

## **2009 Winning Essay by Ruth Moberg Foster**

The task seemed daunting, a twenty-five page research paper based on a topic of the author's choosing with the stipulation that it be related to the theme war and society. Being a modern-American historian and interested in women's studies, I began to ponder topics which could fit into the mold set before me. When I first thought of writing on the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, I laughed because it seemed as if it did not fit the guidelines, but the more I dwelled on the topic, I realized how much I could learn about women's roles on the home front during World War II, specifically that women did much more than to simply work in production factories.

Starting in an obvious place, I logged on to Galileo to peruse the Christopher Center stacks. Expecting to only find an encyclopedia article or a small chapter in a larger textbook on World War II, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the library owned not just one, but four books on women's baseball, two focusing specifically on this league. I immediately jotted down the call numbers and traversed to the third floor to continue my quest. After locating sports section, I further rummaged through the stacks, thumbing through various indexes and eventually deciding on four books with which to begin my research.

It was a few days later that another student mentioned to me that she knew of a VU alumni who had played in the league. Armed with this information, I headed to the university archives to see if I could find out more about her. At the archives I received several newspaper articles and as well as the contact information for Ms. Ruth Born. It was from there that I was able to contact Ms. Born and set up an opportunity to interview her. It was this interview which formed a major backbone for my research because it provided the personal aspect that is often lost in the names, dates and statistics found in the books.

In the meantime, I continued my search for more information. I found the league's webpage, complete with a rather lengthy bibliography. It was from this listing that I logged onto World Cat in order to find the availability of many of these books. Knowing that I had a good chance of receiving most, I continued onto the ILL page and began to place quite a large order. Over the coming weeks, my e-mail box filled with various notifications that my newest sources of information were steadily arriving awaiting my retrieval.

Taking a note from my previous experience with the Christopher Center stacks, I began to search around for a way to visit other Indiana university libraries. Pleased to see that the Christopher Center is a member of Academic Libraries of Indiana (ALI) Reciprocal Borrowing Program, I applied for permission to check out books at the University of Notre Dame when I visited their sports collection. From this experience, I was able to retrieve two highly useful personal narratives on the league that I might not have found had I not had the opportunity to simply sit and look through various books.

My research was truly coming together, but a research paper is not simply written with books alone, I knew I needed to find journal articles. Using techniques gained through a research help session at the Library, I headed straight to the "Academic Search Premier" database. There I found numerous articles analyzing everything from the fans of the league to perceptions of female athletes during the 1940s. Further sifting through articles I saved many, which I thought could be of use, to my EBSCO folder and printed off several to read that I knew would be helpful. From here I began compiling a binder that contained not only articles retrieved from the online databases, but also articles I photocopied from VU's own periodical collection, as well as my interview notes.

By having the opportunity to use many and various sources, such as Galileo, Inter-Library Loan, World Cat, and the online databases, as well as the chance to visit other libraries through the ALI Program, I was able to fashion a strong argument regarding the place of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League both during World War II and the post war society. In fact, I was able to garner so much information that my paper exceeded the twenty-five page mark, and because I had such great resources, the task no longer seemed so daunting.

