"About two miles below Greenville, on the road to Freehold, there lived, early in the present century, two old maids.

"They owned a little log hut there, and a small piece of property surrounding it, in common. They were supposed to be sisters, but in fact were not related by the ties of blood in any way. They had both of them, in their younger days, experienced a romance that had broken their hearts, and the bond of sorrow between them had drawn the two close to each other in womanly sympathy. Together they had come from the old country to Connecticut, and from there to this place, seeking peace and forgetfulness in the wilderness. They never told their story or anything in fact relating to themselves that could serve as a clue to their identity or past life.

"They spent their time in the necessary work about the log house and garden which was filled with wild flowers and ferns, and in painting water color pictures which they sold among the neighboring settlers for small sums; the highest price being asked was twenty-five cents. These paintings. . . are unique in the extreme, showing great originality in conception, drawing and color, as well as in the medium employed for their production. Their subjects were generally selected from the Bible or profane history, in which they seemed to have been well-versed. The paper they used was the wrappings of candles and tea boxes, or something of that sort. The pigments were of home manufacture. They would hunt through the woods and fields for certain flowers, berries and weeds, which they would boil or bruise to obtain the color they desired. These crude materials were sometimes helped with the addition of brick dust, and in fact by anything that these primitive artists found suitable for the work in hand.

"The lady known as Miss Wilson (sic) was the artist-in-chief; the other, Miss Brundage (sic), the farmer and housekeeper. . . . Their paintings are scattered, by purchase, from Canada to Mobile and are now highly prized by the owners."[1]

Mary Ann Willson and Miss Brundidge are more familiar to lesbians as "Patience" and "Sarah," subjects of the fictional biography by Alma Routsong (pseudonym Isabel Miller), self-published for the first time in 1967 as *A Place For Us*. Information about these women is hard to find; a few of the paintings are reproduced in the December, 1955, issue of *American Heritage*; the New York Historical Society owns "Mare Maid," but has no supporting documents on Willson's life. Most of the available information was included in a 1976 issue of *Antiques* magazine.

In an interview with Jonathan Katz which appears in *Gay American History*, Alma Routsong describes her discovery of Willson and Brundidge and discusses the problems she faced in trying to market a positive lesbian novel in the 1960's. The following is an excerpt from their conversation:

"My lover and I were touring New York State and were visiting the folk art museum at Cooperstown. I was wandering through it, not really concentrating on anything, when my lover. . . called me back, pointing to this picture of a mermaid by Mary Ann Willson. There was a card beside it that said Miss Willson and her 'farmerette' companion lived and worked together in Greenville Town, Greene County, New York, circa 1820. Then we went into the next room—a small library—and found a book by Lipman and Winchester, called *Primitive Painters in America*, with a short piece about Mary Ann Willson. It said that she and Miss Brundidge had a "romantic attachment." I was absolutely taken by it. I didn't want to travel any more. I didn't want to see Harriet Tubman's bed. I wanted to go home and research Willson and Brundidge, find out all about them, and write a book about them."[2]

From The Lesbian Issue Collective:

I'm a writer who struggles constantly with the urge to remain silent.

And I understood our collective process as a struggle with silence. Like an individual isolated lesbian, we worked first on self-validation. We talked about the famous respected closet cases—could we get them to come out or figure some way to claim them. (Claiming the "great ones" is a way for a despised group to feel good about itself.) And we spent many many meetings doing consciousness-raising on what it means to be lesbian artists—talking, some of us, about issues we had never discussed before. My excitement in working on this issue of *Heresies* centered around the hope that many lesbian artists would write us, share their work, and contribute to this dialogue.

The standard I used in judging work was based on my wish to be inclusive—to present as much diversity as possible, to present clearly articulated articles even if I disagreed with their content.

Others in the collective felt differently. This we discovered as we worked and worked and no longer had time just to talk to each other. We had been too busy when we started—discussing our similarities, our struggles, our fears, and our opportunities as lesbian artists—to get very far in discussing our differences.

