

Guide to the Alice Huyler Ramsey Papers, 1905-1989

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Collection Summary

Repository:	Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College Libraries
Creator:	Ramsey, Alice
Title:	Alice Huyler Ramsey Papers
Dates:	1905-1989
Quantity:	1.1 cubic feet (4 boxes)
Abstract:	Scrapbook and printed materials about Alice Huyler Ramsey's automobile trip across the United States in 1909. Also correspondence from Alice Huyler Bruns, research notes, and manuscripts of unpublished book about the trip by Earluth Abbitt.

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Biographical Note

Alice Huyler Ramsey (VC ex 1907) was the first woman to drive across the United States, a feat accomplished in 1909.

Alice Ramsey was born in Hackensack, New Jersey on November 11, 1886, the daughter of John Edwin Huyler and Ada Farr Huyler. Her father was a coal dealer and captain of a steam launch who encouraged his daughter's interest in machines.

Although she entered Vassar College in 1903, she left after only two years to marry John Rathbone Ramsey (1862-1933). Her attorney husband was the Clerk of Bergen County when they married and later served in the U.S. Congress (1917-1921). Their son, John Rathbone Ramsey, Jr. (1907-2000), graduated from Princeton University and attended Harvard Law School. After receiving his theological degree from the General Theological Seminary, he served as an Episcopal priest for more than 67 years. Their daughter, Alice Valleau Huyler Bruns (1910-), was a member of the Vassar College class of 1931.

Ramsey's husband bought her a car in the spring of 1908 after carriage horses bolted on her. The new automobile seemed safer. During her first summer behind the wheel, she drove 6,000 miles, mostly exploring roads in New Jersey. After an "endurance run" on Long Island to Montauk, she was approached by Carl Kelsey, then Sales Manager of the Maxwell-Briscoe [Automobile] Company to consider a cross country journey. The trip had recently been made by men, but no woman had made the trip.

On June, 1909, she set out from New York City with her husbands sisters Margaret Atwood and Nettie Powell, and friend Hermine Jahns. Ramsey was the only one of the four who could drive. With advance man John D. Murphy traveling ahead to publicize the trip and arrange for Maxwell-Briscoe agents to have tires, parts and mechanics available, they drew curious crowds and dealt with harsh driving conditions where few roads were paved. Their 3,800, 50-day journey took them across New York to Chicago and then through Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada to San Francisco. The trip included 11 spare tires, a broken axle, rain, mud, desert, prairie dog holes and a road block of policemen searching for a murderer. Traveling across Wyoming, they followed wagon trails that disappeared so often, they had to follow local cars whose drivers could lead them to their destination.

After her journey, she returned to New Jersey to her husband and young son. Subsequently, she made at least 30 more cross-country trips, including a 1919 journey with her son and daughter, friend, and another child. After her husband's death, she moved to Ridgewood, New Jersey, and in 1954 to Covina, California.

The 50th anniversary of Ramsey's trip brought a revival of interest in her accomplishment. She was honored as "Woman Motorist of the Century" at the 1960 Automobile Show in Detroit. She published *Veil, Duster and Tire Iron* in 1961. It was annotated and republished in 2005. In 2000, she became the first woman to be inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame.

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Chronology

1886	Born in Hackensack, New Jersey
1903-1905	Attended Vassar College
1906	Married John Rathbone Ramsey
1907	Son John Rathbone Ramsey, Jr. born
1908	Montauk Run

1909	Transcontinental Trip
1910	Daughter Alice Ramsey (Bruns) born
1933	Husband John Ramsey died
1960	Honored at the Detroit Automobile Show
1961	Published <i>Veil Duster and Tire Iron</i> .
1983	Died in Covina, California
2000	First woman inducted into Automotive Hall of Fame
2005	<i>Veil, Duster, and Tire Iron</i> republished as <i>Alice's Drive</i> . Annotated by Gregory M. Franzwa

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Scope and Content Note

The Alice Huyler Ramsey Collection focuses on Ramsey's early life and her groundbreaking automobile trip across the United States in 1909. The most significant materials include a scrapbook of photographs chronically the journey and notes Ramsey made for Earluth Abbitt who wrote two unpublished manuscripts for children's books about the trip. Draft manuscripts of Abbitt's works are also included. Clippings and magazine articles and a taped interview describe the trip and Ramsey's life.

