In Memoriam: Barbara Faye Harkins

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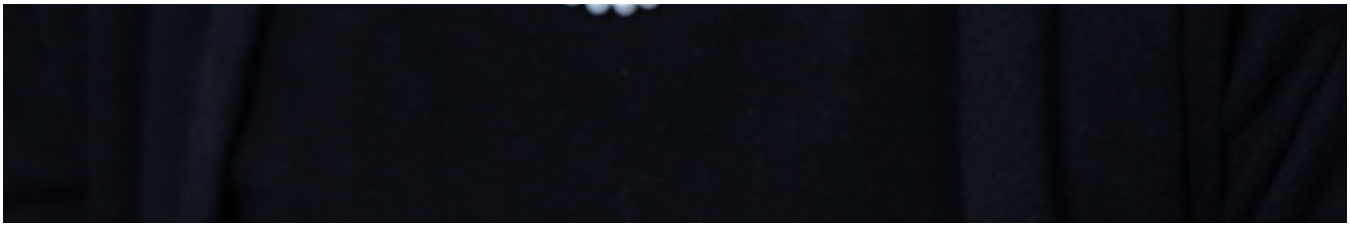
(November 29, 1955–July 25, 2021)



Barbara Faye Harkins, who retired as the archivist in the Office of NIH History and Stetten Museum (ONHM) in March 2020, had two passions: helping researchers get the information they needed, and making historical documents and photos easily available to the public. She is recognized by scientists, historians, economists, and students in many papers and books for helping them secure accurate information or just the right image. Once an inquiry was posed to her, she would not stop in her quest for the answer. Even after the onset of a serious illness in 2017 forced her to work from home, she could hardly bear to leave a question unanswered. Sadly Barbara died on July 25, 2021.

Barbara, born in Alabama in 1955, received an M.A. in Library and Information Science from the University of Wisconsin. During her career, she was a special collections librarian and archivist at Murray State University, Oregon State University, and the Reynolds Historical Library at the University of Alabama. She joined the ONHM in May 2008.

At ONHM, Barbara managed a large and growing oral history collection. She was a champion of preserving NIH's digital history, overseeing the archiving of the websites of the agency's many institutes and centers for inclusion on the Internet Archive, an American digital library that provides free access to collections of digitized materials. Working with the NIH Library, she ensured that many historical NIH documents, such as annual reports, were scanned and made available to the public on the Internet Archive. She also undertook a massive reorganization of the ONHM archival collection, working with the National Archives and Records Administration and the National Library of Medicine to make sure that permanent and historically important collections went to the proper caretakers.

Barbara is survived by her sister and her family, and many grateful ONHM patrons.