

In Memoriam

LOUISE ROSENFELD NOUN (1908–2002)

LOUISE ROSENFELD NOUN, social activist, historian, art collector, and leader in the Iowa women's movement, died Friday, August 23, 2002, in Des Moines at the age of 94. The author of several books on Iowa women's history and founder with Mary Louise Smith of the Iowa Women's Archives, Noun's contributions to Iowa women's history are unparalleled. But she is also widely recognized for her activism on behalf of civil liberties and in improving women's lives.

Noun's activism dates from 1944, when she joined the League of Women Voters of Des Moines. She developed her leadership skills in the League, working on campaigns for a city manager form of government and for reapportionment of the Iowa legislature. After 1960, Noun devoted her energy to the Iowa Civil Liberties Union. As president (1964–1972), Noun led the effort to protect the free speech of high school students in the celebrated *Tinker v. Des Moines* case.

Noun became interested in the woman suffrage movement in Iowa when asked to give a speech on the subject. The topic so intrigued her that she began to research it in depth. She synthesized her research in *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (1969).

After 1970, Noun's activism and her interest in women's history can hardly be separated. A founder of the Des Moines chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and a charter member of the Iowa Women's Political Caucus, Noun was also instrumental in establishing the Young Women's Resource Center, which opened in 1978 to offer counseling and group activities for teenaged girls in Des Moines. Noun later used interviews with women she had worked with during this period as the basis for *More Strong-Minded Women: Iowa Feminists Tell Their Stories* (1992).

Continuing her activism on behalf of women, Noun created the Chrysalis Foundation in 1989. Among its earliest projects was an emergency fund for women students at Des Moines Area Community College; Noun realized that traditional financial aid programs failed to address the most basic barriers to women's education, such as lack of child care and broken-down cars.

In addition to her activism, Noun continued to research and write books on topics that interested her. *Journey to Autonomy* (1990) is Noun's account of her struggle to gain self-confidence. In 1999 she published *Iowa Women in the WPA*, treating a long-neglected subject. Her most recent book, a biography of the suffragist Annie Savery, will be published by the Iowa Women's Archives this fall under the title *Leader and Pariah: Annie Savery and the Campaign for Women's Rights in Iowa, 1868-1891*.

In 1992 Noun realized a long-term goal with the opening of the Iowa Women's Archives at the University of Iowa Libraries. In her research she had been struck by how few historical sources on Iowa women had been preserved. To ensure that such records would be saved in the future, Noun created a \$1.5 million endowment for the archives by selling the Frida Kahlo painting *Self-Portrait with Loose Hair*.

Through her scholarship and her activism Louise Noun has preserved the voices of countless Iowa women, and helped others to find their way in the world. She will be remembered as a scholar, an activist, and a strong-minded woman who lived life on her own terms.

—Karen Mason, Iowa Women's Archives

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