

Ruth Lee Briscoe Papers

Dates Created: 1915-1955

Extent: 0.83 linear feet or 2 clamshell boxes

Creator: Briscoe, Ruth Lee, 1903-

Subjects:

Briscoe, Ruth Lee, 1903-; University of Maryland, Baltimore. Health Sciences and Human Services Library.; University of Maryland, Baltimore; Library administrators.

Abstract:

The Ruth Lee Briscoe Papers contains the professional and personal papers of Ruth Lee Briscoe, long-serving librarian and director of the Library at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. Briscoe served the library from 1914 to 1946 as the first professionally trained librarian. During her tenure the library changed and grew. Briscoe was an avid researcher and routinely published pieces in the *School of Medicine's Bulletin*. The collection provides insight into the library history at the University of Maryland, Baltimore through the lens of a long-serving library director and well-respected member of the school; it also provides insight into library history generally as well as historical events at the University.

Biographical History:

Ruth Lee Briscoe was born in 1877; her father, John W.M. Lee, was the librarian of the Maryland Historical Society. In 1902, she married Charles A.W. Briscoe, a lawyer, who passed away in 1912, leaving her to care for their son, C. Whitridge L. Briscoe. After Charles Briscoe's death, Ruth L. Briscoe started her library career at the Library of the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic, Johns Hopkins Hospital. In July 1914, Briscoe was hired as the librarian at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. She was the first professionally trained librarian at the University.

When Ruth Briscoe was hired the libraries of Law, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Medicine and Commerce were all housed in what was then known as Davidge Hall, a renovated church building on the corner of Lombard and Greene Streets. During her tenure, the libraries of Law, Pharmacy and Commerce moved to their respective buildings but she remained in charge of the medical library in Davidge Hall.

Ruth Briscoe was instrumental in developing the collections of the Library as well as the renovation of the building itself. Additionally, Briscoe opened up the building for users, changing it from an exclusive collection to an open, circulating collection. She was also active in scholarship; writing several articles about the history of the University of Maryland and its Library as well as local library history. She was an avid miniature book collector, exhibiting her collection locally and through scholarship. Finally, she was a genealogist, writing biographies for the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

After Briscoe's retirement in 1946, she was named Medical Librarian Emeritus in honor of her accomplishments and service to the University. She was well-liked and respected by faculty and students alike; a fact supported by a fund created in her honor by an alumnus. Ruth L. Briscoe passed away on February 22, 1955.



Scope and Content:

This collection contains professional and personal papers of Ruth Lee Briscoe, director of the library from 1914 to 1946. The collection is divided into two (2) series: 1) Professional Research, which is divided into two subseries a) Speeches, Manuscripts, & Publications b) Notes; and 2) Personal Papers, which is also divided into two subseries a) Biographical and b) Letters. The materials shed light on the research interests of Ruth Lee Briscoe as well as her personal life and accolades.

Series:**Series 1 – Professional Research, 1917-1951 & undated**

Box 1, Folders 1-9

Series 1 is divided into two subseries: a) Speeches, Manuscripts, and Publications and b) Research Notes.

Subseries a contains published and unpublished speeches, manuscripts, and publications by Ruth Lee Briscoe from 1917 to 1951 and undated. These include pieces written for the *Dictionary of American Biography* and the University of Maryland School of Medicine's bulletins; as well as pieces about her personal miniature book collection, historical University events such as General Lafayette's visit to the school and the library's dedication in memory of those lost in World War I. It also includes a bibliography created by Briscoe of her written work.

Subseries b contains research notes by Briscoe including a series of correspondence about Edmund Ducatel's work and education. The notes in this series are mostly undated except for the Ducatel correspondence which dates from April 1927 to February 1928.

Series 2 – Personal Papers, 1915-1955 & undated

Box 1, Folders 10-18 & Box 2

Series 2 contains personal papers of Ruth Briscoe. It is divided into two subseries: a) Biographical and b) letters.

The Biographical subseries (a) contains Briscoe's biographies, including autobiographies and those written around her retirement in 1946 and death in 1955. It also contains clippings and photographs; one photograph has been removed because of size and is in the Oversized Photograph map drawer; additionally a framed certificate of retirement is housed in box 2.

Subseries b contains letters written to Briscoe from 1915 to 1946 and undated. A bound notebook of letter tributes to Ruth Lee Briscoe created at the time of her retirement has been removed from this subseries because of size and is in box 2 of the collection. In addition two framed letters from this subseries are also housed in box 2 because of size.

Arrangement: Thematically

Access Restrictions: This collection is open for research.

Language: Materials entirely in English.

Related Collection: Health Sciences and Human Services Library Records; Health and Human Services Library Digital Collection: <https://archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu/handle/10713/2>

Custodial History:

These materials were added to and collected by the historical collections librarians of the Health Sciences and Human Services Library at the University of Maryland. Some materials were pulled from the vertical files as well as the separate Health Sciences and Human Services Library Collection.

Sources Used:

Biography of Ruth Lee Briscoe, in Ruth Lee Briscoe Papers.

Robinson, I.M. Ruth Lee Briscoe [Obituary]. *Bulletin of the School of Medicine, University of Maryland*. 1955 Apr: 40 (2): vii-ix.

Robinson, I.M. Ruth Lee Briscoe – In Tribute. *Bulletin of the School of Medicine, University of Maryland*. 1947 Jul: 31(1): 41-45.

Processing Information:

Processed December 2019 by Tara Wink, Historical Librarian and Archivist at the Health Sciences and Human Services Library.