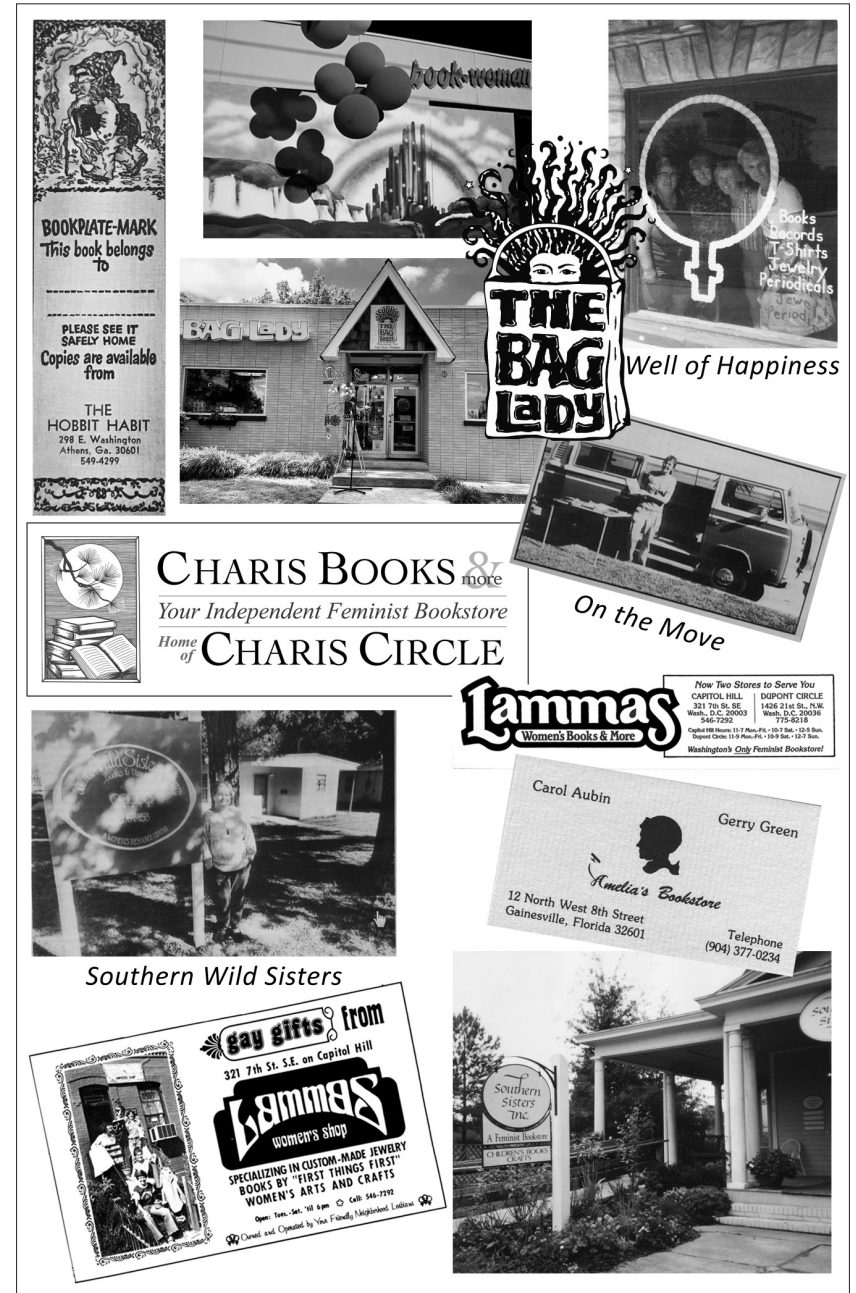


We flee to baseball for hidden fun under the bleachers,
To political campaigns desperate for change.
We meet in writers' circles, witches' circles, feminists' circles.
We are a well-rounded group of refugees.

Potluck suppers recall family reunions under the pecan trees.
We recreate the familial closeness with our own clubs and gatherings.
In celebrations we share the love that is ours,
And hope, for a brighter future,
Where darkness is no longer a necessity.

BOOKSTORE COLLAGE

Suzanne Barbara



Credit next page

Suzanne Barbara designed this collage of feminist bookstores, from upper left and continuing clockwise: The Hobbit Habit (courtesy of Linda Yates), BookWoman (photo by Kay Keys), The Well of Happiness (courtesy of Edie Daly), The Bag Lady (courtesy of Susan Burns), On the Move (courtesy of Cybilla Hawk), Lammas (courtesy of Deb Morris), Amelia's (courtesy of Barbara Esrig), Southern Sisters (courtesy of Melody Ivins), Lammas (courtesy of Deb Morris), Southern Wild Sisters (courtesy of Wanda Henson), Charis Books (courtesy of E.R. Anderson).

“YOU HAD TO BE PASSIONATE AND CRAZY”: FEMINIST BOOKSELLERS IN THE SOUTH

Rose Norman

When Teresa Williams thinks about the bookstore she opened in Columbia, SC, in 1991, she remembers, “The day I opened Bluestocking Books was the day I became an activist.”¹

For Williams, as for most second-wave feminist booksellers, bookstores were a crucial part of building feminist community and networking, and have been important sites of lesbian-feminist activism since the first stores began opening all over the country in the 1970s.² They carried hard-to-find books and usually subscribed to feminist newspapers not found elsewhere, like *off our backs* and *Sojourner*. Their bulletin boards publicized local events, and they might sell tickets to concerts by feminist singers. While providing space as an alternative to the bars where women could hang out and meet other lesbians, bookstores also functioned as places where lesbians could organize and could meet before actions, such as marches. People would call the bookstore seeking roommates, health care, counseling for domestic violence, emergency housing—the list was endless.

1 Teresa Williams, “Warrior Mother,” *Southern Perspectives on the Queer Movement*, ed. Sheila R. Morris (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), p.191. Bluestocking Books in Columbia, SC (1991–94), has no relation to the Bluestockings bookstore in New York City, operating since 1999.

2 Two important books document the feminist bookstore movement: Junko Onosaka, *Feminist Revolution in Literacy: Women’s Bookstores in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2006), and Kristen Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

The number of feminist bookstores peaked at about 130 in the United States and Canada by 1996.³ The fact that at least nineteen of those stores were in Southern states may come as a surprise, given the South’s conservatism and the bi-coastal focus of contemporary histories and memoirs of the women’s liberation movement.⁴ Moreover, eleven of the stores that sprouted in the 1970s were in Southern states, if we extend our definition of the South north to include Maryland and Washington, DC, and west to include Texas. Southern states were home to nearly fifty feminist bookstores at one time or another over the last three decades of the twentieth century.⁵

What do these numbers say, and what difference does it make to look at feminist bookstores in the South in those decades? Region becomes especially significant when you place Southern stores in the context of the overall decline in numbers of feminist bookstores. Several of the earliest Southern stores were at the boundaries of the South—Austin, TX, and Washington, DC—but

3 Junko Onosaka gives the figure as 143 (p. 146), taking this figure from Carol Seajay’s *Feminist Bookstore News*, 19.6, 1997, but Onosaka seems to be using a broad interpretation of “feminist bookstore.” Carol Seajay considers 130 to be closer to accurate. This is the number that Kristen Hogan gives (also citing *FBN*), p. xv. Alexis Clements transcribed and posted online a spreadsheet of 100 Feminist Bookstores in the U.S. in 1994/95, originally distributed by *Feminist Bookstore News*, <https://fusiontables.google.com/DataSource?docid=14VUTtasfATkWmP61SclmzRLju3MX6M2rcMouyY>

4 For example, *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women’s Liberation* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), contains the voice of only one Southerner, out of over thirty contributors. More recently, Gail Collins’ *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (New York: Little, Brown, 2009) includes the South primarily in her chapter on the civil rights movement, and has little to say about lesbians anywhere. Documenting lesbian-feminist activism in the South is the focus of our ongoing project.

5 Our timeline includes start dates for forty-eight stores, but we also found *Feminist Bookstore News* references to others for which we have no start or end dates. Some of these may have been announced or dreamed of, but never actually opened.

Charis Books opened in 1974 in Atlanta, deep in the South, and Herstore opened that same year in Tallahassee, in the staunchly conservative Florida panhandle, with Dorothy Allison as manager! If nothing else, the number and longevity of Southern feminist bookstores testifies to the bravery and perseverance of lesbian-feminists in the South.

By the spring of 2019, the count of feminist bookstores was down to about twenty in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.⁶ Of those bookstores founded in the twentieth century and still in business, four (20%) are in Southern states: Charis Books and More in Atlanta, GA; BookWoman and Resistencia Bookstore, both in Austin, TX; and The Bag Lady in Charlotte, NC. All four have struggled to survive, as have feminist booksellers, and independent booksellers generally, across the nation.

