary Doctor of Music degree on May 13, 1978. This honor was spearheaded by long-time ETM teacher and supporter, Dorothy Kozak, who was a professor of music education at UNL for many years.

The UNL library is eager to accept our materials and artifacts as the Mary Helen Richards Collection, and I have been busy this summer, reading through my files, sorting materials, and copying personal letters and documents to keep for my own files. I am definitely a saver of information! And, it has been quite interesting to reminisce and recall the good times, as well as those difficult years when “leaving” Education Through Music and the Richards Institute was necessary. So much of the details and communications, I had forgotten. I certainly have been reminded in the past few weeks!

If you have any personal materials you would like to donate, please contact me and I will let you know if there is any duplication of materials already sent. My goal is to have boxes shipped to the library by mid-August. I will certainly let you know when the “collection” is announced.

As I spent many hours and days and weeks reading, organizing, collating, listing, and transcribing, I felt the sense of importance for investing this time so that our history would be preserved. I do hope that belief comes true and that there will be those who want to know and understand what all of us worked for, for so many years of our careers.