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Arrangement

Material donated by Ramsey's daughter is in Box 1. Materials gathered by Earluth Abbitt and donated by Travis DuPriest are in Boxes 2-5. [Top](#)

Related Material

- Another scrapbook recording Huyler's transcontinental trip is located in the Detroit Public Library. Additional research material gathered by Earluth Abbitt, including an interview of Huyler by Charles Kuralt is at the Texas Woman's University Libraries.
- Ramsey published an account of her transcontinental journey, *Veil, Duster and Tire Iron* (Covina, CA: The Castle Press, 1961). It was republished as *Alice's drive : republishing veil, duster, and tire iron* (Tucson, AZ: Patrice Press) in 2005. Books about Huyler's trip include: Don Brown's *Alice Ramsey's Grand Adventure*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997) and Patricia Rusch Hyatt's *Coast to Coast with Alice* (Minneapolis: Carolrhoda, 1995).

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Subject Headings

Names:

- Abbitt, Earluth Epting

Subjects:

- Automobile travel--United States--History
- Women travelers

Organizations:

- Vassar College--Alumni and alumnae

Places:

- United States--Description and travel

VCL Categories

- Travel

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Encoding Information

Encoded by Jessica Kemm, October 2009

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Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements

The audiotaped interview of Ramsey requires special arrangements. Please contact the Archives and Special Collections Library staff for more information.

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Administrative Information**Preferred Citation**

Alice Huyler Ramsey Papers, Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College Libraries.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Jessica Kemm, October 2009

Acquisition Information

Box 1 was received from Alice Ramsey Bruns VC 1931, daughter of Alice Huyler Ramsey.

Boxes 2-4 were received from Travis DuPriest, nephew of Earluth Abbitt, in 1990.

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Series List

<u>Series I. Bruns Accession</u>
The Bruns accession includes a photograph album that documents Ramsey's transcontinental trip in 1909, as well as clippings, an audiotape, and other material.
<u>Series II. DuPriest accession</u>
The DuPriest accession consists of materials compiled by Earluth Abbot in her efforts to write a book about Ramsey's journey. The book was never completed, but Abbott did write several drafts of various chapters, which are included in this series along with her notes and other research materials. There are also photographs sent by Ramsey to Abbitt, correspondence, artwork for the book cover, and a treatment for television by Howard George and Morton Lewis.

Container List

Series I: Bruns Accession	
Box 1	Photograph album of transcontinental trip, 1909
Folder 1.1	Loose items removed from photo album [clippings, etc.]
Folder 1.2	Photograph of Detroit Award, 1960
Folder 1.3	Miscellaneous correspondence to Alice Ramsey Bruns, 1971-1983 [3 items]
Folders 1.4 - 1.5	Clippings and magazines
Box 1	Audiotape of Interview - J. Gambling and Alice Huyler Ramsey, 25 Aug 1970
Series II: Dupriest Accession	
Correspondence	
Folder 2.23	Ramsey, Alice Huyler to Earluth Abbitt, 1977-1983

Folder 2.24	Bruns, Alice Ramsey, 1983
Folder 2.25	Elliott, Elizabeth, ca. 1983-1989 [photocopies]
Folder 2.26	Abbitt, Earluth, [1990?] [draft]
Photographs	
Folder 2.4	VC 1907's Daisy Chain, 1905
Folder 2.5	Wedding Portrait, 1906
Folder 2.6	AHR in her first car, 1908
Folder 2.7	AHR, Sennell Ford, and Lorrey Fort fixing a flat on her first car, 1908
Folder 2.8	Run to Montauk Point, 1908
Folder 2.2	AHR and friends in car, 1909
Folder 2.22	List of photos sent by AHR to Abbitt documenting the transcontinental trip
Folders 2.9 - 2.21	Photos sent by AHR to Abbitt documenting the transcontinental trip, 1908-1909
Folder 2.3	AHR and her homes, 1977
Research Materials	
Folder 3.1	Book proposal
Folder 3.2	Manuscripts, book proposal
Folders 3.3 - 3.9	Manuscripts, clippings and notes
Folders 4.1 - 4.9	Manuscripts, clippings and notes
Folder 4.10	Artwork for cover design
Folder 2.27	Clippings and magazines
Folder 2.1	"A Dictionary for Tired People" - pamphlet
Adaptations	
Folder 4.11	George/Lewis treatment n Lewis.

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▼ Details

Abstract

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Collection Title

Alice Huyler Ramsey Papers