This essay and the accompanying timeline of feminist booksellers pay homage to those in the South that came and went, mostly through the diligent efforts of lesbian-feminists, often at considerable personal sacrifice, and always with passion and commitment to feminist values. I first learned about the crisis in feminist bookselling at *Womonwrites* in 2000, when Sara Luce Look of Charis Books and More gave a workshop about what was happening to Charis and other stores. Carol Seajay's *Feminist Bookstore News*, founded in 1976, had closed that year, and the total number of stores was at seventy-four. By 2002, it was thirty-eight. I have been interviewing feminist booksellers

and publishers around the United States and Canada off and on since 2000.⁷

For over forty years, independent bookstores—and even some chains (Crown Books, B. Dalton, Waldenbooks, Borders)—have been squeezed and forced out of business as large corporations bought up publishing companies and began focusing on higher profits and greater volume than had been the practice in publishing for most of the twentieth century.⁸ By 2000, online sales were challenging the customer base for all brick-and-mortar stores.

Feminist bookselling has had its own special challenges. Feminist bookstores were often run by collectives that were progressive and idealistic about business (e.g., not making a profit off of women), and/or by activists with little or no business experience. These feminist bookstores sometimes emphasized activism over bookselling, and some owners were primarily interested in sharing the ideas and information in books while creating a space for feminist empowerment and networking. Other booksellers were financial wizards, Carol Seajay notes, and many would agree with this statement from a 1975 Washington, DC, store newsletter: "For women to build a realistic economic base, we must realize our skills are not 'for free,' i.e. worthless. We shall support ourselves as workers!"⁹

7 Interviews in 2000 with booksellers across the country and Canada led to these publications: "Shrinking Shelves: What's Happening to Feminist Bookstores?" *Women's Review of Books*, 19.3 (December 2001): 11-13; "Support Your Feminist Bookseller: She Supports You." *NWSA Action*, 13.1 (Fall 2001): 30-32. I began interviewing only Southern booksellers in 2012. Some of the booksellers interviewed were lesbian allies but not lesbian-identified: Heather Rudzika-Furr (Lodestar), Melody Ivins (Southern Sisters), and Hope Swann and Susan Burns (Bag Lady).

8 An excellent description and analysis of the corporatization of publishing is Andre Schiffrin's *The Business of Books: How International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (New York: Verso, 2000), which Onosaka draws on and applies to feminist publishing and bookselling.

9 Qtd. by Onosaka, p. 106, from the newsletter *First Things First—Books for Women* (March 1975).

6 This number draws on online sources listed at the beginning of the bookstore timeline, as well as several articles. Most recently, ElectricLit.com encourages readers to "Give Your Money to These 13 Feminist Bookstores," January 18, 2019, including stores in the UK and New Zealand and adding a store in Harlem (Manhattan) that other lists had missed, but overlooking BookWoman. <https://electricliterature.com/give-your-money-to-these-13-feminist-bookstores>.

The Feminist Bookstore Network and *Feminist Bookstore News* stayed well-informed about industry changes and provided substantial support to feminist booksellers facing these challenges. Carol Seajay points out that “feminist bookstores had a significantly higher survival rate than general independent bookstores until Amazon.com began marketing pointedly—and successfully—to lesbian and gay and feminist reading communities, many of whom initially thought that Amazon.com was a successful project of Amazon, the feminist bookstore in Minneapolis.”¹⁰ This article tells some of their stories.

Lammas Women’s Books and More (1973–2000) in Washington, DC, one of the earliest and longest-lasting feminist bookstores in the country, was in many ways typical of these booksellers’ combination of activism and cultural work. Mary Farmer owned Lammas from 1976 to 1993 and made it a feminist gathering and organizing place. Farmer was also a co-organizer of the second Women in Print Conference, held in DC in 1981.¹¹ Longtime store manager Deb Morris describes her Lammas experience in ways that will be familiar to many feminist booksellers:

I can’t tell you how many calls I fielded for referring services for women in distress, either directly or through concerned friends or family. There was an opportunity to recommend books for family members looking for material to provide appropriate information on the body and sexuality for young people. It was a meeting place for women in the community and for women coming into town for a few days or for a march. It was resource for cultural

events, readings, book signings—over a thousand people came to the event for Lily Tomlin and Jane Wagner. It was a source for music by the burgeoning women’s music scene, through records, CDs, and ticket sales.¹²

At the western end of what can be called “the South” is Austin, TX, where another of the first—and now one of the oldest—feminist bookstores opened in 1975: the Common Woman Bookstore Collective, later re-named BookWoman. Feminist collectives were popular in the 1970s, and often short-lived. As a cofounder of the Common Woman Bookstore Collective, Susan Post went from volunteering at the bookstore one night a week to housing all the books in her home and to running the store with a partner after the collective dissolved. After buying out her business partner, Post has been running the store at different locations ever since, though she prefers to think of herself as the “caretaker” rather than the “owner.” She sees herself as a cultural worker and has trained many a bookseller over the years, including Kristen Hogan, author of *The Feminist Bookstore Movement* (2016). Asked how BookWoman has survived when so many others did not, she said, “Number one: I’m stubborn. Number two: when the chips were down, the community has come through.” For example, when rents in her neighborhood began going up about ten years ago, community fundraising enabled her to move.

Post emphasizes BookWoman’s role in providing safe space: “I can’t tell you how many times women have told me that this was a safe place, that they didn’t know what they wanted, but came into BookWoman and found it.”¹³ The store has also become safe space for Austin’s trans community. The Transfeminisms Reading Group meets at BookWoman monthly with twenty-five people

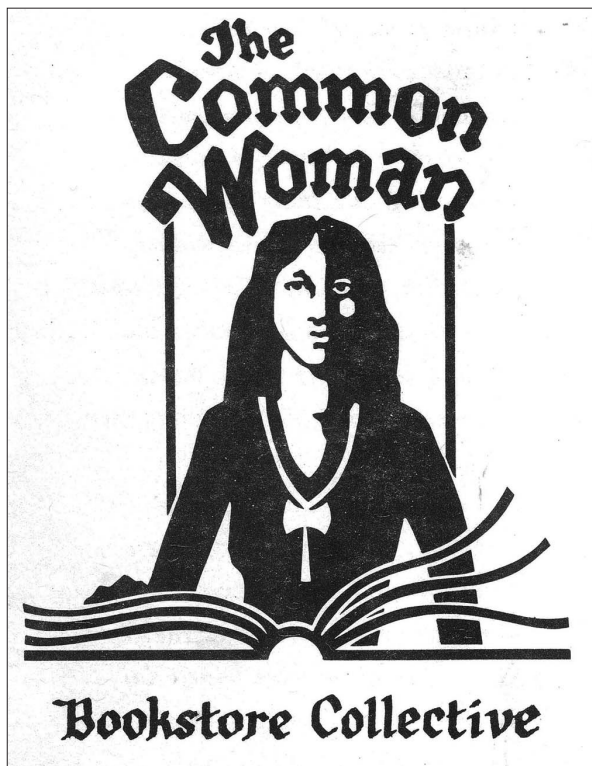
10 Quoted from Seajay’s comments on an early draft of this essay. Kristen Hogan’s book is especially useful in tracing the ways the Feminist Bookstore Network educated its members and influenced publishers.

11 For more on Women in Print, see Jaime Harker’s story, this issue.

12 Morris is quoted from an email interview with Rose Norman, June 5, 2017.

13 Rose Norman interviewed Susan Post by phone on August 28, 2019.

attending regularly and filling the store with “fun and festive energy.” Post observes that the Trump era has been “good for feminism,” saying “I feel privileged to witness and participate as the issues encountered and the scholarship and personal stories are hashed out—I believe the whole political climate has energized feminism.”



BookWoman began as
The Common Woman Bookstore Collective

Womankind Books, open from 1977 to 1983 in Nashville, TN, is a strong example of activism nourished by a feminist bookstore. Several groups formed there over the course of five years, starting in 1977—a Vanderbilt health care group, a group of people who lived in the country and didn't have access

to books, Take Back the Night marches. Owner Carole Powell made sure the store didn't exclude people along lines of race, education, class, and income. Social service agencies got her to volunteer to go to prisons and do book groups with male sexual offenders. The store sent their catalog to 1,000 women in Tennessee and responded to requests for referrals to doctors, lawyers, therapists, and artists. All of this activism led to the creation of an organization, the Womankind Support Project, which became an umbrella for other feminist organizations.¹⁴ Womankind Books also sponsored many concerts of women's music and, with Olivia Records, organized the first national conference of women's record label distributors. “That was a pretty phenomenal concept,” Powell says. “What they [Olivia] did was that all of these women had a nationwide organization for concerts and record distribution. It's also phenomenal that this was in the '70s in Nashville, in the Bible Belt” (December 31, 2012).

