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Brown, Ruth W. Collection (1891-1976), 1949-1979

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INTRODUCTION

The papers in this collection pertain to Ruth W. Brown, the head librarian at Bartlesville Public Library from 1929 to 1950. The collection focuses on an issue in the 1950s which ultimately led to the dismissal of her job. This collection contains correspondences, clippings, legal documents, professional publications, and autobiographical pieces by Brown.

DONOR INFORMATION

The Ruth W. Brown Collection was placed on indefinite loan in Special Collections at the Leonard H. Axe Library by Peggy Varvel on February 21, 1978.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ruth Winifred Brown was born on July 26, 1891 in Hiawatha, Kansas. She graduated from Northwestern State Normal School in 1910 and the University of Oklahoma in 1915. She taught for several years in Eufala and Nowata, Oklahoma. In 1919 she was hired as the Bartlesville [Oklahoma] Public Library librarian. In 1946, Brown helped established the Committee on the Practice of Democracy which was the first Congress of Racial Equality group south of the Mason–Dixon line.

Brown was dismissed from her job as head librarian in 1950 due to the library carrying what was then deemed to be subversive materials: Two left wing magazines and *Soviet Russia Today*, a propaganda magazine. During the city council hearing to discuss this issue, questions arose about her personal life, particularly her activities with racial integration. Brown received her termination notice over the phone, never receiving written confirmation. She appealed this decision up to the Supreme Court of Oklahoma, where she eventually lost her case. Brown later taught at the Piney Woods School, an African-American junior college, in Mississippi for three years.

Brown never married, but attempted to adopt two daughters, Holly and Ellen Brown. However, being single (at the time), she was not allowed custody. When the Holly was eighteen, she ran away from her foster parents to live with Brown and Ellen followed a short time later. Brown did manage to legally adopt Ellen. Ruth W. Brown died in 1975

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Ruth W. Brown Collection has six series: **Correspondence; Clipping; Legal Documents; Writings by Brown; Censorship; and Miscellaneous.** The Censorship series contains journal and magazine articles that are about how Brown's dismissal was a part of a movement for censorship in the country. All of the series are arranged chronologically with undated items in the back.

FOLDER LIST

Correspondence Series

f. 1 1950-1951

Clipping Series

f. 2 1949-1979; undated

Legal Documents Series

f. 3 Report of the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Oklahoma Library Association on the Bartlesville Public Library, 1951
Petition for Ruth W. Brown and Darlene Essary vs. Members of the Board of City Commissioners of the City of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, circa 1951
Syllabus for Ruth W. Brown and Darlene Essary vs. Members of the Board of City Commissioners of the City of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, 1952

Writings by Brown Series

f. 4 Memoir of her dismissal from the Bartlesville Public Library in 1950
Three Years in a Negro School in Mississippi
List of Major Events that happen in the first 21 years of Ruth Brown's life

Censorship

f. 5 American Library Association Bulletin, 1950-1951
f. 6 Library Journal, 1950-1961
Excerpt from Library Journal vol. 75, no. 18, 1950
f. 7 Saturday Review, 1950
"What Censorship," undated magazine article
Civil Liberties, 1950

Publications

f. 8 The Bartlesville Voter, 1950
The Oklahoma City Unitarian Newsletter, 1951
The Negro History Bulletin, 1954
Pamphlet – Are You A Good Library Board Member

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