



Smithsonian

National Postal Museum

Beatrice Aitchison Collection

Mitch Toda, Head Archivist

April 30, 2025

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Postal Museum Archives
Title:	Beatrice Aitchison Collection
Date:	1948-1971
Identifier:	NPMA.2025.3
Creator:	Aitchison, Beatrice (1908-1997)
Extent:	0.5 Cubic feet (One (1) legal size document box)
Language:	English .
Summary:	This collection consists of materials documenting the career of Beatrice Aitchison (1908-1997). Aitchison worked for the Post Office Department (POD) from 1953 until her retirement in June 1971. She held several positions there all of which involved directing research on transportation issues before eventually serving as the Director of Transportation Research in the Bureau of Transportation. Materials in this collection include Aitchison's curriculum vitae, writings related to her work on the Federal Woman's Award Study Group on Careers for Women, award related documents, her retirement speech, photographs, articles and clippings, and a poster.
Digital Content:	Image(s): Photograph - Beatrice Aitchison along with Taylor, Hefner, Helwick, Wadsworth, Miller (Allegheny Airlines), Barnes, and Hammond; standing in front of an Allegheny Airlines plane and amongst sacks of mail, 1953.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated by Ruth Draper, 2025.

Related Materials

An additional four items of Beatrice Aitchison's were donated by Ruth Draper to the National Postal Museum at the same time as this collection; these items include a first flight regular mail pouch, one speed mail pouch, and two Mr. ZIP buttons (Accession no. 2025.2009).

The Museum also has a number of objects related to [air mail](#) in its collections.

The University of Oregon, Special Collections and University Archives, holds the [Beatrice Aitchison Papers, 1931-1979](#) (*Note: As of April 2025, the collection is unprocessed and unavailable for use*).

The Schlesinger Library, Harvard Radcliffe Institute, holds a small collection of the [Papers of Beatrice Aitchison, 1943-1956](#) .

Within the District of Columbia Public Library collection, The People's Archive, there is an [oral history history interview of Beatrice Aitchison](#) contained in the "Slices of Pie" Oral History Project that was conducted on April 11, 1984.

Processing Information

Processed by Mitch Toda, Head Archivist, April 2025.

Preferred Citation

Beatrice Aitchison Collection, NPMA.2025.3, National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

Collection is open for research. Access to original archival materials is by appointment only. Researchers must submit request for appointment in writing. Please direct reference inquiries to the National Postal Museum Archives: NPM_Archives@si.edu.

Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

Beatrice Aitchison (1908-1997) was born in Portland, Oregon and attended private school there until 1916 when her family moved to Washington, D.C. She was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Goucher College in 1928, and received her masters (1931) and doctoral (1933) degrees in mathematics from Johns Hopkins University. Aitchison returned to Oregon in 1935 and in 1937 received her second masters degree in economics from the University of Oregon. When she returned to Washington, D.C. in 1937 she lectured in statistics at American University until 1939. She also worked as a member of the faculty of the graduate school of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and starting in 1938 held temporary assignments at the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). Aitchison returned to the University of Oregon in 1939 as an economics instructor, but still continued her temporary assignments with the ICC during her summers. In 1942 she resigned from her position at the University of Oregon and began her career with the federal government as a transportation economist, first with the ICC, where between 1942-1946 she was promoted from junior to senior statistician and then from 1948-1951 served as principal transportation economist. From 1942-1945 she was a consultant and head of traffic analysis for the Office of Defense Transportation, and in 1950 she was a consultant to the director of military traffic at the Department of Defense. She was the director of the Transportation Economics Division of the Office of Transportation at the U.S. Department of Commerce from 1951-1953.

Starting in 1953 until her retirement in June 1971, Aitchinson worked for the Post Office Department (POD) in several positions all of which involved directing research on transportation issues. She would eventually serve as the Director of Transportation Research in the Bureau of Transportation. While working for the POD, Aitchison directed studies that proved that it would be less expensive to send mail by air rather than by train. In the 1960s she also lead a five-year study that lead to the renegotiation of contracts with air carriers which saved the government an estimated \$50 million a year. For her work in mail transportation Aitchison was honored in 1961 as one of six women chosen to receive the "Federal Woman's Award" from the United States Civil Service Commission.