Whereas Nashville had a store that led to an organization, Gainesville, FL, had an organization that led to a store, and then another store, and finally another store that was open until 2017.¹⁵ Gerry Green explains: “In 1975 a group of wimmin formed an umbrella organization called Women Unlimited, which ultimately would include Womanbooks (the first feminist bookstore in Gainesville), *WomaNews* (a radical feminist monthly newsletter), and the Women's Center, where wimmin could meet and organize,” all in one location. When WomanBooks ended, Gerry Green and Carol Aubin bought the stock and started Amelia's Books in a nearby location. Gerry Green continues:

¹⁴ See Merrill Mushroom, “The Womankind Support Project in Nashville,” *Sinister Wisdom* 93 (Spring 2014): 100-104.

¹⁵ See also “Women Unlimited, Gainesville, Florida” *Sinister Wisdom* 109 (Summer 2018): 21-23).

The idea of the bookstore initially was not only having a source for wimmin's books, but just as important . . . a gathering place to bring women together . . . to get the word out about feminism. . . . The Friday Night Wine Down [became] a real social place for people to come, and if they bought something they could get a glass of wine. Having Wine Down helped sell books, but the main thing was to get people into the store and get wimmin together. . . . [T]he most important thing was to bring in as many women as we could, and that's the way our consciousness was raised. Consciousness, I think, was really one of the main goals.¹⁶



Photo courtesy of Barbara Esrig

Amelia's Books in the 1970s

From 1982 to 1992, Gainesville had no feminist bookstore, but in the fall of 1992, Susan Keel and Karey Godwin started Wild Iris

in a building close to the site of Amelia's Books. In 1996, Dotty Faibisy and Bev White bought it from them, and under various owners Wild Iris lasted well into the new millennium. Its last co-owner, Erica Rodriguez Merrell, a young heterosexual woman from Miami, had been a bookseller for six years when her boyfriend (now husband) took her to Wild Iris, the first feminist bookstore she had ever seen. She loved it, and after two years of volunteering became a co-owner with Cheryl Calhoun. Merrell later helped broaden the store's audience to embrace intersectionality and the broader queer community. Looking back on its long history, Merrell reflected: "There's been challenges, but it's been a part of everything good that's happened in Gainesville."¹⁷ When Wild Iris closed on December 23, 2017, it was Florida's last feminist bookstore.

Faye Williams was working as a marketer for a friend's consignment store in Washington, DC, when she became aware that some customers were dealing with domestic violence and mental health issues. Starting by adding a book section and organizing workshops, she eventually moved next door and opened what may have been the first Black feminist bookstore in the country, Sisterspace and Books (1994–2004 and 2009–11). As the name she chose indicates, Sisterspace was always a place for nurturing Black women's community as well as a bookstore (see story, this issue).

Similarly, Martha Cabrera envisioned her San Antonio bookstore, Textures, (1992–99) as "a safe place for women to talk," while meeting the needs of an underserved population.¹⁸ A decade before Textures, San Antonio had Las Mujeres, a volunteer-run women's bookstore that one of its volunteers also describes as a

¹⁷ Quoted by Molly Minter, "A New Chapter," *The Fine Print*, March 5, 2018, <http://thefineprintmag.org/a-new-chapter/>.

¹⁸ Quoted in Elda Silva's profile of Textures in *Feminist Bookstore News* 15.6 (March/April 93): 30.

¹⁶ Barbara Esrig interviewed Gerry Greene on March 16, 2015.

“safe” place: “Safe in the sense that hopefully there’s not going to be any gay-bashing. . . . You’re not going to be harassed. You’re accepted for who you are Biases are left outside It should be a place to meet and be with friends.”¹⁹

Like Faye Williams and Martha Cabrera, Audrey May conceived of her store, Meristem Books & More for Women and Their Friends, as more than a bookstore. In some respects, the books and magazines were incidental to the initial impulse of the store. “Meristem” is a botanical term for the type of plant cells that carry a plant’s identity, so a snapdragon remembers it’s a snapdragon, a tomato remembers it’s a tomato, etc. Audrey May and her then-partner Vickie Scarborough chose the name for their store to convey a sense of “carrying on from generation to generation and knowing who we are.”²⁰ Meristem opened in Memphis, TN, in 1990, and Audrey May ran it until 1998. May’s background was in social work, and she wanted a gathering place for women to find information, sell their crafts, etc. The real impulse came from visiting Southern Wild Sisters Unlimited, the feminist bookstore run by Brenda and Wanda Henson in Gulfport, MS. May thought that if such a store could survive in a small conservative town like Gulfport, it surely could in Memphis. She was right. For a while.

Pokey Anderson had been a lesbian-feminist activist for ten years in another large Southern city, Houston, when she and Annise Parker (later mayor of Houston—an out lesbian!), started Inklings Bookshop (1988-2000). Anderson describes the relationship of feminist bookstores to community building:

Communities need various things to exist, actual places to meet, communication systems like radio programs and newsletters, entertainment and culture—bars, concerts, poetry readings, basketball

games, ways to bring people together in harmony of who they are and why they’re there. Bookstores function as a lot of those things, as a way of communicating, as community centers. They help build the rest of the infrastructure. In an average year we might sell \$6,000 to \$10,000 in tickets for various groups, usually without a cut of any kind. Most of those groups didn’t have a place where somebody could come and buy a ticket. . . . As an activist for all those years, I know that you can create wonderful things out of the trunk of your car, but at some point, to get traction and build a community, there have to be things like employees and at least rented space. On the internet, it’s easy to feel you are connected, but when it comes down to it, there are things a virtual community can’t do that a flesh and blood community can, and that’s what a feminist bookstore is: flesh and blood community.²¹

“Flesh and blood community” is what Black feminist scholar Alexis Pauline Gumbs found at Charis Books and More in Atlanta in the ‘90s. Gumbs was only fourteen in 1996 when the feminist bookstore movement peaked, but she had the good fortune to find the Young Women’s Writing Group sponsored by Charis’s new programming and fundraising organization, Charis Circle. That youthful experience was so important to her that she has launched all of her books from Charis, though she has not lived in Atlanta since high school. She credits becoming a Black feminist to the collected poems of Audre Lorde, a book she found there. Those weekly Young Women’s Writing Group meetings provided her with a grounding context for seeing her own writing in a communal space surrounded by her peers and by the works of other women writers.

19 Quoted by Elda Silva, *op cit.*, p 30.

20 Rose Norman interviewed Audrey May by phone August 2, 2001.

21 Rose Norman interviewed Pokey Anderson by phone on August 9 and 16, 2001.

We met in what was really a storage closet! . . . It was a tiny, tiny room mostly full of books, . . . amazing books like *Sister Outsider*, and sometimes we would just open a book and take a prompt. . . . I can't imagine not having an intergenerational approach, very clearly making visible the feminist writers that came before me. That was the context in which I became a writer. . . . To have a collective, feminist writing space—for real, not just because there are young women there, but one that is actually feminist in its values and practices—has made so much possible. I never took it for granted. I always felt grateful for it, but I don't think I understood just how *queer* in the transformative sense, and how rare it was. . . . Of course, they are bookstores, but it's not just a place you go to consume, but a place you go to understand that you are regenerating a tradition, are part of a tradition. Why are you buying feminist children's books? Because you actually are producing feminism into the future!²²

Lodestar Books was that transformative space for lesbian-feminists in Birmingham, AL, and environs, from 1983 until about 2002. Beth Gundersen, who grew up in Birmingham, was a Lodestar co-owner during a period when the store became a vital part of the progressive community in Birmingham, 1987–99. She describes the diversity of feminist bookstores generally and Lodestar in particular:

Feminist bookstores are pretty magical places. They hold a place for so many different groups and people. We were a feminist bookstore, so we served the metaphysical community, the gay and lesbian community, the recovery community. There's a

big Friends of Carl Jung group in Birmingham that began about that time, so we had a huge Jungian psychology section. So many people from so many different walks of life walked through the door, and they would run into each other and cross over. People would be exposed to things. The Quakers met there for a while. We published an alternative newspaper out of the back room. NOW met there. We had a poetry night every month, lots of authors, both local and people on book tours. Well-known lesbian authors like Leslie Feinberg and Minnie Bruce Pratt did readings there.²³

Theresa "Terri" Barry and her then-partner Joan Mayfield started the first feminist bookstore in Virginia, Labrys Books, in the living room of their Richmond home, which, luckily, was zoned both commercial and residential. It was 1977, they were in their twenties, and they had gone on a coast-to-coast trip to visit rock shops and women's bookstores. When they got back, Barry says,

we thought we kind of had what we needed to get started. We didn't exactly, but we adapted. We started taking the bookstore with us just about everywhere. If there was a conference, we were there. If there were workshops, we would teach some of them. I started teaching things at sci-fi workshops, sci-fi by women. Joan knew about mysteries. If there was some other workshop they needed, we'd figure it out and teach it. We would throw those fifty-pound boxes of books in the car and head out.²⁴

²³ Rose Norman interviewed Beth Gundersen by phone on December 7, 2015.

