



Smithsonian
National Air and Space Museum

Ruth Law Collection

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2020

National Air and Space Museum Archives
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<http://airandspace.si.edu/research/resources/archives/>

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Air and Space Museum Archives
Title:	Ruth Law Collection
Identifier:	NASM.XXXX.0387
Date:	(bulk 1916-1919) 1912-1963
Extent:	1.67 Cubic feet (1 flatbox; 1 slim legal document case)
Creator:	Law, Ruth
Language:	English .
Summary:	Ruth Law was the third American woman to earn her pilot's license. The Ruth Law Collection chronicles her aviation career with most materials dating from 1916 to 1919. The largest part of the collection is a scrapbook, with additional loose materials, containing the following types of items: photographs; newspaper clippings; correspondence; magazine articles; programs; and ribbons.
Digital Content:	Image(s): Ruth Law Collection

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Ruth Law Estate?, gift?, unknown, NASM.XXXX.0387, unknown

Processing Information

Arranged, described, and encoded by Amanda Buel, 2019. Revised and digital assets attached by Elizabeth C. Borja, 2020.

Preferred Citation

Ruth Law Collection, Acc. NASM.XXXX.0387, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

No restrictions on access

Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

Ruth Law (1891-1970) bought her first aircraft, a Wright Model B, from Orville Wright in 1912. She enrolled in the Burgess Flying School in June 1912, made her first flight on July 5, and soloed on August 12. She was the third American woman to earn her pilot's license. Among Law's accomplishments are the first woman to "loop the loop", the first person to fly a plane at night, and a one-time holder of the Chicago -- New York aerial speed record in 1916.

In 1917, Law offered her services to the United States in World War I. She was the first woman authorized to wear a military uniform, but she was denied permission to fly in combat. Instead, she raised money for the Red Cross and Liberty Loan drives with exhibition flights. After World War I, Law was active in the *Ruth Law Flying Circus*, a three-plane troupe that traveled to state and county fairs. She toured Asia in 1919 and had the honor of carrying the first official air mail to the Philippine Islands. Her husband, Charles Oliver, persuaded her to retire from flying to "home and hearth" in 1922.

Scope and Contents

This collection chronicles Ruth Law's life in 1916-1918, covering mostly her aviation career but also touching upon other aspects of her life. The scrapbook contains the following types of material: photographs; newspaper clippings; correspondence; magazine articles; programs; and ribbons, including a first-place ribbon won by her dog at a dog show. Additional groups of loose photographs were integrated with the collection in 1998. The photographs contain images of Ruth Law in all stages of her life, both in aerial and studio views, as well as images of her contemporaries in aviation, various World War I era aircraft, and circa-1919 photographs of her brother, Frederich Rodman Law.

Arrangement

The Ruth Law Collection is arranged as follows:

Series 1

- Ruth Law Scrapbook

Series 2

- Auxiliary Photographs

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Aeronautics
Aeronautics -- Exhibitions
Aeronautics -- Records
Women in aeronautics
World War, 1914-1918

Types of Materials:

Clippings
Correspondence
Photographs
Publications
Scrapbooks

Names:

Law, Frederich Rodman, 1885-1919
Law, Ruth
Ruth Law Flying Circus

Container Listing

Series 1: Ruth Law Scrapbook, 1916-1918

This scrapbook chronicles Ruth Law's life in 1916-1918, covering mostly her aviation career but also touching upon other aspects of her life. The scrapbook contains the following types of material: photographs, newspaper clippings, correspondence, magazine articles, programs, and ribbons.

The digital images in this finding aid were repurposed from scans made by an outside contractor for a commercial product and may show irregular cropping and orientation in addition to color variations resulting from damage to and deterioration of the original objects.

The Ruth Law Scrapbook is large and every page was scanned at least twice (top of scrapbook, bottom of scrapbook). Materials are layered and each page was scanned multiple times so each layer can be viewed. Loose materials in the scrapbook remain where found, but only pages pertinent to Ruth Law are displayed digitally.

Box 1, Folder 1 Ruth Law Scrapbook, 1916-1918
[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 2: Auxiliary Photographs, 1912-1963 (bulk 1912-1919)

The photographs in this series contain images of Ruth Law in all stages of her life, as well as images of her contemporaries in aviation, various World War I era aircraft, and circa-1919 photographs of her brother, Frederich Rodman Law.

The digital images in this finding aid were repurposed from scans made by an outside contractor for a commercial product and may show irregular cropping and orientation in addition to color variations resulting from damage to and deterioration of the original objects.

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|-----------------|--|
| Box 2, Folder 1 | [Material from Envelope #7]
Image(s)
"A Brief History of the Progress of Aviation by Photographs" by H.M. Benner [Harry], Hammondsport |
| Box 2, Folder 2 | [Material from Envelope #8]
Image(s)
Ruth Law and her aircraft, including her first Wright Model B, sold to her by Orville Wright in 1912 |
| Box 2, Folder 3 | [Material from Envelope #9]
Image(s)
Ruth Law and her aircraft |
| Box 2, Folder 4 | [Material from Envelope #10]
Image(s)
Publicity photographs for Ruth Law, including postcards, loop-the-loop, and Ruth Law's Flying Circus |
| Box 2, Folder 5 | [Material from Envelope #11]
Image(s)
Letter from Mel Anderson, March 23, 1963, and photographs from "Ruth Law Day," May 25, 1918. Photographs of aircraft in France, probably during World War I. Photograph of Rodman Law and Phillip Ward Page, 1912. |
| Box 2, Folder 6 | [Material from Envelope #13]
Image(s)
Portraits of Ruth Law from the Ira Hill Studio. Photographs of July 1935 visit to the International Shrine for Aviators, Riverside, California. |
| Box 2, Folder 7 | [Ruth Law Photographs]
Image(s)
Mostly Ruth Law's Flying Circus |
| Box 2, Folder 8 | [Frederich Rodman Law Photographs]
Image(s) |

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