



Penny Armstrong papers, 1972-2023

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Maine Women Writers Collection

Abplanalp Library
University of New England
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, Maine 04103
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URL: <https://library.une.edu/mwwc/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Maine Women Writers Collection
Creator:	Armstrong, Penny
Creator:	Feldman, Sheryl
Title:	Penny Armstrong papers
ID:	0057
ID [aspace_uri]:	/repositories/3/resources/1002
Date [inclusive]:	1972-2023
Physical Description:	2 linear feet 2 boxes, 12 digital files
Language of the Material:	English

Preferred Citation

Penny Armstrong papers, Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England, Portland, ME.

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Biographical / Historical

Penny (Bradbury) Armstrong was born in Houlton, Maine in 1946, spending her early childhood in Bridgewater and on her grandparents' family farm in Hodgdon. Although her family moved frequently throughout her youth due to her father's job as a commercial pilot, she has an enduring affinity for rural life, shaping her commitment to healthcare practice that is responsive to the needs of rural communities. Armstrong is best known for her work as a Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM) serving the Amish and Mennonites in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, an experience that has informed her writing as well as her work in health education and advocacy.

Armstrong's interest in midwifery began when, at the age of thirteen, she was enlisted by a local veterinarian to help a sheep deliver a malpresenting lamb, but it would be some time before she would pursue that career in earnest. After graduating from the University of Miami with a degree in psychology, she served for three years as a Federal Health Planner

for Southern Maine Comprehensive Health specializing in drug abuse prevention. It was during her time as a Health Planner that she was introduced to nurse midwifery when she visited a rural health clinic staffed by a Family Nurse Practitioner and CNM. She then pursued her nursing prerequisites while also briefly entering police officer training in San Francisco, California and serving as Director of Activities at the Florence Crittenton Home for Unwed Mothers. She received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 1976 through St. Louis University School of Nursing's accelerated program; this was followed by rigorous midwifery training at the College of Nursing and Midwifery in Glasgow, Scotland, where she earned her Registered Midwife certification in 1978 and entered the Registry of the Royal College of Midwives.

After completing training for foreign-trained nurse midwives at the Booth Maternity Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she became a CNM in 1979. She then immediately began working as a solo practitioner in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, attending home births as well as those in birth center and hospital settings. She also earned hospital privileges at Ephrata Community Hospital, despite dissent from several doctors. During this time, she enjoyed the support of her patients and their families, as well as that of her husband, Rich Armstrong. In 1981, a crew of Amish men raised a post and beam home for the Armstrongs, designed by Rich. It was that crew's first house raising; previously, they had only raised the community's barns.

During her time in Lancaster County, Armstrong held clinical teaching positions, supervising nurse-midwifery students at home births, for the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing and at Case Western Reserve University. She earned her Master of Science in Nursing at Case Western Reserve University in 1993.

Moving on from her Pennsylvania practice, from 1991 to 1996, Armstrong taught students and preceptors in her role as the first Director of Clinical Education at the Frontier School of Midwifery and Family Nursing (now Frontier Nursing University) in Kentucky, where she educated students and preceptors in fifty states in the country's first clinical distance education program, the Community-Based Nurse-Midwifery Education Program.

Armstrong's work catching babies while immersed within the Amish and Mennonite communities contrasted strikingly with her experiences assisting hospital deliveries in St. Louis, Missouri and elsewhere, where she observed CNMs battle the medical establishment's childbirth practices, as well as its general disdain for nurse midwifery. Seeking to raise public consciousness about midwifery, childbirth, and the power of culture to shape maternity experiences, she published two books, co-authored with Sheryl Feldman, that share the insights she gained throughout this work. *A Midwife's Story: Life, Love and Birth among the Amish* (1986) recounts Armstrong's journey from student midwife in Glasgow to running her own practice in rural Pennsylvania, while *A Wise Birth: Bringing Together the Best of Natural Childbirth and Modern Medicine* (1990) explores the politics of childbirth, discussing the myriad factors influencing how women give birth and providing information for those seeking greater autonomy in their birthing experience.

Some years and 1,400 births after beginning her work in Pennsylvania, Armstrong returned to her home state of Maine. Having spent her entire nurse midwifery career advocating for improvements in the way birth was conducted, she continued to act on her commitment to better healthcare. She volunteered for a time with the Maine Humanities Council, serving on

the Planning Committee for "Literature and Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Healthcare," an in-hospital reading and discussion program open to all who worked in the hospital system. This experience informed her contributions to her third book, *A Life in Medicine: A Literary Anthology* (2001), co-edited with Robert Coles, Randy Testa, and Joseph O'Donnell.