²⁴ Rose Norman interviewed Terri Barry by phone on December 5, 2015.

²² Rose Norman interviewed Alexis Pauline Gumbs in Atlanta on June 8, 2019.

After Labrys Books closed, Beth Marschak and others opened WomensBooks in Richmond, organizing it as a co-op and starting out in the YWCA downtown in 1981. When they outgrew the space at the Y, they moved to the basement of Fare Share Food Co-op near Virginia Commonwealth University. When a progressive bookstore, Phoenix Rising, opened, and chain stores began carrying lesbian books, their sales began to fall off. Marschak says, "We felt it didn't make sense to cling on until we gradually went out of business. It made more sense to consciously close, so we negotiated with Phoenix Rising, and they bought a lot of our stock."²⁵

Edie Daly and her then-partner Doreen Brand opened the Well of Happiness when they moved from New York to St. Petersburg, FL, where Daly had grown up. "We wanted to find the Lesbians," Daly writes, "so we had this idea that we would open a Women's Bookstore and the Lesbians would find us. With \$1,500 and three boxes of Naiad Press novels, in April 1982, we opened our bookstore in a vacant storefront next to the gay bar on Madeira Beach [The Other End], and hoped for the best. The best did happen, and within three months we knew 150 Lesbians."²⁶ At that time, it was the only feminist bookstore in Florida. Amelia's had closed in 1982, although Rubyfruit Books would open in Tallahassee in 1983 (see story, this issue). They had no business experience, and asked the two women who ran the gay bar next door to handle ordering books and records. Because of the small feminist community, they never expected it to be profitable, and after a year handed it over to Pam Morse and Tee Smith, who tried to keep it going, first in the storefront, later in their home.

²⁵ Rose Norman interviewed Beth Marschak by phone on November 18, 2015.

²⁶ Edited from an email interview with Edie Daly (aka Edie Feather), March 25, 2019. Daly's oral herstory is also part of the Old Lesbians Oral History Project, archived at Smith College. Her papers from the Well of Happiness and other activism are archived in Special Collections at USF Tampa, <https://digital.lib.usf.edu/SFS0031833/00001>

Edie recalls: "I was elated that our dream of 'finding the Lesbians' came true. It was like putting out seed. The women flocked in and we grew into a wonderful, more than twenty-year Lesbian Community. It was truly a dream whose time had come."²⁷

In 1987, Cybilla Hawk came up with an idea for avoiding some of the overhead of maintaining a space for a bookstore. She started a mobile bookstore out of her 1978 VW van. Her initial stock came from the Well of Happiness. She ran On the Move from 1987 to 1997, traveling to all kinds of women's events in Florida (where she lived in St. Petersburg, then Tampa), as well as to five of the six Rhythm Fest women's music festivals (first in Georgia, later in the Carolinas). She would stock up on what would be popular for a particular event, and then haul a dozen or more publishers' boxes, and a few sidelines (bumper stickers, pins, bags). She never made a profit (maybe \$50 one year), but thoroughly enjoyed this way of "tipping over patriarchy," to paraphrase her favorite bumper sticker.

Another feminist bookstore that arose out of lesbian-feminist activism was Southern Sisters in Durham, NC, owned by Dorothy "Cookie" Teer and a group of friends that she convinced to invest in it. Cookie, and her bookstore manager, Melody Ivins, tell the story:²⁸

Cookie: I came to feminism through . . . the anti-pornography feminist movement. Andrea Dworkin was one of my mentors and a very good friend. . . . An outgrowth of that was working with women in systems of prostitution. We did a billion slideshows. . . . How Southern Sisters got born was that I was having dinner with a friend, Jane Ryan, and I was saying we should picket

²⁷ For more about the activities that came out of The Well of Happiness, see Edie Daly, "Salon in St. Petersburg, Florida: A Living Prose Poem," *Sinister Wisdom* 93 (Summer 2014): 37-41.

²⁸ Rose Norman interviewed Cookie Teer and Melody Ivins together at Cookie Teer's home in Durham, NC, July 11, 2015.

the *Durham Morning Herald* about their coverage of AIDS. Jane didn't think that picketing was the best use of our time. So Jane said, "How about if we do a bookstore?" That had never crossed my mind before. [But she went home, called some friends, and organized co-owners.]

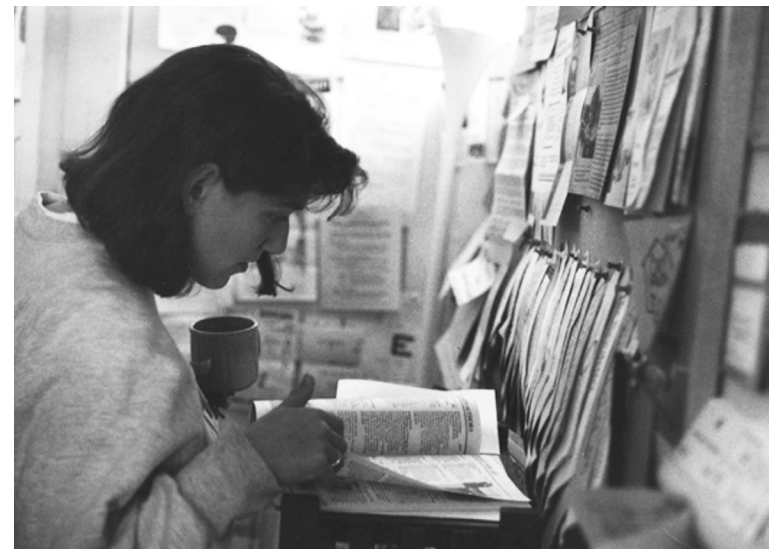
Now that we had the idea, I decided we wanted it in Durham, and I wanted it to stand alone and be something beautiful. I never saw myself as part of the Left, or a hippie, or any of that. We found the building, and then I knew Melody [Ivins], who managed the Women's Book Exchange, and that she knew everything about books. We didn't know squat about books. If we'd known what it was going to take, we wouldn't have done it! You had to be passionate and crazy.

Melody: We had opened the Women's Book Exchange in February 1983 with 200 books. [It was a library, not a store.] None of us had ever seen that many books about women in one place before. . . . People donated books, and we learned quickly what we needed and didn't need. We would make the rounds of the local bookstores and trade what we didn't need for books we did need. This was the most tremendous fun ever.

After amassing thousands of books and moving them to the Orange County Women's Center in Chapel Hill, the Women's Book Exchange met significant controversy about censorship. When a new Women's Center leader said the lesbian books had to be removed for the Book Exchange to remain in the Women's Center, they stored the collection, moved it to another location, and eventually donated the books to the Duke Women's Center. While working for the Women's Book Exchange, Melody became manager of Southern Sisters.

Melody: By the time of Southern Sisters, I had had five years managing the Women's Book Exchange. . . . The same sense of mission and the same passion for sharing information and learning from the people I met came with . . . Southern Sisters. Sexual abuse was just starting to be talked about. *The Courage to Heal* came out the first year Southern Sisters was open. Rape crisis. Everyone doing any kind of work passed through Southern Sisters.

Cookie: I don't think there was even a Women's Center in Durham during the years we had Southern Sisters [1988–95]. The store acted like that. It was the place where all these people would meet, the Ministry in the South crowd, various independent newspapers we had, really a congregation of organizations that ebbed and flowed in the 1980s. If we had a dollar for everyone who looked at the bulletin board!



Customer at the Southern Sisters bulletin board, probably 1990

Photo courtesy of Melody Ivins

Cookie: We also had a sidelines room. The cards were a big, big feature. . . . Another thing that was very successful was kids' books. We designated an entire room that was gorgeous. That was my favorite part of Southern Sisters. That brought in a lot more people who would normally be scared of feminism but were trying to be more progressive with their children. I was determined that feminism was going to look beautiful.

