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Maida L. Riggs Papers

1925-2000

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[About SCUA](#)

[SCUA home](#)

[Credo digital](#)

[Scope](#)

[Overview](#)

[Series 1. Correspondence](#)

[Series 2. Photographs](#)

[Series 3. Writing and research projects](#)

[Series 4. Memorabilia and Ephemera](#)

[Inventory](#)

[Series 1. Correspondence](#)

[Series 2. Photographs](#)

[Series 3. Writing and research projects](#)

[Series 4. Memorabilia and Ephemera](#)

[Admin info](#)

[Download](#)

[xml version](#)

[print version \(pdf\)](#)



[Read collection overview](#)

Maida Leonard Riggs, class of 1936, taught women's physical education at UMass Amherst before shifting to teacher preparation. Riggs was a beloved member of the UMass faculty for 28 years before her retirement. An adventurous spirit took Riggs around the globe: to Europe with the Red Cross during World War II; as a bicycling tour leader after the war; on a trek across Nepal at

age 62; to Russia, China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Uzbekistan. After retiring, Riggs, a self-described compulsive traveler, embarked on a more personal journey to explore her roots. Riggs transcribed more than 250 letters by her pioneer great-grandmother, Mary Ann Clark Longley, and published them under the title *A Small Bit of Bread and Butter: Letters from the Dakota Territory, 1832-1869*, an absorbing and sometimes heartbreaking account of life on the frontier. An avid photographer, Riggs took advantage of any opportunity to use her camera. These images, particularly from World War II, tell as many stories as do her correspondence. Her memoir *Dancing in Paratrooper Boots* contains typed copies of her letters from her days as a Red Cross volunteer during the war.

The Riggs Papers are a rich documentary history of the World War II era, both in America and Europe, as well as an engrossing study (in transcripts) of the American frontier. Included with extensive correspondence and photographs are published and unpublished prose, and Lovingly, *Lucy: Vignettes of a Pioneer Woman's Life*, an essay on Riggs's paternal grandmother, Lucy Dodge Riggs. Additional items in the collection include handwritten journals, one detailing a trip to China and Japan in 1982, and Riggs's photographs of young children at play taken for her book on child development, *Jump to Joy: Helping Children Grow Through Active Play*. Riggs also took her genealogical research seriously, meticulously charting her family's 1638 immigration from England to Massachusetts. With camera in hand, she later traveled to England in search of more evidence of the Longleys' English roots.

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Women

World War II

Background on Maida L. Riggs

Maida Leonard Riggs was born on May 16, 1915, in Grafton, Mass., to Alfred D. Riggs, Sr., and Winifred Leonard Riggs, and graduated from Grafton High School in 1932. She was one of four children, along with Amy, Doris (known as Dot), and Alfred, Jr. Enrolling at Massachusetts State College with the class of 1936, Riggs majored in Distributed Sciences and was active in the YWCA, Home Economics Club, student government, and athletics. She was Swimming Manager of the Women's Athletics Association and was on the Rifle Team, and she was a member of the sorority Phi Zeta, whose MSC chapter was founded in 1932, not long before Riggs arrived on campus. She was tapped to be a "floor captain" in Abigail Adams House, the women's dormitory. Receiving her diploma from MSC in 1937, Riggs enrolled at the Bouve-Boston School of Physical Education, completing the Three-Year Normal Course in May, 1939. The following September, she began teaching at Sweet Briar College in Virginia, exploring the area on her bicycle, spending weekends in the Women's Athletic Association cabin in nearby woods, and following the developing war news reported on the radio.

In 1943, determined to serve the war effort abroad, she went to enlist in the U.S. Air Force but found that being a woman meant assignments restricted to "teaching drill tactics and conditioning exercises in the USA," as she later wrote. Instead, she joined the American Red Cross and was sent to Europe as a "Clubmobiler." Part of Group G, she was in England for about a year, and then went to France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany, remaining on the continent until October 1945. Although her duties chiefly consisted of making and delivering doughnuts and coffee to the troops from the remodeled buses that functioned as canteens on wheels, the Clubmobilers functioned as support troops who ventured as far into the action as required. Riggs later recalled landing at Utah Beach in August 1944 the day after General Patton did, noting that women's presence at the invasion of Normandy, among other major battles, tended to be left out of the historical narrative. Exciting, challenging, and strenuous, Riggs's wartime experiences overseas were just the beginning of a life devoted to seizing any opportunity for travel, with an emphasis on outdoor adventures. In the decade following the war, she led bicycle trips to Europe for the American Youth Hostels and the Experiment in International Living and ended up touring most of western Europe by bike.

