

**LOOK WHAT
HAPPENED
HERE:**

*North Carolina's
Feminary Collective*

by Tamara M. Powell

THE 1960S REVIVAL OF THE AMERICAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

centered on passing the Equal Rights Amendment. That goal failed, but its failure does not diminish the importance and accomplishments of “women’s lib,” including the accomplishments of the North Carolina-based feminist writing collective, *Feminary*. While then, just as now, women didn’t always agree on what exactly women’s liberation meant and how to achieve it, most agreed that the ultimate goal was to achieve more power for women in American society.

The desire for political change as a motivation for writing can result in powerful, lasting literary works that help later generations understand themselves better. It is this desire for political change that motivated the *Feminarians*: it is also what continues to fuel and empower the writings of Minnie Bruce Pratt, Mab Segrest, and Dorothy Allison, women who contributed to the periodical called *Feminary* and are still writing today.¹ The desire for political change as a motivation for writing makes the *Feminary* collective and the resulting journal *Feminary* an important part of North Carolina history and American women’s history. *Feminary*, a collectively written journal for women, was the source and backbone of contemporary Southern lesbian feminist theory.²

Collective work was viewed by many feminists as a method that could offset the hierarchical, patriarchal system perceived by the majority of Americans until the late ‘seventies as “normal” and “efficient” but by feminists as problematic and oppressive. Many feminists of the ‘sixties and ‘seventies believed that truly liberating writing had to be created collectively. From this premise sprang writing collectives, groups of people who live and work together without an appointed leader, much like a co-op; they were widely regarded as highly successful operations. These collectives often created journals and other venues for publishing the writings of their members. The best-known collectives are Conditions

¹ North Carolina residents Minnie Bruce Pratt and Mab Segrest, along with Susan Ballinger, Helen Langa, Deborah Giddens, and Durham native Cris South (author of *Clenched Fists, Burning Crosses: A Novel of Resistance from Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984*) helped to restart *Feminary* in 1978 after a hiatus of about a year

² Copies of *Feminary* are archived in Duke University’s Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, and are also available in the North Carolina Collection of Wilson Library at UNC-Chapel Hill.