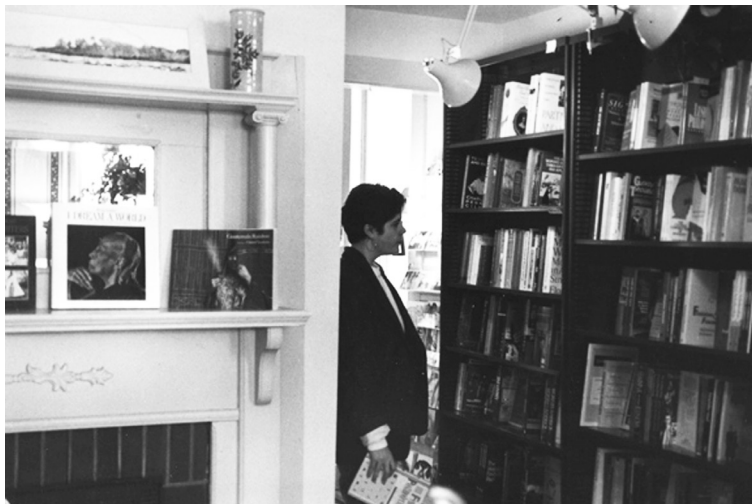


Photo courtesy of Melody Ivins

The beautiful interior of Southern Sisters, probably 1990

Nearly every feminist bookstore owner interviewed mentioned the importance of selling “sidelines” to make ends meet and keep the doors open. In 2001, Lodestar Books reported that for them sidelines were 65% of revenue and 25% of inventory cost. Audrey May at Meristem reported that she eventually went from 80% books to a mix of 60% books, 40% sidelines. That made the profit margin much greater, and it drew people in who were not necessarily readers or even feminists. “We became known as many things,” May said, “feminist, gay, pagan, or just a place to

get cool cards.” Lots of women would wear a button or a T-shirt, even if, or especially if reading wasn’t (yet) their thing. Feminist music became an important sideline, and stores like Womankind Books became Olivia distributors and concert producers as well.

The Bag Lady in Charlotte, NC, was among the last feminist bookstores to open in a Southern state in the twentieth century.²⁹ It opened in March 1995, the year before the number of feminist bookstores in the United States and Canada peaked, and it is still open today, though it has changed locations and owners several times. Like many feminist booksellers, Hope Swann had no business experience at all, and says she relied on the woman she called her “Vice Goddess,” Martha Harrell, who had the business sense and helped her make wise decisions about stock. Swann describes the many synchronicities and coincidences that led to opening the shop in “How I Became A Bag Lady” (2000).³⁰ She chose the name “Bag Lady” to empower a negative stereotype about women and redefine it as “a strong, resourceful woman who travels lightly, carries with her what she needs, and lives by her inner resources of wit, creativity, and compassion” (p. 224). The shop was about to close when it lost its lease in 2018, but then-owner Karen Coffin convinced her friend Susan Burns to buy it and find a new location while continuing her full-time job as administrator of a nonprofit. Burns had worked as a “Baggette” (as the staff call themselves) for ten years, and says that, like Hope Swann, she experienced many funny coincidences that led her to take on the store alongside her full-time job. She recalls that Hope Swann always insisted that “The Bag Lady” was an entity, perhaps their “patron goddess” or “the reincarnated soul of Susan B. Anthony We always feel that we’re channeling something—

²⁹ FBN indicates that the last store to open was First Women’s Books, a traveling bookstore based in Washington, DC.

³⁰ *Our Turn, Our Time: Women Truly Coming of Age*, ed. Cynthia Black (Beyond Words Publishing, 2000), 218-25.

saying, 'The Bag Lady told me to do it!'"³¹ Burns attributes some of The Bag Lady's continued success to an expanded children's book section emphasizing girl power.

Women of color are present throughout the feminist bookstore movement as owners, co-owners, staff members, and customers, but their presence is too often overlooked. Chela Sandoval observes that women of color engaged in feminist activism within other movements (Black Power, Chicano, civil rights, etc.) and that this mobility within movements has been read as absence.³² Carol Seajay notes that

the early feminist bookstore movement was preceded by the Black Liberation Movements of the 60s, which generated as many as sixty to eighty movement-oriented Black-owned bookstores (and numerous publishers), many of which were owned or co-owned or managed by Black women, all of whom distributed and supported Black literature with the same passion that feminist bookstores came to distribute and support feminist and lesbian literature. They were very parallel and sometimes overlapping political movements where sometimes Black feminists and Black lesbians felt more at home in one strand of the movement than in the other. Or in which the same women felt more comfortable in one place and then at another point in their lives felt more comfortable in the other thread—and/or claimed both threads as their right and heritage.³³

Kristen Hogan gives significant attention to the presence of women of color in the feminist bookstore movement from its

³¹ Rose Norman interviewed Susan Burns by phone on April 17, 2019.

³² *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), cited by Hogan, p. xx.

³³ Quoted from Seajay's notes to an early draft of this essay.

very beginning, when pioneering collectives considered ethnic diversity central to their project. In fact, Hogan regards lesbian antiracism as key to the feminist bookstore movement, side by side with "feminist accountability" (these are the subtitle of her book). It is possible that bookstores emphasizing ethnicity just do not get recognized as feminist, thus reducing the overall numbers of feminist bookstores. There is also the issue of defining "feminist bookstore." Carol Seajay and her *Feminist Bookstore News* staff put a lot of effort into keeping track. They came to define a "feminist bookstore" as one with 51% books by or about women, 51% women staff, and owned by women. Seajay notes that this definition always required consensus-making. Of the almost fifty feminist bookstores we have identified in Southern states (and DC), at least seven were at one time owned, co-owned, or managed by women of color, and probably many others included women of color in their collectives.

Resistencia Books in Austin, TX, is an example of a movement-focused bookstore whose programming, leadership, and booklists Kristen Hogan sees as fitting the description of a feminist bookstore, but is often not counted in feminist bookstore lists.³⁴ Founded in 1981 by a Xicanindio man, Raúl "Roy" Salinas (1934–2008), in 2014 Resistencia Books became a project of Red Salmon Arts (RSA), a 501(c)(3) cultural arts organization that sustains the bookstore to this day. RSA director Lilia Rosas identifies as "a Chicana lesbiana queer feminista cultural worker" committed to intersectional feminism.³⁵ I asked Rosas how she sees Resistencia Books fitting into (or reshaping) a story about feminist bookstores in the South, 1970–99, and this was her response:

I think the fundamental question is how has the traditional lens of feminist bookstores continuously excluded the commitment, innovation, and tenacity of

³⁴ Hogan, p. xix.

³⁵ Quotations are from an email interview with Lilia Rosas, September 29, 2019.

grassroots, homegrown feminism, queer activism of booksellers, bookpeddlers, cultural workers of color dedicated to literature as tools of empowerment and liberation. Resistencia Books, formerly Resistencia Bookstore, started as a movement bookstore devoted to uplifting the words of Chicax/~/Latinx/~/Native American writers, poets, authors, and artists and a hub of local social activism as both a gathering and organizing space. Resistencia Books continues to build on this trajectory by keeping the doors of Resistencia Books open and maintaining the programming of Red Salmon Arts. Additionally, we refashioned ourselves as a center, which nurtures a progressive, queer, POC, women's space at Red Salmon Arts, along with sustaining this site as a Chicax/~/Latinx/~/Native American autonomous zone.

In many ways, Rosas describes what have been goals of many feminist bookstores, only more focused on ethnicity. Perhaps with feminism becoming global, and gender becoming mutable and contested, Resistencia Books has become a model of the feminist bookstore of the future.

Doubtless, other movement-oriented bookstores could be added to our list, but for now Resistencia Books stands as a placeholder for them. With that caveat, our timeline shows eleven Southern stores opening in the 1970s, fifteen in the 1980s, and twenty-two more in the 1990s. Two closed in the 1970s, five in the 1980s, and at least fifteen in the 1990s.³⁶ Ironically, the number of feminist bookstores peaked just as the industry was crumbling. By the '90s, book distributors were going to "just-in-time" inventory, and publishers were being bought by huge corporations and shrinking their sales forces. Audrey May reported that just as she

was learning how to order and get Meristem on the publishers' sales rep route, publishers started limiting sales rep calls to large stores in large cities. Memphis is a large city, but Meristem was never a large store.

Feminist Bookstore News (FBN) and the Feminist Bookstore Network (FB-Network) had been very important resources for feminist bookstores from their inception in 1976 at the first Women in Print Conference (WIP), held near Omaha, NE. By 2000, as more and more stores closed, and feminist publishers and presses closed as well, *FBN* also became unsustainable due to loss of advertising from mainstream publishers. What happened to Meristem in Memphis in the 1990s happened to many feminist bookstores of that time. It came down to one person not being enough to run the bookstore and also do all the new things required for it to survive. Recruiting investors, starting a nonprofit fundraising arm, and developing a website were all tasks that Audrey May would have to learn to do herself, or recruit volunteers to do. "The things we were most successful at," she said, "were things we couldn't charge for, like how people felt when they were there." It was too much, and she went on to "an equally stressful job, but one where someone else paid my salary." Overall, she has good memories of that time, saying "It was a wonderful gig, and I loved doing it! We felt Meristem was a garden, and we planted seeds for other things to happen."