Riggs spent a year as director of admissions at the Bouve-Boston School of Physical Education, then taught physical education in Newton and Scituate public schools before joining the School of Physical Education faculty at UMass Amherst in 1951. There she



Maida Riggs, ca.1944

established the Teacher Education in Physical Education program, but she continued to find time to travel, mostly in the summers. She received a master's degree in physical education from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1957, earning it over the course of three summers. Particularly fond of the Scandinavian countries, she spent the summer of 1959 at the University of Oslo in Norway in the university's first international program for physical education teachers to which Americans were invited, then took the opportunity to travel into the far north of Finland. A few years later, in 1963, she was in Ivory Coast as a Peace Corps instructor, training Americans in physical education. At sixty-two, she went on a 200-mile trek through the foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal.

She also taught or lectured at Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, the University of Utah, and in England and Norway, and she participated in educational seminars held in the Soviet Union, Mongolia, Australia, New Zealand, China, and Japan, where she was able to observe nursery schools and how they provided for physical activity for their young students. Also a specialist in early childhood education, she published *Jump to Joy: Helping Children Grow Through Active Play*, concerning physical, mental, and emotional development in young children and featuring her own photographs, in 1980. Retiring from UMass in 1979, Riggs remained connected to the university as both an emeritus professor and an alumna, living and gardening in Hadley. She continued to travel, and she researched her family's genealogy and history, publishing a collection of the letters of her great-grandmother, a nineteenth-century missionary to the Sioux in Minnesota, as *A Small Bit of Bread and Butter*. Riggs also compiled her own World War II letters into the foundation of her memoir, *Dancing in Paratrooper Boots*. Around 2000, she put together a list of women from the classes of 1928 to 1946 of the Massachusetts Agricultural College and Massachusetts State College who joined military services. Riggs died February 27, 2011.

Scope of collection

Riggs's two main areas of research interest, women in World War II and her own family history, are well represented in the collection. The Riggs Papers vividly chronicle the World War II era, both in America and Europe, as well as presenting an engrossing study of the American frontier. Riggs's extensive correspondence and photographs mainly depict her travels, from her time as a "Clubmobiler" with the American Red Cross to the many trips she made both abroad and in the United States throughout her life. Also included are research notes, published and unpublished prose, and assorted mementoes. Riggs conducted extensive research into her family, producing meticulous genealogical charts, transcriptions of family letters for publication, and *Lovingly, Lucy: Vignettes of a Pioneer Woman's Life*, an essay on her paternal grandmother, Lucy Dodge Riggs. Research materials from her World War II women project are also here, as are several drafts of *Dancing in Paratrooper Boots*.

Series descriptions

Series 1. Correspondence

1935-2000

Much of Maida Riggs's correspondence is with family members, including the frequent and lengthy group letters that she wrote from overseas, during the war and during her travels. In particular, the letters from 1943-1945 vividly chronicle Riggs's experiences serving with the Red Cross in Europe. Most of the letters are Maida's, but there is a small assortment of letters written by others as well.

Series 2. Photographs

1929-1986

Riggs's passion for photography is evident in the many photographs in this collection, beginning with those she took as a camp counselor in the summer of 1929 and into the 1930s. The bulk of the photographs are from Riggs's wartime experiences serving with the Red Cross, depicting herself, colleagues, American troops, and sightseeing trips, with some contextualizing documents (notes, letters) interfiled with the photographs. Riggs's travels after the war through Europe and Asia, as well as to Alaska, are also well covered and often include notes and itineraries. There are also photographs of young children at play, taken for her book on child development, *Jump to Joy*. Older family photographs are found within the manuscript of *Lovingly Lucy*, in Series 3.

