

Public Abstract

First Name:Milbre

Middle Name:Elizabeth

Last Name:Burch

Adviser's First Name:Heather

Adviser's Last Name:Carver

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

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Title:IN HER OWN WORDS:

CONNIE REGAN-BLAKE, THE FOREMOTHER

OF THE FESTIVAL-BASED AMERICAN STORYTELLING REVIVAL

This ethnographic and historiographic study is grounded in archival interviews with Connie Regan-Blake (b. 1947), the foremother of the festival-based American storytelling revival, found in the Cotsen Storytelling Project (CSP) at the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University. As co-director of the CSP (with Berkley Hudson), I created the archive of ninety interviews with storytellers from 1997-2000; Regan-Blake's are among the first to be transcribed. I analyzed the CSP and later interviews, looking for thematic and rhetorical recurrences and information about Regan-Blake's life within the revival. She read and responded to the study; her responses were incorporated into this dialogical work. The study uncovers Regan-Blake's significance as a feminist artist and leader striving for inclusivity in the storytelling movement, as the unnamed artistic director of the National Storytelling Festival in its first decade, and as an advocate for the national storytelling organization since its inception. It interrogates the impact of a masculinist dominant discourse on Regan-Blake's development and on her pioneering career in "the Folktellers" – a tandem touring partnership with her cousin Barbara Freeman (b. 1944). It examines her emergence as a solo artist, mentor and activist despite her exclusion from the institutional history of a festival she shaped and her eventual marginalization on its stages, and considers her significance in the revival today. The study points the way to future scholarship on women within the revival, opens up the CSP to further research, and provides a basis for more inclusivity within the revival's myth-making and its artistic and economic practices.