Cynthia Carr

The only talent I bring to the lesbian collective is my sexual preference, a scorn of self-important pretension, a nose for drivel, and a desire to see to it that we say it like it is. In the past we have done ourselves and our work a terrible damage by lying about our experience. Driven by a need for the comfort of a common political position, we have all too often allowed rhetoric to pass for truth. Seeking an accommodation with the straight world, we have lied about our essential difference. And in a spirit of loyalty we have compromised ourselves by supporting thinking and work which is simply bad. There is very little sense of humor in us. We have, by this excusable example, leaned heavily on many closet doors which might otherwise have sprung open. It was my hope that with this issue we might present truly good work by lesbians. Now, as I am about to be pasted up and mechanicaled, I can say that the effort has been exhausting and perilous. And certainly I am too close to the final product to say that we have succeeded.

Betsy Crowell

I usually think of myself as part scientist and part magician with certain skills that sometimes make art. Neither feminism nor lesbianism determine the form and content of my work yet it was only with the security of the former and the coming to terms with the latter (the muse) that my life and art began to be uniquely and overtly me.

Initially I worked on the issue seeking a community to explore in depth the relationship of lesbianism to the artist and to discover what would happen if lesbian art and artists were brought together. Our editorial collective's discussions were some of the most provoking and intimate that I have experienced, yet after each I felt a sense of panic. I know that lesbians have made great art, I know that lesbians have been major contributors to culture, and I believe that lesbianism in the largest and most powerful sense of the word has been central not peripheral to the creative world of woman, yet I was worried that we wouldn't receive sufficient "good" material. I also feared being viewed through society's homophobic lenses yet I will not obscure the importance of lesbianism to my life and art. The muse and I are inextricably entwined and she is a woman. I struggle continually against any restrictions on my identity while questioning why this culture relentlessly omits and suppresses from discussion and history (even in the feminist community) the essentialness of lesbianism to the creative lives of women.

However, there was a far deeper reason for my panic. After nine months of working on this issue I felt that our greatest unfaced demon was our own homophobia absorbed by all of us in different ways from a culture so homophobic that it ruthlessly suppresses and punished all exploration of female sexuality. This, coupled with the fact that lesbian artists desperately need visibility and credibility, gave us a common unexamined goal: visibility as matured and serious artists.

This is only a beginning. Omitted from the issue is any dialogue that examines the role of lesbianism as central to women claiming full power over their sexuality and that such power is the root of strong and unique art. Do not for a minute imagine that art has to be explicitly about sex or anything so simplistic. I am speaking rather to the fact that a person must be able to put the full force of herself behind her work. Fear of being seen as sexual, fear of the audience, fear of offending heterosexual friends, fear of retribution for creating or being in the issue are only a few of the fears that are real and need to be faced before we can initiate a discussion that begins from a point that assumes that lesbianism is the key to the powerfulness of all women.

Betsy Damon

I wanted an issue on lesbian art and artists that would provoke me; an issue that would challenge all the assumptions I have about lesbians and art; an issue that would leave me filled with questions and with the energy with which to explore the questions further. I wanted lesbians to be excited and disturbed by what they read here, finding glimpses of themselves, as well as a sense of what is missing. What stories are still untold?

What are lesbians? What are artists? In trying to reach a working definition of these two most basic questions, a sense of my own alienation from the task before us began to grow. This alienation came from being forced to examine sexuality from within a patriarchal context. A context which has created distinctions and categories in order to maintain its own power and privilege. The advantages gained by society's "power-brokers" through perpetuating and emphasizing the differences among racial, economic, sexual, and religious groups are clear. The most apparent difference between myself and a heterosexual woman; or myself (white, middle-class), and a Chicano working-class woman—is one of privilege. And for me, as a lesbian, as white, as middle-class, to maintain and perpetuate differences that ultimately exist only to deny privilege to some, seems wrong. One way I see myself as a lesbian perpetuating differences is in my focusing on what is and what is not a lesbian. "A woman who does not sleep with men." "Any woman who calls herself a lesbian." "A woman that loves and sleeps with other women." "What if she sleeps with a man one time? Is she still a lesbian?" "What if she used to sleep with men, used to be married to one, and doesn't now, but can't predict the future?" "What is the difference between a woman-identified-woman and a lesbian?" It was in trying to answer questions like these that a sense of futility and absurdity developed. I am not a lesbian. I make love only with women. I am in every way what society calls a lesbian. I will call myself and insist upon being called a lesbian as long as something called a heterosexual or bisexual exists. In all probability, I am referring to a sexuality that will never exist inside me. A simple sexuality, without reference to another's