Stores like Charis Books and More are still planting those seeds of feminist consciousness-raising, but rely heavily on a nonprofit organization for fundraising, as described in "Blueprint for a Feminist Bookstore Future" (this issue). Charis Circle organizes readings and other events for Charis Books and does their newsletter, which is solely distributed online. Founded in 1974, Charis is now the oldest feminist bookstore in the South. It stands among hundreds of feminist bookstores that have come and gone since the very first feminist bookstores—ICI-A Woman's Place Bookstore in Oakland, CA, and Amazon Bookstore Cooperative, Inc., in Minneapolis, MN—opened in

³⁶ Fifteen of the forty-eight stores have an unknown closing year, all but two of them stores that opened in the 1990s.

1970. Throughout the decades, these feminist booksellers have been cultural workers in their communities.

After so many years of feminist bookstores closing, it is refreshing that we are now seeing new ones. In March 2018, Athenian Press and Workshops opened a feminist bookstore in Wilmington, NC, though it has since changed to a mobile bookstore with online sales. Combatting the high cost of overhead, two young women in Birmingham, AL, Katie Willis and Meagan Lyle, have started Burdock Bookstore Collective, a “pop-up” feminist bookstore. Until they found a home at the Quaker Meeting House, Burdock promoted and scheduled impromptu book sales through social media as they moved from one free location to another, hauling the books they stored in their apartment.³⁷ Alexis Pauline Gumbs and her life partner have started the Black Feminist Bookmobile in Durham, NC, creating pop-up “reading rooms” in parks and other spaces. With the opening of Alsace Walentine’s Tombolo Books (tombolobooks.com) in St. Petersburg in December 2019, Florida is no longer without a feminist bookstore. Perhaps the unlikeliest place to find a feminist bookstore in the South is in a small town in Mississippi. Jaime Harker opened Violet Valley Books in Water Valley, near Oxford, MS. Harker, runs the women’s studies program at nearby Ole Miss, and describes her store’s mission as making “feminist, queer, and multicultural books available to the Water Valley community, the state of Mississippi, and the South.”³⁸ She is an example of today’s young feminists who seem to have the same brilliance and optimism that inspired that earlier wave of feminist booksellers to empower and transform women’s lives through books.

³⁷ See Rose Norman, “Transforming Birmingham with Feminist Books,” MS Online, July 23, 2019, <https://msmagazine.com/2019/07/23/transforming-birmingham-with-feminist-books/>

³⁸ Quoted from their website (<https://www.violetvalley.org>).

TIMELINE OF FEMINIST BOOKSTORES IN THE SOUTH, 1970–1999

Rose Norman and Jennifer Scott

Our research on feminist bookstores in the South focuses on the last three decades of the twentieth century, the boundaries of our overall project collecting lesbian-feminist activism in the South. Sources include interviews with twenty-one feminist booksellers in the South, ninety-three issues of *Feminist Bookstore News (FBN)*, and a state-by-state list of “Lesbian/Women’s Stores” published in *Lesbian Connection* (September 1977). Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish feminist bookstores from primarily GLBT bookstores. When in doubt, we included them. Note that the list includes only stores for which we have found an opening and/or closing date, and does not include mail order only stores, except those that had a physical store at some point.

Resources:

Charis Books and More maintains a list of feminist bookstores remaining in North America, <https://www.charisbooksandmore.com/list-feminist-bookstores>.

Feminist Bookstore News, 1983–2000 (it is missing vols. 1–6), is posted online through Independent Voices: An Open Access Collection of an Alternative Press, <http://voices.revealdigital.org>. Searching this online source also helped establish store opening or closing dates from searches of other publications.

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) maintains a list of feminist bookstores with online sales: <https://oloc.org/feminist-bookstores/>.

♀ □ Bookstores with separate stories in this issue.

c. 1971–c. 1985

Hobbit Habit, Athens, GA

Feminist linguist and academic activist Julia (Stanley) Penelope, then teaching at the University of Georgia, bought this store

for her mother Frances Smith to run. They stocked lesbian and feminist publications and textbooks and sponsored a lesbian softball team, The Hairy Hobbits. Frances Smith kept it going after Julia Penelope moved to teach at the University of Nebraska, and versions of the Hobbit Habit continued under other proprietors. It appears in *FBN* only once, in a brief story saying that the gay male co-owner wants to sell his share, but Frances Smith will remain (June 1985).

1973 (January)–1977

First Things First, Washington, DC

Collective includes Casse Culver, Mimi Satter, and Susan Sojourner. Mostly mail order but with a “mobile unit” for events. Also sold through Lammas starting 1974. “We’re chartered as a not-for-profit educational corporation to educate people about feminism, the sexist nature of society, the discrimination & oppression that resists.” *Off Our Backs* (5.3, March 1975): 27. On financial and class issues, as well as store closing, see *Quest*, 5.4 (1982): 16–17.

1973–2000

Lammas Women’s Books & More, Washington, DC

Founded in 1971 by Leslie Reeves and Judy Winsett as a women’s craft and jewelry shop, the first all-women’s shop in the country, selling all women-made crafts, pottery, art, and jewelry. They added books at the back of the store in about 1973 (hence our date here). Mary Farmer managed the store for a while, and owned the store from 1976 to 1993, switching the focus from crafts and jewelry to books, eventually moving to books and sidelines. Deb Morris managed the store during those years. The first Lammas was on Market Row and became a feminist gathering and organizing place. Farmer opened a second store on Dupont Circle and later closed the Market Row store. Farmer was a co-organizer of the second Women in Print Conference (1981), an important gathering of feminist publishers, printers, distributors,

booksellers, and authors. In 1994, Farmer sold the store to Jane Troxell, Rose Fennell, Marjorie Darling, and Susan Fletcher. In 1998, they sold to Denise Bump and Sylvia Colon.

1973–1994

31st St. Bookstore, Baltimore, MD

Founded by Amy Gaver, who sold it in 1987 to a collective of 500 customers (mostly lesbian-feminists) to keep it from going out of business (*FBN* June 1988). The street also had the socialist workers party, the Lesbian Community Center, and the first Pride block party in Baltimore.³⁹ Jane Troxell and Rose Fennel of Lammas bought the 31st St. Bookstore Coop in 1994, but decided to close this location and focus on the DC store (*FBN* July/August 1996).

♀ □ **1974 (November)–Present**

Charis Books and More,

Atlanta, GA, www.charisbooksandmore.com

First owners Linda Bryant and Barbara Borgman; currently co-owned by Sara Luce Look and Angela Gabriel. Charis Circle Executive Director, E.R. Anderson. <http://www.charisbooksandmore.com/>

1974–1977

Herstore Feminist Bookstore, Tallahassee, FL

Founding manager Dorothy Allison says they founded it because “we needed an institution outside the university that could continue to do things. . . . I wanted a feminist community center that wasn’t based in the university” (quoted from an oral history available online at <https://www.smith.edu/libraries/librarians/vof/transcripts/Allison.pdf>.)⁴⁰

³⁹ Kate Drabinski, “Gay History on 416 East 31st St.,” *Independent Reader*, June 24, 2013, <https://indyreader.org/content/gay-history-416-east-31st-street>

⁴⁰ There are surprisingly few references to this bookstore: a citation in Onosaka’s *Feminist Revolution in Literacy* (p. 146), which says only that Allison read from her first book there; a mention in *Conversations with Dorothy Allison*, ed. Mae Miller Claxton (University Press of Mississippi, 2012), xvii; and a mention in a footnote in James Sears’s *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), footnote 42, p. 379.

1975 (June)–1977**WomanStore (aka WomenBooks), Gainesville, FL**

Operated by Women Unlimited, which also published a newsletter and ran a counseling center, the store sold women's arts and crafts as well as books. In 1977, new co-owners changed the name to Amelia's and moved it to an old house downtown.⁴¹

1975 (December)–Present**BookWoman, Austin, TX, www.ebookwoman.com**

Founded by the Common Woman Bookstore Collective, it became BookWoman after Susan Post took it over when the collective dissolved in the 1970s. She has run it ever since. See also *Lesbian Tide* (March/April 1976): 24.⁴²

April 1977–1980**Labrys Books, Richmond, VA**

Co-owners: Theresa "Terri" Barry and Joan Mayfield ran the bookstore from their home and took the books to various events.

