Attention to a new field of history inevitably leads to discoveries of "new" archives. Usually, these are new only in the sense that they have recently been deemed valuable—worth consulting and collecting because of the historical interest or importance they have acquired. One measure of the success of the women's history movement over the past decade is the sheer number of documents and entire archival collections that have suddenly and with great fanfare come to light. The claims that traditionally historians ignored female subjects because women were inarticulate, absent from the records, or untraceable by the usual methods are belied by the profusion of documentation that has emerged. Invisibility rather than absence has become the key descriptive term for women's place in the historical record. Moreover, accounting for invisibility is now an important preoccupation of theoretical work in the field.

My favorite example (and there are many similar ones) of discoveries of women's archives in France involves the Marie-Louise Bouglé collection, which is now available at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris. Marie-Louise Bouglé (1883–1936) was an active feminist at the turn of the century. In 1921 she began collecting the materials she hoped would prove the infinite capacity and ability of women. She scoured the bookshops of
Paris for exemplary works about and by women and she also saved all the newspapers and letters of the various feminist groups to which she belonged. She amassed the papers of friends and colleagues: their personal correspondence and photographs, their handwritten notes for unfinished dictionaries of famous women, and their manuscript studies of working conditions in female trades. Her apartment became a storage place—a kind of armory in which the intellectual weapons for feminist struggle were stockpiled. When Bouglé died, friends unsuccessfully sought a repository for the collection. (Apparently most librarians thought it had no historical merit. The one feminist library—the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand—was unacceptable because Bouglé had major differences with Durand and had already rejected that option.) The collection ended up at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris in 1946. The books were integrated into the library’s holdings; the papers moldered in boxes in the basement for some forty years. In 1977 a scholar in search of illustrations for her book on the history of French feminism was directed to the basement by a librarian. There she found an extraordinary and extensive collection that she decided was important enough to devote several years to preparing for use. Encouraged by senior women historians, Maïté Albistur inventoried and cataloged the collection. Her annotated Catalogue des Archives M-L Bouglé (which was accepted as a master’s thesis) provides a fascinating history of Bouglé and an invaluable guide to the papers.

Heightened consciousness of the value of women’s personal testimony has led to smaller discoveries and to the publication of letters and memoirs from the nineteenth century. In 1982, Marthe (Éditions du Seuil) appeared and was greeted with critical acclaim and some skepticism. (It was published in English translation in 1984.) The editor claimed to have discovered in his family attic a collection of letters by and about a young woman of provincial aristocratic lineage. The letters span the period 1892–1902 and concern Marthe’s illegitimate pregnancy and the family turmoil it unleashed. Edited and arranged to unfold like a melodrama (hence the skepticism about their authenticity), the letters provide extraordinary insight into the texture of relationships in this family and into its concern for reputation, on the one hand, and money and property, on the other. Most striking is the plight of Marthe herself. Consumed by sexual drives she cannot control and forced by her family to adjust to acceptable social rules, she is alternately rebellious, obedient, brutal, deceptive; at once the victim and the author of her fate.

1 Maïté Albistur, “Inventaire des Archives Marie-Louise Bouglé déposées à la Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, le 4 juillet 1946” (Thèse pour le troisième cycle, Université de Paris VII, April 1982).


3 These characterizations are those of the anonymous editor of the book (Marthe, 8).
Another recent discovery of personal testimony has just been published in the *archives privées* series by Éditions Montalba. Edited by Michelle Perrot and Georges Ribeill, *Le journal intime de Caroline B.* is the diary of a young woman kept during the years 1864–68. The volume also includes letters she wrote to her husband from Belgium in 1871 (during the Franco-Prussian War), where she waited until it was safe enough to return to Paris. Like the letters in *Marthe*, the diary was found accidentally, while Georges Ribeill was rummaging through a row of religious books in a stall at a flea market. The diary is presented in abbreviated form in the book; the complete copy has been deposited at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.

Like *Marthe*, *Le journal* provides extraordinary insight into the individual experience of a young woman. Caroline Brame was born and lived in Paris, but her father’s family came from Lille. She was very much a part of the world described so brilliantly in Bonnie Smith’s *Ladies of the Leisure Class*: industrial, bourgeois, wealthy, and—for women, at least—extremely devout. A good deal of Caroline’s writing in the diary concerned religious matters. She detailed her visits to her confessor and other priests; her attendance at Mass and catechism classes; her thoughts and prayers to Jesus and the Virgin Mary. At the same time her life was a constant whirl of social visits, balls, and dinner parties. When she worried about the effect of these on her piety, she consulted her confessor for advice:

> “Oh, well,” he said to me, “go my child, with simplicity, enjoy yourself, but don’t get carried away; may the thought of God never leave you!” He advised me not to dance with too much abandon on Sunday, to restrain myself, to have God with me! “Especially no waltzes,” he added. Oh! how happy one is to hear these good words, how one enjoys things more with the knowledge that, in silence and meditation, a priest prays for a child who is obliged to go into the noise and distraction of the world. [31–32]

Caroline lived primarily in the company of women. Her closest friendships and her deepest emotional ties were with her female friends. She mourned her mother’s death for it deprived her of intimacy and “tenderness” and, seventeen when the diary began in 1864, she was particularly saddened by the decisions of some of her closest friends to marry. “I don’t know why all these marriages make me so sad” (43) sounds like a refrain in the pages she wrote.

