

Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center

Hours of operation: 10am-3pm Mon-Thu **Phone:** 304-367-4403 **Email:** wvfolklife@FairmontState.edu

Address: Squibb Wilson Blvd. Fairmont, WV 26554

Ruth Ann Musick Collection

CREATOR

Dr. Judy Byers

EXTENT

Linear Feet: Approximately 108 linear feet

Number of Containers: 108 bankers boxes

Number of Items or Digital Files: 0

COLLECTION SUMMARY

This collection contains documents, letters, writings, and items from Dr. Ruth Ann Musick. They were donated by Dr. Judy Byers and the estate of Dr. Musick.

LANGUAGES

English

PROCESSING ARCHIVIST

Hayley Harvey

Collection Details

Biographical / Historical Note

Dr. Ruth Ann Musick (September 17, 1897 – July 2, 1974)

Ruth Ann Musick was born September 17, 1897, in Kirksville, Missouri.

Ruth Ann Musick left a significant mark on the history of West Virginia by fully recognizing, appreciating, and distinguishing the vast wealth West Virginia possesses in its cultural heritage. She was the first and primary female folk scholar to work toward the preservation of West Virginia's folk life mainly through the recording of the folk tale. Apart from her contributions to folklore, Dr. Musick served West Virginia as an outstanding educator, creative writer, and public humanist.

She loved to teach literature, creative writing, and of course, folklore. Often, she would act out singlehandedly the plays of Shakespeare while teaching them. It wasn't uncommon for her to jump on a desk or hide behind a door to explain fully a scene to her class.

Many aspects of Ruth Ann Musick's early life served as background for her work and life as an adopted West Virginian. Her formal education was basically completed, and she had gained valuable and varied teaching experience in both secondary and higher education. From her family she had inherited a respect for traditions. Through folklore she had found a means to preserve and perpetuate cultural heritage. All of this helped prepare her for the significant role she would play in West Virginia's history.

Much of West Virginia was like the Missouri known to Dr. Musick. Her native Missouri was also rolling and green, with the Ozark Mountains to the south. The same Anglo-Celtic Germanic population that had migrated into Appalachia in the early 1700s moved west into the Ozarks. Her English-Irish lineage, mixed with Scottish and German traces was predominant in the bloodlines of many West Virginians. She knew the Scotch-Irish folk songs, games, and dances, the dulcimer and the fiddle, and the quilting bees and other mountain crafts.

West Virginia's folk life was at the same time different from that of Missouri. The hills were filled with ghost tales never before collected. The people of Southern Europe and Asia Minor who had migrated into the hills at the turn of the nineteenth century to work the railroads and mine the coal possessed traditions very different from the Celtic stock who settled before them. To the recording and preserving of all of this rich cultural treasure Dr. Musick dedicated the rest of her life.

Ruth Ann Musick's formal education was extensive: she entered Kirksville State Teacher's College in 1916 and in 1919 received a Bachelor of Science degree in education; in 1920 she continued her education at the State University of Iowa in Iowa City; she was then awarded a Master of Science degree in 1928 with a major in mathematics and a minor in English; in 1938, Ruth Ann enrolled in a doctorate program at the State University of Iowa; and in 1943 she received a Doctor of Philosophy degree in English, with an emphasis on creative writing. In between receiving degrees, she taught English and mathematics in various high schools and colleges. It was not until Ruth Ann began her doctoral studies that an affinity toward folklore began to blossom.

In the fall of 1946, she accepted a teaching position at Fairmont State College. She had eagerly outlined her desire to record folklore of West Virginia and had beseeched President George H. Hand to allow her

to develop folklore and folk literature at the college. Even though Dr. Musick was originally hired to teach college mathematics (and did so for a few years) she eventually began to teach a few classes in the English department. In 1948 Dr. Hand allowed her to start a folklore class that continues on in the curriculum today. Two years after Dr. Musick began teaching her folklore class, she revived the West Virginia Folklore Society. The following year she found the *West Virginia Folklore Journal* and served as its editor and main writer until her retirement in 1967.