Series 3. Writing and research projects

1942-1999

Riggs's two chief interests, women in World War II and her family history, are at the heart of this series, in the form of research notes, research materials, drafts, and compilations of letters, photographs, and essayistic writing. Copies of her major personal projects--her World War II memoir and several works about her family--are here, and while there is not a copy of her book about childhood development, *Jump to Joy*, there are some materials connected to its production and publication. There are also several handwritten journals focused on reading and travels, and some shorter writings.

Series 4. Memorabilia and Ephemera

1925-2000

A mix of mementoes (including newsclippings) and documents such as diplomas and passports, the items here represent Riggs's eventful and travel-filled life.

Inventory

Series 1. Correspondence

1935-2000

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1935-1942

Box 1: 1

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1943

Box 1: 2

Letters from Maida L. Riggs: American Red Cross

1943 Jan-1944 Jan

Box 1: 3

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1944 Jan-June

Box 1: 4

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1944 July-Dec

Box 1: 5

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1945

Box 1: 6

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1947

Box 1: 7

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1950

Box 1: 8

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1951-1955

Box 1: 9

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1957

Box 1: 10

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1959

Box 1: 11

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1960-1961

Box 1: 12

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1964-1973

Box 1: 13

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1974-1976

Box 1: 14

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1977-1979

Box 1: 15

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1980

Box 1: 16

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1981-1982

Box 1: 17

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1983-1985

Box 2: 1

Letters from Maida L. Riggs

1986

Box 2: 2
Letters from Maida L. Riggs
1987

Box 2: 3
Letters from Maida L. Riggs
1988

Box 2: 4
Letters from Maida L. Riggs
1989

Box 2: 5
Letters from Maida L. Riggs
1990

Box 2: 6
Letters from Maida L. Riggs
1991-1997

Box 2: 7
Letters from Maida L. Riggs
1998 Dec-1999 Feb

Box 2: 8
Letters from Maida L. Riggs
1999 March-May

Box 2: 9
Letters from Maida L. Riggs
undated

Box 2: 10
Letters from Maida L. Riggs
undated

Box 2: 11
Letters from Maida L. Riggs
undated

Box 2: 12
Envelopes
1943-1945

Box 2: 13
Postcards from Maida L. Riggs
1965-1990

Box 2: 14
Letters from various correspondents to Maida L. Riggs
1943-1999

Box 2: 15
Letters from UMass to Maida L. Riggs
2000, undated

Box 2: 16
Letters to and from Amy Riggs Farnum Loungway
1939

Box 2: 17
Letters to and from other friends and family
1961-1999

Box 2: 18
Series 2. Photographs
1929-1986
Camp
1929-1938

Box 3: 1
World War II
1943-1944

Box 3: 2
World War II
1943-1944

Box 3: 3

World War II

1944

Box 3: 4

World War II

1944

Box 3: 5

World War II

1944-1945

Box 3: 6

American Youth Hostel tours

1947-1954

Box 3: 7

Alaska

1950

Box 3: 8

Jump to Joy: #1-24

ca.1979

Box 3: 9

Jump to Joy: #25-47

ca.1979

Box 4: 1

Jump to Joy: #48-71

ca.1979

Box 4: 2

Phi Zeta reunions

1983-1986

Box 4: 3

Camp: photocopies

1929-1938

Box 4: 4

World War II: photocopy of album 1

1943-1944

Box 4: 5

World War II: photocopy of album 2

1943-1945

Box 4: 6

World War II, American Youth Hostel tours, and Alaska: photocopy of album 3

1943-1954

Box 4: 7

Series 3. Writing and research projects

1942-1999

Family history: genealogy chart, Longley family

undated

Box 4: 8

Family history: genealogy chart, Riggs family

undated

Box 4: 9

Family history: Longley-Riggs Letters, 1832-1869 (transcribed)

undated

Box 4: 10

Family history: Lovingly, Lucy: Vignettes of a Pioneer Woman's Life (1 of 4)

undated

Box 4: 11

Family history: Lovingly, Lucy: Vignettes of a Pioneer Woman's Life (2 of 4)

undated

Box 4: 12

Family history: Lovingly, Lucy: Vignettes of a Pioneer Woman's Life (3 of 4)

undated

Box 4: 13

Family history: Lovingly, Lucy: Vignettes of a Pioneer Woman's Life (4 of 4)

undated

Box 5: 1

Family history: Mary Ann's Background, 1813-1836 (Pioneer Ancestors)

undated

Box 5: 2

Family history: Pioneer Ancestors (1 of 3)

undated

Box 5: 3

Family history: Pioneer Ancestors (2 of 3)

undated

Box 5: 4

Family history: Pioneer Ancestors (3 of 3)

undated

Box 5: 5

Family history: A Small Bit of Bread and Butter: Letters from the Dakota Territory, 1832-1869

