



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Berta N. Briggs Papers,
1908-1976, in the Archives of American Art

Jean Fitzgerald

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Archives of American Art
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<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Berta N. Briggs papers
Identifier:	AAA.brigbert
Date:	1908-1976
Extent:	1.3 Linear feet
Creator:	Briggs, Berta N. (Berta Nabersberg), 1884-1976
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of painter, writer and educator Berta N. Briggs measure 1.3 linear feet and date from 1908-1976. Found within the papers are biographical material, scattered letters primarily discussing her activities with various arts organizations, notes and writings, artwork including sketchbooks and drawings, scrapbooks, printed material, and photographs primarily of her artwork.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Berta N. Briggs papers were donated in 1977 by Mrs. Malcolm Fooshee, Briggs's niece.

Processing Information

The papers were processed to an intermediate level in February 2006 by Jean Fitzgerald.

Preferred Citation

Berta N. Briggs papers, 1908-1976. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Use requires an appointment.

Ownership and Literary Rights

The Berta N. Briggs papers are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical Note

Berta N. Briggs (née Nabersberg) was born June 5, 1884 in St. Paul, Minnesota, daughter of John William and Rosina (Reinfrank) Nabersberg. After her graduation from Central High School, she moved to New York to study art at the Art Students League under Kenyon Cox, at the Pratt Institute under Ralph Johannot, and at the Teachers College of Columbia University under Arthur W. Dow.

Upon her return to St. Paul in 1905, Briggs was appointed the first Supervisor of Handicrafts in the public schools, a position she held for three years. From 1908-1911, she organized and directed the Department of Crafts at the St. Paul Institute School of Art and taught woodblock printing, leather work, metal work, and pottery. During these years, she attended the summer school of the Minneapolis Handicraft Guild, working under Ernest Batchelder and Bertha Lum.

In 1911, Briggs moved to New York to become the head of the art department in the Charlton School, a private school for girls, where she taught art and lectured on the history of art and architecture for two years. On June 18, 1913, she married William Harlowe Briggs, an editorial executive for Harper Brothers publishers.

From 1918 to 1928, Berta Briggs lectured on the history of art at Miss Chandor's School for girls in New York. With nine other craft workers, she founded an outlet for craftwork, the Noank Studio Guild.

In 1928, Briggs began to paint landscapes and specialized in paintings birds. From 1930 to 1932, she was President of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors. She was Vice-President of the Society of Woman Geographers from 1939 to 1942, and was a member of the National Association of Women Artists.

Briggs's book *Charles Willson Peale, Artist and Patriot* was published in 1952, followed by *To the Shores of Tripoli*, published in 1955.

Berta N. Briggs died November 12, 1976 in New York City.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of painter, writer and educator Berta N. Briggs measure 1.3 linear feet and date from 1908-1976. Found in the collection are biographical material such as curriculum vitae and awards, and scattered letters primarily discussing Briggs's activities with various arts organizations. Notes and writings include notebooks for Briggs's two books *Charles Willson Peale: Artist and Patriot* (1952) and *To the Shores of Tripoli* (1955). The papers also contain artwork by Briggs including sketchbooks and drawings of birds, scrapbooks and printed material including exhibition catalogs and announcements, and photographs of Briggs's artwork.

Arrangement

The collection has been arranged as 7 series. Documents within each series are arranged chronologically.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1932-1975 (Box 1; 3 folders)
- Series 2: Letters, 1932-1961 (Box 1; 2 folders)
- Series 3: Notes and Writings, 1950-1954 (Box 1; 19 folders)
- Series 4: Artwork, 1931-1942 (Boxes 1-2; 6 folders)

- Series 5: Scrapbooks, 1908-1968 (Boxes 1-2; 7 folders)
- Series 6: Printed Material, 1932-1976 (Box 1; 12 folders)
- Series 7: Photographs, 1929-1943 (Boxes 1-2; 4 folders)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Women educators -- New York (State) -- New York
Women painters -- New York (State) -- New York

Types of Materials:

Drawings
Photographs
Scrapbooks
Sketchbooks

Names:

Peale, Charles Willson, 1741-1827

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1932-1975

3 Folders (Box 1)

Biographical material consists of curriculum vitae and awards.