During this time, Armstrong also worked for the University of New England (UNE) College of Osteopathic Medicine as Project Director of the Behavioral Science and Community Health Curriculum Project. At UNE, she co-taught courses on topics such as Film & Medicine and Behavioral Change for the medical school and visited undergraduate courses on women's health to share her expertise on midwifery and childbirth. She then worked as the Quality Assurance Officer for Health Dialog, working to improve chronic disease management and surgical decision-making and leading their National Committee for Quality Assurance accreditation. She also traveled abroad, teaching midwifery in Somaliland and medical English in Vietnam.

Armstrong now lives in Scarborough, Maine, where she practices year-round ocean swimming and competes in International Ice Swimming Association meets.

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Collection Scope and Content

The Penny Armstrong papers are composed of drafts and manuscripts, professional correspondence, news coverage, patient records, and personal items documenting Armstrong's work among the Amish and Mennonite communities in Lancaster County, PA. The collection includes drafts of essays, speeches, and the two books she co-wrote with Sheryl Feldman (*A Midwife's Story* and *A Wise Birth*), as well as correspondence with editors, publishing staff, and readers. The collection also contains hospital communications from throughout her nurse-midwifery education and practice, faculty awards from two of her teaching roles, and news coverage of her career, particularly the struggle over her permission to practice at Ephrata Community Hospital. Other materials include photo slides and scrapbooks from her time in Lancaster County, an unpublished screenplay based on *A Midwife's Story*, and audio/video recordings of speeches and interviews focused on Armstrong and on Lancaster County's Plain sects. Some materials in this collection are restricted.

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Arrangement

This collection is organized into seven series based on record format and subject matter.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Maine Women Writers Collection

Abplanalp Library
University of New England
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, Maine 04103
mwwc@une.edu
URL: <https://library.une.edu/mwwc/>

Access

Collection is open for research.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Midwifery
- Amish
- Audiovisual materials
- Manuscripts
- Correspondence
- Armstrong, Penny

Collection Inventory

Writing/Publishing

ID: 01

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47837

Title/Description	Instances	
A Midwife's Story 1984 draft, 1984 <u>ID</u> : 001 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47839	Box 1	Folder 001
A Midwife's Story 1985 draft, 1985-03 <u>ID</u> : 002 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47840	Box 1	Folder 002
A Midwife's Story tour/promotion correspondence, 1986-1988 <u>ID</u> : 003 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47841	Box 1	Folder 003
A Wise Birth early drafts + editing correspondence, 1987-1988 <u>ID</u> : 004 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47842	Box 1	Folder 004
A Wise Birth complete draft (1/3), 1989 <u>ID</u> : 005 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47843	Box 1	Folder 005
A Wise Birth complete draft (2/3), 1989 <u>ID</u> : 006 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47844	Box 1	Folder 006
A Wise Birth complete draft (3/3), 1989 <u>ID</u> : 007 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47845	Box 1	Folder 007
Publishing correspondence, 1986-2005 <u>ID</u> : 008 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47846	Box 1	Folder 008
Feldman/Houde correspondence, 1987-1988 <u>ID</u> : 009	Box 1	Folder 009

<p><u>ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47847</u></p> <p>Articles (solo + cowritten), 1988-2005</p> <p><u>ID: 010</u></p> <p><u>ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47848</u></p>	Box 1	Folder 010
<p>Clinic for Special Children essay, correspondence + news coverage, 1989-2005</p> <p><u>ID: 011</u></p> <p><u>ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47849</u></p>	Box 1	Folder 011
<p>Essay and speech drafts, undated</p> <p><u>ID: 012</u></p> <p><u>ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47850</u></p>	Box 1	Folder 012
<p>Essay + A Wise Birth chapter drafts, undated; 2007</p> <p><u>ID: 013</u></p> <p><u>ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47851</u></p>	Box 1	Folder 013
<p>Miscellaneous draft pages, undated</p> <p><u>ID: 014</u></p> <p><u>ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47852</u></p>	Box 1	Folder 014
<p>A Wise Birth promotion plans, undated</p> <p><u>ID: 015</u></p> <p><u>ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47892</u></p>	Box 2	Folder 015

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Records/Reference

ID: 02

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47838

Title/Description

Instances

Nurse-Midwife certification documents, 1976-2007

Box 1

Folder 001

ID: 001

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47853

ACNM delivery record, 1980

ID: 002

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47854

Lancaster County patient notes, undated

ID: 003

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47855

Appointment books, 1983-1984

ID: 004

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47856

Patient account notebooks, 1981-1989

ID: 005

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47857

Amish publications, 1982-1989

Box 1

Folder 006

ID: 006

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47858

Faculty awards (Frontier School + UNE), 1997-2001

Box 1

Folder 007

ID: 007

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47859

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Photos

ID: 03

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47860

Title/Description	Instances	
Photos (Glasgow, Pennsylvania, CNEP), late 1970s - early 2020s <u>ID</u> : 001 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47861	Box 1	Folder 001
Quilt album + letters, 1985 <u>ID</u> : 002 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47862	Box 1	Folder 002
Slides: 'Practice Annual Picnic', 1985 <u>ID</u> : 003 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47863	Box 1	Folder 003
Slides: 'General Plain Amish/Mennonites', 1988-1989; undated <u>ID</u> : 004 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47864	Box 1	Folder 004
Slides: 'General Practice', 1979-1989; undated <u>ID</u> : 005 <u>ID [aspace uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47865	Box 1	Folder 005
Slides: 'When a Child is Born'		

