Nancy Drum Dawson
(name in the 1970s was Nancy Drum)

Feminist work in North Carolina:
Winston-Salem, NC, NOW chapter president and founding member
North Carolina NOW state president
ERA United, NC, coalition vice-president and state coordinator to ratify the ERA
Women's Forum of North Carolina, charter member
NC Women's Political Caucus, Policy Council

Community Work in North Carolina and France:
YWCA of Winston-Salem, NC, Board of Directors, community dialogues on school integration
Community Environmental Action, NC, erosion control and flood plain zoning project, chair
CONTACT Helpline of the Triad, NC, volunteer and board member
Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education, DC, national board member, southeastern vice-chair
Arts North Carolina, Board of Directors, and president
Governor's Advisory Council for the Arts, NC, appointee
United Nations International Woman's Year, NC Conference, arts program chair
ARCADE, Dordogne, France, chamber music concerts, board member
Live-in-France, online discussion forum for American expats living in France, moderator

Employment
Teacher, The Woods Schools, Langhorne, PA
Child Development Specialist, Developmental Evaluation Clinic, Winston-Salem, NC
Public Relations Director, University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Winston-Salem, NC
Writer, published by Wall Street Journal

Narrative Biography, Nancy Drum Dawson

Nancy Dawson was born and raised in Philadelphia. Her father was an industrial designer and her mother was an elementary school teacher. Her ancestors were Quakers who came to Philadelphia with William Penn. She was educated at a preparatory school that they helped to found, where she was influenced by the Friends values of fairness, equality, personal responsibility and concern for others. In 1957, in her junior year, she was an exchange student to France, an experience that had a significant impact on her feminism. Before leaving for France, she read Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" and on arriving in Paris, she asked to be taken to the Café de Flore, where she knew that de Beauvoir and Sartre did much of their writing. It was inspiring for her, an impressionable 16-year-old, to sit in the crowded café, in the very place the book may have been written. During her year abroad, Nancy watched French women closely, admiring their independence and intellectual freedom. It changed her sense of femininity, which in the US was a rigid and confining ideal of what a woman should be.

In 1958, she enrolled at Guilford, a Quaker college located in North Carolina. This was the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement and she was there to witness the historic lunch counter sit-in at Woolworth. She saw the "whites only" signs on public water fountains and bathroom doors. On the bus that she took to town, the seats in the front were reserved for "whites," so she sat in the back in the "colored section." No one objected probably because she was white, but some of her friends were embarrassed. An incident that left a lasting impression was seeing the disappointment on a black child's face when her mother explained that she couldn't buy an ice cream cone at the "Friendly" ice cream parlor. Nancy worked with the few civil rights organizations that existed at the time and participated in peaceful protests and demonstrations, but the terrible inequities in the South had a powerful impact on her.

Her first job was teaching at the Woods Schools, a residential school for developmentally disabled children in Pennsylvania. At night she attended graduate school to study special education and child development and was mentored by special education pioneer Bernice Baumgartner. This prepared her for her next job as the first child development specialist in an HEW-funded Diagnostic Evaluation Clinic for disabled children and their families. The clinic served western North Carolina and provided a unique

context for Nancy to experience racial and sexual stereotyping in the South, but also the kindness and charity of most of the southerners she met in the towns and rural communities where she worked.

A few years later, Nancy married an activist lawyer and had two daughters. She stayed at home to be with her children until they were school age, but she remained active in the community. As a board member of the local YWCA, she coordinated interracial and culturally diverse dialogue groups on school integration and busing. She also worked with Citizens for Fair Housing and documented discrimination against blacks and women in real estate practices. She joined the efforts of an early environmental action group and canvased neighborhoods for recycling projects, lobbied for soil conservation and flood plain zoning and ran for office as a Soil Conservation Supervisor. Most of her colleagues were women and the experiences sharpened her interest in feminism, leading to her participation in the founding of the first NOW chapter in Winston-Salem, NC, and she was its second president. Among her many activities with chapter was the successful desegregation of newspaper help wanted ads; a publicized survey on the status of female teachers vs principals, and others on sexually biased courses in the public schools and sexism in local television programing.

When the Equal Right Amendment was passed by Congress in 1972, it was a call to action for Nancy and became her focus in the next three years as well as being her most important contribution to the feminist movement. She was elected president of North Carolina NOW and vice-president of ERA United, a state coalition of 27 organizations. In that capacity, she led the four-month campaign to ratify the amendment; she was the campaign spokesperson and coordinator and traveled throughout the state to organize local efforts and made speeches, participated in debates, and gave television and radio interviews.

After the disappointing defeat on April 16, 1975, she was tapped by the NC Senate to draft a bill for fair employment legislation to compensate women for the failure to ratify the amendment. The bill was introduced in that session and failed, and it was reintroduced in each session for the next ten years and failed.

By this this time, Nancy had developed an in-depth knowledge of the politics and the culture of North Carolina and she was offered a position at the state-supported North Carolina School of the Arts to develop community service and outreach programs for the school in the state. She served as the school's director of public relations for thirty years, retiring in 2005. During this period, she took advantage of opportunities to advance women in the arts, such as with the 1980 UN International Women's Year Conference in North Carolina, for which she arranged a screening of Judy Collins's Academy Award-nominated film, "A Portrait of a Woman" about the preeminent conductor, Antonia Brico.

Her service and community work on women's issues and in the arts included serving on the Mayor's Committee on the Status of Women, as well as the Policy Council of the NC Women's Political Caucus; and the Governor's Advisory Council for the Arts. She served on the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education national board of directors and was vice-chair for the Southeast region. She was chairperson of Arts North Carolina, the statewide arts advocacy organization and a board member for many years.

A volunteer commitment that Nancy valued highly was ten years of service for a local telephone helpline that brought her in touch once again with the issues women face. She was astonished to realize how little had changed in the thirty years since she first worked with NOW, fielding hundreds of calls from women about job discrimination, cultural barriers, legal issues and marriage. It was a sobering and informative experience, but it was time to pass the baton to her daughters and to the younger women.

Not long after Nancy retired, she moved to France with her husband, abstract painter John Adams Griefen, and turned her attention to writing, including an article about moving to France, published by The Wall Street Journal. Currently she is researching and writing about the status of women in France and the role and impact of French feminist organizations.