We are deeply saddened to report the passing of Karyl Winn, who for more than forty years helped UW Libraries collect and preserve the historical records of our state and region. A great friend to the History Department, Winn was tireless in her pursuit of one-of-a-kind manuscripts and archival materials, so that historians now and in the future would have access to these indispensable artifacts.  

In her role as curator of manuscripts, Winn worked closely with History Department faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates, helping with research and guiding scholars through the rich resources of Special Collections in the UW Libraries.

The collections Winn established are her most lasting legacy. She was keenly interested in preserving our regional history, and persuaded hundreds of individuals and organizations to donate their records. An avid outdoorswoman, one of her favorite treasures was the collected records of the Mountaineers, the 112-year-old Seattle-based environmentalist organization. Labor and civil rights history were two other passions. The scores of collections that she brought in anchor the Labor Archives of Washington, a dedicated unit in the library that was established in the wake of her retirement to continue the work she had begun.

Professor John Findlay worked with Karyl Winn for many years and shared some of his memories:

Karyl Winn was a staunch friend of the History Department. When I arrived in 1987 she made me feel very welcome in the Libraries' Manuscripts Collection and University Archives (which have since been consolidated into Special Collections). She was pleased that I worked on 20th-century topics, one of the strengths of the manuscripts collection she curated and maintained. And she routinely pointed me toward new or unknown-to-me collections that might help my research and teaching. This was the case for my research on the Seattle World's Fair of 1962, on the history of the university, and on the history of Hanford. Graduate and undergraduate students that I worked with received the same warm welcome and savvy advice that I did. I recall one of our PhD students partnering with Karyl to expand and develop UW Libraries' special collections in Jewish history. She was supportive in so many ways.

Furthermore, Findlay explains, her ties and service to the department went far beyond research. Winn had earned a master's degree in history from the UW, and “her interest in History and the History Department never flagged.” After retirement, she and her husband Norman regularly audited history courses as Access students. “She was always appreciative of these opportunities, and always eager...
On her passing Winn left a generous donation to the department that will be used to help us maintain the high quality of our teaching, scholarship, and civic engagement.

We thank her for her years of kindness and service and will use this gift to continue her important work of preserving the past, while looking to the future.