Oh! They don’t understand that it is painful for a young girl to watch a friend marry; if the affection remains the same, intimacy weakens; there are no longer the same activities, nor the same thoughts, nor the same duties! [56]

They don’t understand that Marie’s marriage saddens me. It is good, but that doesn’t make me suffer any less, on the contrary. And I cannot say how many difficult moments there are! I have to repress all that I feel; how many times have I had to hold back my tears! . . . Why, my God, don’t I have more courage? . . . I will offer whatever sacrifices you ask of me and I will offer them with all my heart, but permit me to find my gaiety again. [69]

In the evening we all went together to Marie Ternaux’s house. It was the last time that I would see her as an unmarried girl and, when I kissed her, I could not protect myself from a feeling of sadness. Goodbye to all those delicious hours spent together, nothing is permanent on this earth. [74]

Although Caroline contemplated taking the veil (“I prefer the black veil to the white and the crucifix to all these ornaments” [77]), she also toyed with the idea of marriage. She invoked God’s will and left the decision to him. Still, her anxiety seemed to increase as the months went by and in January 1866, she noted: “New Year’s Day is such a singular day, a day of sadness and hope; we embrace, we build thousands of castles in Spain, all on sand. I was wished happiness, I was also wished a husband” (122–23). Several days later, she returned to the question, and it seems clear that she felt marriage was her destiny: “My God, there is something I desire. Is it God’s will? And when I think of it with hope, direct me, calm my fears and my disillusion, choose for me when you will, but soon, because at times it seems to me I cannot go on this way . . . I would certainly be happier and calmer in a convent than in the world, but is that my vocation?” (123).

Not long afterward, Caroline’s father apparently arranged for her to meet Ernest Orville, and the couple were married in April 1866. Caroline was overjoyed that there was someone to care for her and protect her, and she thanked God for his blessing. Even at her most exuberant moments, however, she referred to her husband formally as Monsieur Ernest. Indeed, a sense of containment and restraint replaced the girlish emotionalism of earlier pages. In fact, the diary tapered off after her marriage, apparently having ceased to serve Caroline’s needs. Michelle Perrot notes that the journal’s function changed once Caroline married. “The journal filled its role as the companion of an anxious adolescence, as the confidante for emotional uncertainties. Rite and witness of passage, that was the source of its unity and, doubtless, its uniqueness” (170).

The diary provides important insight into the separation of male and
female spheres in mid-nineteenth-century France. Caroline’s world was clearly a female world, but it was also a public one. Her time was taken up with social visits, dinner parties, balls, and church activities. “Nothing is more exhausting than these meals of Balthazar that never end!” (21). At one point, ill and tired, Caroline nonetheless had to preside at a dinner party and “amuse everyone, provide a certain animation for the guests.” She says, “I was so weak I would have given anything to be delivered from this difficult burden. Oh! the role of mistress of the house is not always enviable!” (19).

Clearly, Caroline’s world was different from her father’s and husband’s. They are depicted as busy; their time took precedence over and indeed often interrupted women’s schedules and plans. Theirs was the world of business which was remote and mysterious for Caroline. Her time was spent with family and friends; rarely did her contacts seem to take her outside her social circle. Indeed, with the exception of her maid, Caroline never had anything to do with the lower classes. (Once in the country she watched peasants work from a distance.) Yet the public nature of her life is undeniable, and it is evident not only in her descriptions of what she did and how she presented herself but also in her awareness of the importance of her activities for developing the allegiances and alliances on which social bonds depended. The worlds of men and women depicted in this diary are sharply different; but the nature of the difference is less public/private than it is business/household or business/domestic. Men managed money and administered family affairs; they set timetables and established formal contacts. Women were religious and emotional; they facilitated social affairs, bore and raised children, and provided the affection and intimacy the system required. The spheres were distinct and complementary; and women’s “destiny” was also in the hands of men. If these contrasts are not themselves new for historians of women, they are important to observe in their concrete manifestations. That close, concrete detail is what is so striking and useful about Le journal . . . de Caroline B.

The editors provide excellent short essays to put the diary in its historical context. Michelle Perrot does a sensitive reading of the text, which both places it in its historical context and exemplifies the way documents of this kind can be used to explore women’s history. Georges Ribeill situates Caroline Brame in her genealogical context, detailing the long and fascinating history of a nineteenth-century “bourgeois dynasty.” Caroline B. is a welcome addition to a growing collection of primary source material. The book, with its documents and essays, provides a model both for using such sources to write women’s history and for making women’s experience comprehensible as part of the historical record.

School of Social Science
Institute for Advanced Study