

Series 289 – County Historian Files (10.5 cubic ft.)**Series 293 – County Historian Videotapes (2.16 cubic ft.)****Processed by: Linda Swanson****Background:**

Although Westchester County has always had volunteer historians, Susan Swanson was the first individual to be paid in that position, from 1984 until it was terminated due to budget cuts in 1995. There were earlier attempts to cut funding to the position in 1991 but it was reinstated after a number of Swanson's colleagues in local government and at various local historical societies wrote letters on her behalf. After 1995, the role of County Historian remained unfilled until 2006 when the Westchester County Historical Society was officially given the title.

The role of County Historian as performed by Swanson was varied; and as a result, the papers documenting her work cover a wide range of topics. For example, because she was the County Historian during the Bicentennial of the United States' Constitution (1987), Swanson initiated and participated in many lectures and interactive events to highlight public participation in government. She explored the United States' "Freedom of the Press" and initiated some town meetings and other local events celebrating the country's heritage in connection with this anniversary. Swanson also worked closely with County Executive Andrew O'Rourke and other members of the county government as County Historian and was active in many county-wide meetings preparing for Westchester 2000. This work included discussions on Westchester County transportation issues including roadway congestion, airport expansion, and housing and employment issues. Swanson also participated in roundtables with other local historians. Together, they sought to introduce more educational programs of a historical nature into Westchester schools. Promoting Westchester tourism was another focal point for Swanson as County Historian. Finally, Swanson conducted an extensive oral history project during her tenure, capturing on videotape the memories of some former and current leaders of the county.

Swanson received numerous awards for her contributions as Westchester's County Historian, including the New York State Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution Outstanding Civic Leadership Award in 1988, the Lower Hudson Conference of Historical Agencies and Museums' Historical Services Award for Excellence for the brochure "Westchester County: Architecture on Tour" (1988), and the National Association of Counties' 1990 Achievement Award for "Westchester Celebrates, 'We The People': Freedom of the Press," among others.

Collection Description – Series 289:

This collection is divided into eight subseries: Bicentennial of the Constitution, County Executive, County Government, County Historian, Historic Preservation Advisory Committee, Municipal Historians, Westchester 2000 and Westchester County. The bulk of the collection is found in the County Government subseries, and includes committees the County Historian participated in, such as Budget,

Women's Advisory Committee, and Youth Board. In addition to correspondence and memoranda found throughout the subseries, there are some newspaper clippings and an occasional cartoon illustrating the prominent issues of the time. Some of these were the lack of affordable housing in Westchester County, the need for a greatly expanded airport and new roads, emerging women's issues, and growing concerns about waste removal and ecological issues.

Also highlighted in the collection is the educational role Swanson sought to play as County Historian in promoting the American system of government, especially to young people. This role was highlighted during the celebrations related to the Bicentennial of the Constitution. Preserving Westchester's heritage and history, including emphasizing the need for architectural preservation, was another focal point of Swanson's time as County Historian. The collection includes information on promoting tourism along with publications showing Westchester attractions. Finally, included throughout are pamphlets and other samplings of Swanson's published writings.

Collection Description – Series 293:

Videotapes created and collected by Susan Swanson during her tenure as Westchester's County Historian (1984-1995). The most extensive part of this collection is made up of oral history interviews conducted by Swanson and others of individuals who held positions of leadership within Westchester County both currently and in the past. Interviewees include county executives, legislators, district attorneys, and department commissioners, among others. See finding aid for complete listing of individuals interviewed. For some interviewees, interview notes used in preparation for and/or during the interview are also available, as noted in the finding aid.

Other videos in the collection include information about the Bicentennial of the United States' Constitution (a subject covered in detail during Swanson's time as County Historian); a 1948 documentary prepared by the United States Information Service about "County Government" extolling the virtues of democratic government which used Westchester County as its example; and a time-lapse film of the construction of the county courthouse in White Plains from 1972-1974.