1977–1982**Amelia's Bookstore, Gainesville, FL**

Co-owners: Gerry Green and Carol Aubin.

1977 (September 23)–1983**Womankind Books, Nashville, TN**

Owner: Carole De Bra Powell.

Several other feminist bookstores had the same name, such as one in Santa Barbara, CA, and another in New York and later Arizona.

1981–present**Resistencia Books, Austin, TX, www.resistenciabooks.com**

Founded by Raúl "Roy" Salinas.

⁴¹ "Nurturing the Intellectual Needs of a Community," *Radical Women* in Gainesville, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/rwg/womanstore>. This website includes an image of an ad for WOMANSTORE publicizing "over 500 titles" and open 10-6 Monday-Saturday.

⁴² Some sources give the starting year as 1974, but Susan Post's recollections and a letter to the editor of *Lesbian Tide* (March/April 1976): 24 indicate that 1975 is more accurate.

1981–c. 1982**Las Mujeres, San Antonio, TX**

LGBT activist Martha Prentiss was a founder.

See Martha Prentiss papers, legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utsa/00402/utsa-00402.html, and *FBN* March/April 1993.

1981–1993**WomensBooks, Richmond, VA**

A cooperative that started at the YWCA and later moved to the basement of Fare Share Food Co-op, substantially supported by Richmond Lesbian-Feminists.

1982 (April)–1983**The Well of Happiness, St. Petersburg, FL**

Edie Daly and Doreen Brand started it, and Pam Morse and Tee Smith tried to keep it going.

♀ □ **1983 (August)–1998****Rubyfruit Books, Tallahassee, FL**

Started by Joan Denman, who sold it in 1996 to Susan Mayer, who moved it to an inconvenient location. The store celebrated its tenth anniversary with a publication, *Rubyfruit Anthology*, and its twelfth anniversary and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the women's suffrage amendment with *The Second Rubyfruit Anthology*.

1983–2002**Lodestar Books, Birmingham, AL**

First owner, Linda James; longest-term owners, Sally Engler (feminist and lesbian ally) and Beth Gundersen until 1997; sold to customers David White, Connie Hill, and John Dantzler in 1997 (*FBN* Sept/Oct 1997). A year and a half later (c. 1999), they "gave" the store to Heather Rudzika-Furr and her husband. The couple relocated the store and tried to make a go of it by leasing part of the space to a vegetarian café.

c. 1983–unknown**Half the Sky, Dallas, TX**

Owner: Johncy Mundo.

See *Lesbian Connection*, June/July 1983.

1987–1997**On the Move**, St. Petersburg, FL, and Tampa, FL

Cybillia Hawk operated this mobile bookstore from her VW van, taking it to various women's events in Florida and to five of the six Rhythm Fest women's music festivals in north Georgia and the Carolinas.

1987 (November)–1991⁴³**Southern Wild Sisters Unlimited**, Gulfport, MS

Brenda and Wanda Henson ran this community bookstore, as well as a GLBT resource center and a food bank out of the bookstore. Bonnie Morris quotes Brenda Henson saying, "Instead of a community starting a bookstore, our bookstore started a community."⁴⁴ Wanda Henson writes: "The foodbank started with the MS Gay and Lesbian Alliance to make available food for Gay men living with AIDS. We eventually got the local Catholic Diocese involved with our community. MCC started a church in our Quonset hut behind the bookstore. The local Black Nurses Association held their first meetings at SWSU because they could not find another place to meet. So much happened at Southern Wild Sisters Unlimited! Brenda and I loved making that space available."⁴⁵ Morris says that the bookstore had become a flashpoint for harassment and intimidation even before the Hensons bought the land in Overt, MS, for Camp Sister Spirit, which would get national attention in 1993–94 when neighbors violently harassed them.

⁴³ *FBN* October 1991 says they "finally had to choose between festivals, concerts, activist work and such. The store was in part a casualty of the Gulf War." There were five military bases in the area, and sales dried up when soldiers were deployed. See also Marideth Sisco, "A Saga of Lesbian Perseverance and Steadfast Resolve: The Hensons and Camp Sister Spirit," *Sinister Wisdom* 98 (Fall 2015): 150-56.

⁴⁴ Qtd. "Women's Festivals on the Front Lines," in *Out in the South*, ed. Carlos L. Dews and Carolyn Leste Law (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), p. 58.

⁴⁵ Quoted with permission from email received 10-2-19.

1988 (August)–1995**Southern Sisters**, Durham, NC

Founded by Cookie Teer and other investors, and managed by lesbian-feminist ally Melody Ivins.

1988 (November 15)–c. 1991 (August)**Mystic Moon Collective**, New Orleans, LA

Owners Tahnya Giordano (and Barbara Trahan?) expanded space (*FBN* Mar/Apr 1989); moved to Magazine St. (*FBN* October 1990); then put it up for sale in 1991. "If no buyer is found, the store will close at the end of August when the lease runs out," but will continue mail order sales (*FBN* July/Aug 1991).

1988 (December)–2000 (December)**Inklings**, Houston, TX

Founders Pokey Anderson and Annise Parker sold the business in 1998 to two young lesbians, Liz Brackeen and Stephanie Fulton. Brackeen and Fulton moved it to Salt Lake City, where they ran it until Christmas 2000.

1988–c. 1991**Curious Times**, Dallas, TX

From *FBN*: this "new women's bookstore in Dallas is scheduled to open May 1. Send information to Kay Vinson" (June 1988); "open and things are going great!" (September 1988). *LC* lists them as a distributor in their July/Aug 1989 issue, and *New Directions* lists them as a distributor in March/April 1991. Nothing turns up in *Independent Voices* after that.

1989 (April 29)–c. 1990**Book Oasis**, Nashville, TN

Owner Arlene Samowich started this store with inventory from Womankind Books, working out of her home. *FBN* announced that it was opening in May/June 1989, and moving to a new location in its October 1990 issue. After that, silence.

1989 (July 1)–2003**Brigit Books**, St. Petersburg, FL

Founder Patty Callaghan, who had previously managed Crazy Ladies in Cincinnati (1986–89), ran it for eleven years, then sold

it to twenty-four-year-old Helen Roman in June 2000. The store never recovered from expenses of an unanticipated move in 2001, which doubled their square footage and increased parking, but got less foot traffic.

1989–1991 (August)

First Page, Fort Lauderdale, FL

Owner Sue White originally planned to open this bookstore in a side room of the local women's bar, *JJ's Other Side* (*FBN* January/February 1989), but instead opened it a few doors down (*FBN* May/June 1989), and closed two years later (*FBN* September/October 1991).

1990 (September)–1998 (August)

Meristem Books & More for Women and Their Friends,
Memphis, TN

Audrey May and Vickie Scarborough were the original owners, with May as full-time store manager.⁴⁶ Meristem was the only feminist bookstore in Tennessee for the eight years it was in operation. Since it closed, there has been no feminist bookstore in Tennessee.

c. 1990–unknown

Womanstuff, Annandale, VA

One mention gives the owner as "Jag" (*FBN* October 1990).

♀ □ **January 1991–1994**

Bluestocking Books, Columbia, SC

Owner: Teresa Williams.

1991–1997

Rising Moon Books & Beyond, Charlotte, NC

Founded by Barb Park and Sue Henry, Charlotte's first openly gay candidate for mayor, this was the second gay and lesbian bookstore in Charlotte (the first was Friends of Dorothy, founded by Don King, a gay man). "Henry worked to create space for the

community to learn, network and organize for change. Henry says she considered the store a de facto community space, offering room for community organizations' announcements and more."⁴⁷ In 1996 they briefly opened a second store in Wilmington, managed by Paula McGlamery.

1992 (December 5)–1999 (November)

Textures Books & Gifts, San Antonio, TX

Founder Martha Cabrera was the first member of the Feminist Bookstore Network to apply for and receive an SBA Loan (*FBN* Jan/Feb 1995). Cabrera describes Textures as "a safe place for women to talk" (*FBN* March/April 1993). Purchased by Naiad authors Frankie Jones and Peggy Herring in 1997.

1992–2017 (Dec 23)

Wild Iris Books, Gainesville FL

Dotty Faibisy and Bev White bought the store from its original owners, Susan Keel and Karey Godwin, in 1996. The last owners were Cheryl Calhoun and Erica Rodriguez Merrell. Originally known as Iris Books, the store added the "Wild" after their third anniversary (*FBN* November/December 1995).

1992–unknown

Athena's Attic, Denton, TX

Owners Nova Adamson and Robbie Nodine described it as a "new feminist/lesbian/gay bookstore in TX" (*FBN*, February 1992).