From her folklore collecting fieldwork Dr. Musick published four West Virginia folklore collections: *Ballads, Folk Songs, and Folk Tales From West Virginia*; *The Telltale Lilac Bush, and Other West Virginia Ghost Tales*; *Green Hills of Magic, West Virginia Folktales from Europe*; and *Coffin Hollow and Other Ghost Tales*. She also wrote two columns for West Virginia newspapers: "The Old Folks Say" for the *Times West Virginia* in Fairmont and "Sassafras Tea" for the *Allegheny Journal* in Elkins and Marlinton.

Dr. Musick's dedication to West Virginia's folk life was not limited to collecting and publishing. She was also a spokeswoman for West Virginia folklore both within the state and beyond its boundaries. Nationally, Dr. Musick maintained an active membership in the National Folk Festival Association and the American Folklore Society. She dedicated the last thirty years of her life to gaining recognition of West Virginia folklore as an intricate component of the state's history.

On November 8, 1973, Dr. Musick was diagnosed with spinal cancer. The disease quickly spread throughout her body. She called to her friends who understood the importance of her folklore work in West Virginia. She wished for this valuable work to be continued. Dr. Musick died in July 2, 1974. She was seventy-six years old.

Collection Description

This collection includes a multitude of memorabilia and ephemera of Dr. Ruth Ann Musick's time at Fairmont State College, now Fairmont State University. The extent of the collection includes photos, CDs, records, essays, stories, tests, newspapers and newspaper clippings, a multitude of folklore journals, letters and correspondence both familiar and professional, novels, thank you cards, post cards, superstition cards, column additions, maps of West Virginia and Appalachia, notepads, poems, folk songs, booklets, reports, magazines, flyers, playbills, prints and illustrations, hotel and travel information, home remedies, and classification cards. Most items are from the 1940s through to the 1960s.

Many of the items in the collection were donated by Judy Byers and were collected at the beginning of the Folklife Centers creation. Items are organized and listed in an ongoing finding guide that is soon to be attached to this finding aid for pursual. There is a total of 108 boxes specific to the Ruth Ann Musick collection, and items are listed in order of front to back for each box in the finding guide, with the boxes being organized by number, shelf, wall and space in the archive.

For now, please contact us at the email and number listed on the first page of this finding aid, and we will attempt to lead scholars, researchers, and those curious around the odds and ends of this as-of-now incomplete archive.

Arrangement Description

The collection is divided into 108 boxes and is being inventoried now. Some items will be weeded from the collection as the inventory continues along. For now, the extent is listed above in the collection description. The arrangement of items follows a clockwise wall label starting from the wall attached to the entry door as A to D, with shelves being numbered top to bottom as A to E, spaces being numbered left to right as 1 to 5, with odd numbered boxes in the front and even numbered boxes in the back.

Separated Materials

N/A

Related Materials

N/A

Location of Originals

N/A

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Dr. Judy Byers, a close friend of Dr. Musick, acquired Dr. Musick's personal effects and writings after her death in 1974. Dr. Byers donated this collection to the Folklife Center when the Folklife Center archival storage was completed around 2011.

Processing Note

The Folklife Center reserves the right to weed and maintain the RAM archive in accordance with our collections development and weeding policies.

Using the Collection

ACCESS STATEMENT

Materials are to be viewed in the Folklife Center and not removed from the building. Patrons are welcome to take photos and make copies of materials so long as it is safe to process the materials as such.

All materials must be handled according to archiving best practices, which means gloves must be worn, no pens and only pencils, and no liquids aside from water which is to be opened away from the materials as best as possible.

The Folklife Center does not have the capabilities to playback or record materials such as records, CDs, and VHS tapes.

RIGHTS STATEMENT

Copyright has been assigned to The Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center by Dr. Judy Byers. Copyright restrictions apply.

PREFERRED CITATION

[**ITEM DESCRIPTION**], Ruth Ann Musick Collection [**DATE**], The Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center, Fairmont, West Virginia