As a result of receiving this award she became a member of the Federal Woman's Award Study Group on Careers for Women, a small group of award recipients that were appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson that was successful in recommending that sex discrimination be added to the executive order banning discrimination in government employment. In 1970 Aitchison received a National Civil Service League Career Service Award as one of the top ten government workers of the year, the only woman in the group. Upon her retirement from the POD in June 1971, she was one of the highest-ranking women in the federal government. In addition to her work at the POD, she was a fellow of the American Statistical Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, as

well as helped found the American Society of Traffic and Transportation (later known as the American Society of Transportation and Logistics).

Content Description

This collection consists of materials documenting the career of Beatrice Aitchison (1908-1997). Aitchison worked for the Post Office Department (POD) from 1953 until her retirement in June 1971. She held several positions there all of which involved directing research on transportation issues before eventually serving as the Director of Transportation Research in the Bureau of Transportation. Materials in this collection include Aitchison's curriculum vitae, writings related to her work on the Federal Woman's Award Study Group on Careers for Women, award related documents, her retirement speech, photographs, articles and clippings, and a poster.

Arrangement

This collection is unarranged.

Bibliography

For more information about [Airmail Service](#) see the Topical Reference Page at the National Postal Museum.

Green, Judy, and Jeanne LaDuke. 2009. *Pioneering Women in American Mathematics : / The Pre-1940 PhD's*. Providence, R.I., London: American Mathematical Society ; London Mathematical Society. <https://doi.org/10.1090/hmath/034> .

Aitchison, Beatrice. "A Bureaucratic May Day or Cokes to Alaska and love letters to Viet Nam". *Goucher Alumnae Quarterly* (V. 047, No. 4) Summer 1969. Documents. Goucher College, 1969. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.33178629> .

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Air mail service
- Economists -- United States
- Performance awards
- Transportation
- Transportation -- Research -- United States
- Transportation and state -- United States
- United States -- Officials and employees
- Women economists

Names:

- Aitchison, Beatrice (1908-1997)
- American Association for the Advancement of Science
- American Society of Traffic and Transportation
- American Society of Transportation and Logistics

American Statistical Association
American University (Washington, D.C.)
Federal Woman's Award
Federal Woman's Award Study Group on Careers for Women
Goucher College
Graduate School, USDA
Interstate Commerce Commission
Johns Hopkins University
Johnson, Lyndon B. (Lyndon Baines), 1908-1973
National Civil Service League
United States. Civil Service Commission
United States. Department of Defense
United States. Office of Defense Transportation
United States. Post Office Department. Bureau of Transportation
University of Oregon

Container Listing

Box 1, Folder 1	Curriculum vitae - Beatrice Aitchison, January 1954
Box 1, Folder 2	Airmail poster, 1955
Box 1, Folder 3	Draft - Chapter I - "Problems of the Working Woman", May 18, 1966
Box 1, Folder 4	Draft - Chapter II - "Career Fields Offering the Greatest Promise for Women", May 23, 1966
Box 1, Folder 5	Draft - Chapter III - "What Colleges and Universities can do to Prepare and Train Women for These Careers" and Chapter IV - "How can Attitudes of Employers Towards Hiring Women be Improved", June 1, 1966
Box 1, Folder 6	Draft - Chapter V - "New Ways of Making Government Service Attractive to Women of Demonstrated Ability", June 29, 1966
Box 1, Folder 7	Profile of Federal Woman's Award recipients, Fall 1966
Box 1, Folder 8	Post Office Department - Press release - National Civil Service League award to Beatrice Aitchison, Director of Transportation Economics, April 6, 1970
Box 1, Folder 9	National Civil Service League Career Service Award Citation - Beatrice Aitchison, May 8, 1970
Box 1, Folder 10	Retirement speech - Beatrice Aitchison, June 1971
Box 1, Folder 11	Photographs - Beatrice Aitchison, 1948-1953, and undated
Box 1, Folder 12	Articles and clippings featuring Beatrice Aitchison, 1955-1970