ID: 006

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47876

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Publicity

ID: 04

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47866

Title/Description	Instances	
Midwives' insurance news coverage (prep for A Wise Birth), 1985 <u>ID</u> : 001 <u>ID [aspace_uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47867	Box 1	Folder 001
Birth Gazette interview + book review, 1986 <u>ID</u> : 002 <u>ID [aspace_uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47868	Box 1	Folder 002
Miscellaneous news coverage, 1972-2006 <u>ID</u> : 003 <u>ID [aspace_uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47869	Box 1	Folder 003
A Midwife's Story + A Wise Birth reviews, 1986-1992 <u>ID</u> : 004 <u>ID [aspace_uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47870	Box 1	Folder 004
A Life in Medicine reviews, 2002-2003 <u>ID</u> : 005 <u>ID [aspace_uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47871	Box 1	Folder 005
Sisters on a Journey profile w/ Armstrong's notes, undated <u>ID</u> : 006 <u>ID [aspace_uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47872	Box 1	Folder 006
Ephrata Community Hospital scrapbook, 1979-1982 <u>ID</u> : 007 <u>ID [aspace_uri]</u> : /repositories/3/archival_objects/47875		

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Correspondence

ID: 05

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47873		
Title/Description	Instances	
Ephrata Community Hospital communications, 1979-1983 ID: 001 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47874	Box 2	Folder 001
Community Hospital of Lancaster communications, 1988-1989 ID: 002 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47877	Box 2	Folder 002
Miscellaneous personal + professional correspondence, 1980-1987 ID: 003 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47878	Box 2	Folder 003
Midwifery academic literature review, 1989 ID: 004 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47879	Box 2	Folder 004
Reader letters (nonpatients), 1986-1988 ID: 005 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47883	Box 2	Folder 005
Reader letters (nonpatients), 1989-1993 ID: 006 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47880	Box 2	Folder 006
Reader letters (patients + nonpatients), 1987-1994 ID: 007 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47881	Box 2	Folder 007
Patient letters re: A Midwife's Story, 1986-1987 ID: 008 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47882	Box 2	Folder 008
Patient letter (Penny's favorite), undated ID: 009 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47884	Box 2	Folder 009
Patient letters (1/4), 1980-2003; undated ID: 010 ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47885		
Patient letters (2/4), 1984-2005; undated ID: 011		

[ID \[aspace uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47886](#)

Patient letters (3/4), 1980-2006; undated

[ID: 012](#)

[ID \[aspace uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47887](#)

Patient letters (4/4), 1980-1993; undated

[ID: 013](#)

[ID \[aspace uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47888](#)

Mother's Supply correspondence, 1985

[ID: 014](#)

[ID \[aspace uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47889](#)

Amish Historical Library correspondence, 1980-1983

Box 2

Folder 015

[ID: 015](#)

[ID \[aspace uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47890](#)

Professional correspondence + CNM practice information, 1989

Box 2

Folder 016

[ID: 016](#)

[ID \[aspace uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47891](#)

Retirement letter + friendship book pages, 1990; letter undated

Box 2

Folder 017

[ID: 017](#)

[ID \[aspace uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47893](#)

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Digital Materials

[ID: 06](#)

[ID \[aspace uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47894](#)

Title/Description	Instances
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DVDs	
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[ID: 001](#)

[ID \[aspace uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47895](#)

Audio: Margaret Stanley 'Breech' story	
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[ID: 002](#)

[ID \[aspace uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47896](#)

Audio: Diane Rehm interview, 1986	
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[ID: 003](#)

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47897](#)

Audio: "Living and Working and Writing Among the Amish" speech, 1993

[ID: 004](#)

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47898](#)

Audio: "Lighting the Way to a Wise Birth" speech, 1995

[ID: 005](#)

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47899](#)

Audio: Randy Testa/John Hostetler Mennonite interview

[ID: 006](#)

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47900](#)

Audio: Richard Armstrong speech, "Amish Culture & the Road"

[ID: 007](#)

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47901](#)

Text: Wonderfully Made (A Midwife's Story screenplay)

[ID: 008](#)

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47902](#)

Text: Reading Eagle newspaper profile, 1988

[ID: 009](#)

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47903](#)

Text: "Anarcha, no one knows your name", 2023

[ID: 010](#)

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/47904](#)

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