⁴⁷ Quoted by Matt Comer, "Then & Now: Women's Place in Charlotte's LGBT Movement," QNotes, May 23, 2014. <http://goqnotes.com/29530/then-now-womens-place-in-charlottes-lgbt-movement/>. Comer also says that the Charlotte Women's Center (where *Sinister Wisdom* was born), "one of the longest-standing Women's Collectives in the South, closed in 1993, though some of its lesbian leaders continued working on social and political causes through groups like the Lesbian Avengers." *FBN* (July/Aug 1996 and January/February 1997) says that Sue Henry opened a second Rising Moon store in Wilmington, NC, managed by Paula McGlamery, but closed it in 1997 to focus on keeping the Charlotte store open.

⁴⁶ May acquired full ownership of Meristem Books as of June 15, 1993, buying out Vickie Scarborough's half of the business.

1993 (August)–unknown**Purple Moon Women's Bookstore**, Fredericksburg, VAOwned by Suzy Stone (*Free Lance–Star*, September 24, 1993).*FBN* describes it as a 1600-square-foot, full-service feminist bookstore also carrying art, pottery, “woodwork and other unique crafts by women” (August 1993, p. 62).**1993 (October 18)–c. 1996****Wittershins Bookstore and Café**, Easley, SC, Greenville, SC, Raleigh, NCRobin Moneypenny and Anne Moser originally announced that the store was opening in March 1993 in Easley, SC (*FBN* November/December 1992), and Carol Seajay reported that Wittershins attended the 1993 Feminist Bookstores Conference in Miami Beach (*FBN* August 1993). In the March/April 1994 *FBN*, they announced having opened October 18, 1993, in Greenville, SC, and that “sales are booming” (p. 53). They were still open in Greenville as of the September/October 1995 *FBN*, but are announced as reopening in Raleigh, NC, in January 1996 (November/Dec 1995). After that, silence.♀ □ **1994–2004, reopened 2009–2011****Sisterspace and Books**, Washington DC

Co-owners Faye Williams and Cassandra Burton specialized in African American women's books at what is possibly the first African American feminist bookstore in the country.

1994–unknown**Bad Habits Etc.**, Norfolk, VAOpened by Michele Keller as a mostly feminist and lesbian store (*FBN* July/August 1994), it changed its name to Two of a Kind (*FBN* Nov/Dec 1996).**1994–unknown****Above and Beyond**, Fort Myers, FLOwner: Susan Aguirre (*FBN* Sept/October 1994).**1994–unknown****Illusions**, Tuscaloosa, ALOwned by Ricki and listed as the second Feminist Bookstore Network member in Alabama—“we're taking over the American south!” (*FBN* Mar/Apr 1994).**1994–c. 1998****Rainbows, Ltd.**, Huntsville, AL, later Madison, ALOwned by Yvonne Boudreau and Linda Ballentine, Rainbows focused on gay and lesbian, feminist, recovery, AIDS, ethnic, and black women's issues (*FBN* Dec 1994 and Aug/Sept 1997).**c. 1994–unknown****Moore Magic Womyn's Bookstore**, New Orleans, LAOwned by Anne Moore and listed in the first two *FBN* holiday catalogs, and in their 1994/95 list of feminist bookstores. A May 26, 1996, posting that came up on a Google search reads: “Tucked away in the French Quarter is Moore Magic Womyn's Bookstore. We are an oasis from the heat and stupidity. Besides carrying a wide range of items from locally handmade jewelry and statuary to herbs and magical tools, we are, to date, the only feminist bookstore from Houston to Tallahassee.” <http://www.qrd.org/qrd/usa/louisiana/moore.magic.womyns.bookstore>.**1995 (March 1)–present****The Bag Lady**, Charlotte, NC, the-bag-lady.biz

Hope Swann started the store, focused on gifts, books, crystals, and jewelry. She sold it in 2004. It has changed owners several times and is now owned by Susan Burns. From the beginning, it has supported the local Battered Women's Shelter, and currently hosts a variety of feminist spirituality events.

1995 (March 12)–unknown**Lavenders**, Naples, FLOwned by Sandi Sprenger and Vicki Fraser, who say that 85% of their stock is by/for/about women (*FBN*, May/June 1995).

1995 (December)– unknown**Pandora, Knoxville, TN**

Owned by Peggy Douglas and Susan Godseaux (*FBN* November/December 1995; March/Apr 1996).

June 1996–c. 1998**Sissy's Inc., Satellite Beach, FL**

Owned by Jocelyn Croft and Becky Jeffers; listed as a feminist, lesbian/gay gallery and bookshop (July/Aug 1996 *FBN*).

1996–unknown**Healing Rays, Charleston, SC**

Alexandria Ravenel-Gainor planned on opening this store in March 1996, listing it in the March/April 1996 *FBN* as a “feminist bookstore and gift store, specializing in self-help, metaphysical, women’s health, spirituality, political and other areas, with themes that will change from month to month.” It also appears in the *FBN* core mailing list at 57 Broad St., Charleston as late as 2000.

1997 (March)–unknown**Out of Bounds, Greenville, SC**

Owned by Suzanne Couch and Jennie Allison (*FBN* Spring 1998).

c. 1999–unknown**First Women's Books, Washington, DC**

Owner Leslie Smith describes this as a traveling bookstore that takes books by/about/for and of interest to women of color to festivals/conferences, and other events (*FBN* May/June 1999).



Locations of Southern cities with feminist bookstores 1970–99

Graphic design by Suzanne Barbara,
original map by Jesse/Ina-Lee

Feminist Booksellers in the South, 1973–99

* booksellers interviewed in 2001

** booksellers interviewed 2012–19

*** booksellers interviewed in both 2001 and 2012–19

Alabama

Illusions, Tuscaloosa, 1994–unknown

***Lodestar Books, Birmingham, 1983–2002

Rainbows, Ltd, Huntsville, Madison, 1994–c. 1998

Arkansas

[Women's Project, Little Rock, *FBN* core mailing list, 1994 and n.d.]

District of Columbia

First Things First, 1973–unknown

First Women's Books, c. 1999–unknown

** Lammas Women's Books & More, 1973–2000

**Sisterspace and Books, 1994–2004, 2009–11

Florida

Above and Beyond, Fort Myers, 1994–unknown

**Amelia's, Gainesville, 1977–82

***Brigit Books, St. Petersburg, 1989–2003

First Page, Fort Lauderdale, 1989–91
 Herstore, Tallahassee, 1974–77
 Lavenders, Naples, 1995–unknown
 **On the Move, Tampa, FL, 1987–97
 **Rubyfruit Books, Tallahassee, 1983–98
 Sissy's Inc., Satellite Beach, 1996–c. 1998
 **The Well of Happiness, St. Petersburg, 1982–83
 * Wild Iris Books, Gainesville, 1992–2017
 **WomanStore, Gainesville, 1974–77

Georgia

* Charis Books and More, Atlanta 1974–present
 Hobbit Habbit, Athens, GA, c. 1971–c. 1985

Louisiana

Moore Magic Womyn's Books, New Orleans, c. 1994–unknown
 Mystic Moon Collective, New Orleans, 1988–c. 1991

Maryland

31st St. Bookstore, Baltimore, 1973–94

Mississippi

Southern Wild Sisters, 1987–91

North Carolina

Rising Moon Books & Beyond, Charlotte, 1991–97
 **Southern Sisters, Durham, 1988–95
 **The Bag Lady, Charlotte, 1995–present

South Carolina

**Bluestocking Books, Columbia, 1991–94
 Healing Rays, Charleston, 1996–unknown
 Out of Bounds, Greenville, 1997–unknown
 Wittershins Bookstore and Café, Greenville, 1993–unknown

Tennessee

Book Oasis, Nashville, 1989–unknown
 *Meristem Books & More, Memphis, 1990–98
 Pandora, Knoxville, 1995–unknown
 **Womankind Books, Nashville, 1977–83

Texas

Athena's Attic, Denton, 1992–unknown
 **BookWoman, Austin, 1975–present
 Curious Times, Dallas, 1988–c. 1991
 Half the Sky, Dallas, c. 1983–unknown
 *Inklings, Houston, 1988–98
 Las Mujeres, San Antonio, 1981–c. 1982
 **Resistencia Books, Austin, 1981–present
 Textures Books & Gifts, San Antonio, 1992–99

Virginia

Bad Habits, Norfolk, 1994–unknown
 **Labrys, Richmond, 1977–80
 Purple Moon Women's Bookstore, Fredericksburg, 1993–unknown
 Womanstuff, Annandale, c. 1990–unknown
 **WomensBooks, Richmond, 1981–93