Box 1, Folder 1	Curriculum Vitae, circa 1932-1943
Box 1, Folder 2	National Association of Women Artists Award Medal, 1954
Box 1, Folder 3	National Association of Women Artists Award Certificate, 1975

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Series 2: Letters, 1932-1961

2 Folders (Box 1)

Letters primarily discuss Briggs's activities with various arts organizations, and include one letter signed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mabel Conkling, Gail Sherman Corbett, Elisabeth Sturtevant Theobald, and other artists.

Box 1, Folder 4-5 Letters, 1932-1961
(2 folders)

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Series 3: Notes and Writings, 1950-1954

19 Folders (Box 1)

This series includes two notebooks concerning Briggs's book *Charles Willson Peale: Artist and Patriot* (1952) and one notebook concerning her other book *To the Shores of Tripoli* (1955). Additional writings describe Briggs's artwork and consist of typescripts by Briggs and others.

Box 1, Folder 6-16	Notebooks Concerning Book <i>Charles Willson Peale: Artist and Patriot</i> , 1950-1954 <i>(11 folders)</i>
Box 1, Folder 17-22	Notebooks Concerning Book <i>To the Shores of Tripoli</i> , 1954 <i>(6 folders)</i>
Box 1, Folder 23	Writings by Briggs, undated
Box 1, Folder 24	Writings by Others, 1953, undated

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Series 4: Artwork, 1931-1942

6 Folders (Boxes 1-2)

Artwork by Briggs includes three sketchbooks of birds drawn at the Bronx Zoo, the San Diego Zoo, and the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. Also included are miscellaneous undated drawings, and a block print.

Box 1, Folder 25	Sketchbook of Birds in Bronx Zoo, 1931-1936
Box 1, Folder 26	Sketchbook of Birds in San Diego Zoo, 1940
Box 1, Folder 27	Sketchbook of Birds in Washington Zoo and Bronx Zoo, 1941-1942
Box 1, Folder 28	Miscellaneous Drawings, undated <i>(see also Box 2)</i>
Box 1, Folder 29	Block Print of the Crucifixion, undated
Box 2, Folder 30	Oversized Drawing of a Cat, undated <i>(see also Box 1)</i>

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Series 5: Scrapbooks, 1908-1968

7 Folders (Boxes 1-2)

Scrapbook 1 contains letters, clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs and miscellaneous programs. Scrapbook 2 consists of only a few pages containing clippings. Scrapbook 3 concerns Briggs's books *Charles Willson Peale: Artist and Patriot* and *To the Shores of Tripoli* and contains letters, clippings, a press release, and an exhibition announcement.

Box 1, Folder 31-32	Scrapbook 1, 1908-1963 <i>(2 folders; see also Box 2)</i>
Box 1, Folder 33	Scrapbook 2, 1931-1939
Box 1, Folder 34-36	Scrapbook 3, 1950-1968 <i>(3 folders)</i>
Box 2	Oversized Scrapbook 1, 1908-1963

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Series 6: Printed Material, 1932-1976

12 Folders (Box 1)

This series contains clippings including Briggs's obituary, press releases, and exhibition announcements and catalogs that document Briggs's career.

Box 1, Folder 37-44	Clippings, 1932-1976 <i>(8 folders)</i>
Box 1, Folder 45	Press Releases, 1932-1943, undated
Box 1, Folder 46-47	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1932-1963 <i>(2 folders)</i>
Box 1, Folder 48	Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1939-1956, undated

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Series 7: Photographs, 1929-1943

4 Folders (Boxes 1-2)

All photographs are of artwork.

Box 1, Folder 49 Photographs of Landscape Paintings, undated

Box 1, Folder 50-51 Photographs of Paintings of Birds, undated
(2 folders)

Box 2 Photograph Album of Artwork, 1929-1943

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