



# Smithsonian

*National Air and Space Museum*

## Ruth Law Collection

Amanda Buel and Elizabeth C. Borja

2020

National Air and Space Museum Archives  
14390 Air & Space Museum Parkway  
Chantilly, VA 20151  
NASMRefDesk@si.edu  
<https://airandspace.si.edu/archives>

# Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	1
Administrative Information .....	1
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	2
Arrangement.....	2
Names and Subjects .....	2
Container Listing .....	4
Series 1: Ruth Law Scrapbook, 1916-1918.....	4
Series 2: Auxiliary Photographs, 1912-1963 (bulk 1912-1919).....	5

---

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	National Air and Space Museum Archives
<b>Title:</b>	Ruth Law Collection
<b>Date:</b>	(bulk 1916-1919) 1912-1963
<b>Identifier:</b>	NASM.XXXX.0387
<b>Creator:</b>	Law, Ruth
<b>Extent:</b>	1.67 Cubic feet (1 flatbox; 1 slim legal document case)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	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.
<b>Digital Content:</b>	<a href="#">Image(s): Ruth Law Collection</a>

---

## 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

Material is subject to Smithsonian Terms of Use. Should you wish to use NASM material in any medium, please submit an Application for Permission to Reproduce NASM Material, available at [Permissions Requests](#) .

---

## 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, Frederick 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

Scope and Contents: 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](#)

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

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

Scope and Contents: 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.

Box 2, Folder 1	<a href="#">[Material from Envelope #7]</a> Notes: "A Brief History of the Progress of Aviation by Photographs" by H.M. Benner [Harry], Hammondsport
Box 2, Folder 2	<a href="#">[Material from Envelope #8]</a> Notes: Ruth Law and her aircraft, including her first Wright Model B, sold to her by Orville Wright in 1912
Box 2, Folder 3	<a href="#">[Material from Envelope #9]</a> Notes: Ruth Law and her aircraft
Box 2, Folder 4	<a href="#">[Material from Envelope #10]</a> Notes: Publicity photographs for Ruth Law, including postcards, loop-the-loop, and Ruth Law's Flying Circus
Box 2, Folder 5	<a href="#">[Material from Envelope #11]</a> Notes: 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	<a href="#">[Material from Envelope #13]</a> Notes: 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	<a href="#">[Ruth Law Photographs]</a> Notes: Mostly Ruth Law's Flying Circus
Box 2, Folder 8	<a href="#">[Frederich Rodman Law Photographs]</a>

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*