1996

Box 5: 6

Journal: reading

ca.1979-2004

Box 5: 7

Journal: travel to China and Japan

1982

Box 5: 8

Journal: travel to Europe

undated

Box 5: 9

Jump to Joy: charts and illustrations

ca.1979

Box 8

Jump to Joy: cover blow-up, mounted

ca.1980

Box 8

Paw Pals

1986-1992

Box 5: 10

Short writings

1942, undated

Box 5: 11

World War II memoir: Dancing in Paratrooper Boots (draft, partial)

ca.1998

Box 5: 12

World War II memoir: Dancing in Paratrooper Boots

ca.1999

Box 6: 1

World War II memoir: Dancing in Paratrooper Boots (copy 2)

ca.1999

Box 6: 2

World War II research materials: Normandy

1944-1999

Box 6: 3

World War II research materials: Preas, Maxine, diary notes

1944-1945

Box 6: 4

World War II research materials: women in the war

Box 6: 5

World War II research materials: women in the war

Box 6: 6

World War II research materials: women in the war

Box 6: 7

World War II research materials: UMass women in the war

Box 6: 8

World War II research/history: The Clubmobile

1982

Box 6: 9

Computer disks

1990-1995

Box 6: 10

Series 4. Memorabilia and Ephemera

1925-2000

Badges: Winter Olympics

1980

Box 6: 11

Badges and ribbons

1986, undated

Box 6: 12

Biographical materials

ca.1990-1999

Box 7: 1

Certificates and diplomas

1932-1939

Box 8

Certificates and diplomas

1947-1957

Box 7: 2

Certificates of honor and acknowledgment

1985-1997

Box 7: 3

Financial and miscellaneous notes

1972-1995

Box 7: 4

Identification: driver's licenses

ca.1943, 1990

Box 7: 5

Identification: passports, certificate of registration

1947-1957

Box 7: 6

Identification: passports

1965-1981

Box 7: 7

Maps

Box 7: 8

Maps

Box 8

Mementoes: school and church

1925-1928
Box 7: 9
Mementoes: travel
1945, undated
Box 7: 10
Mementoes: travel receipts
1980-1997
Box 7: 11
Mementoes: various

Box 7: 12
Newsclippings
1935-2000
Box 7: 13
Newsclippings: A Small Bit of Bread and Butter
1996-1998
Box 7: 14
Newsletters
1944-1945
Box 7: 15
Publication: Over Here (American Red Cross News)
1944 Dec
Box 8
Publication: Index (Massachusetts State College yearbook)
1935
Box 7: 16
Publication: Index (Massachusetts State College yearbook), personalized copy with autographs
1936
Box 7: 17

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Maida L. Riggs, 2000-2006.

Processing Information

Processed by Caroline J. White.

Related Material

See also University Archives: Alumni, Class of 1936: Maida Riggs (RG 50/6).

Language:

English

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Search terms

Subjects

China--Description and travel.
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Riggs family.
University of Massachusetts Amherst--Alumni and alumnae.
University of Massachusetts Amherst--Faculty.

University of Massachusetts Amherst. Department of Physical Education.
Women physical education teachers.
World War, 1939-1945--Women.
World War, 1939-1945.

Contributors

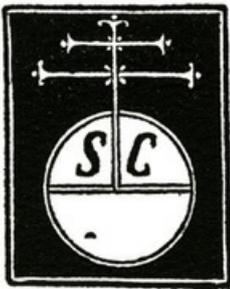
Riggs, Maida L. [\[main entry\]](#)
Riggs, Maida L.

Genres and formats

Letters (Correspondence).
Photographs.

Link to similar SCUA collections

China
Mass State College (1931-1947)
Photographs
UMass (1947-)
UMass faculty
Women
World War II



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