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Collection Summary

Repository: Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College Libraries

Creator: Atkinson, Ruth Lamb, 1896-1978

Title: Ruth Lamb Atkinson Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1781-1975

Bulk Dates: 1928-1947

Quantity: 10.2 cubic feet (20 boxes)

Correspondence, clippings, reports, speeches, articles, pamphlets, and government documents

Abstract: relating to Atkinson's work in advertising and with the Food and Drug Administration. Also includes collected Americana and Indian art and manuscripts.

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Biographical Note

Ruth de Forest Lamb (1896-1978) was born in Hallstead, PA. She graduated from Vassar College in 1918 and worked as a copywriter for various advertising agencies from 1918 to 1926. After some years as a consultant on food, drug, and cosmetic advertising, she joined the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 1933 as Chief Educational Officer. During this period she wrote *American Chamber of Horrors* (1936) and *The Devil's Candle* (1937). After leaving the FDA in 1942, she became the Washington lobbyist for the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and other consumer groups (1942-1945) and a director of Food for Freedom, Ind. (1943-1946). She married Henry R. Atkinson in 1942 and went with him to India for several years after World War II. Subsequently, she was active in consumer groups in Massachusetts. Ruth Lamb Atkinson died on June 17, 1978.

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Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of correspondence, clippings, reports, speeches, articles, pamphlets, and government documents pertaining to food and drug legislation, the drug "krebiozen," the seafood industry, ergot, consumer groups, Food for Freedom, Ralph Nader, and drug industry propaganda, 1928-1970. Major correspondents include Rachel Lynn Palmer and William Allen White. Also included are notes, articles, pamphlets, and clippings used in writing Atkinson's books; drafts and galley proofs; correspondence with her publisher Farrar & Rinehart; and reviews and letters received about *American Chamber of Horrors*, 1934-1937, and *The Devil's Candle*. Other items include clippings and government reports concerning India's independence, 1945-1947; Indian manuscripts; a scrapbook of the drug and cosmetic advertisements she wrote in the 1920s; and

miscellaneous Americana she collected including 1781 military communication of General William Heath, 1830 sheet music, and Benson J. Lossing prints of the Hudson River.

Note: The Revolutionary War file listed under Miscellaneous Americana is missing as of 13 November 2006.

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Access and Use

Access

This collection is open for research according to the [regulations of the Vassar College Archives and Special Collections Library](#) without any additional restrictions.

Restrictions on Use

Permission to quote (publish) from unpublished or previously published material must be obtained as described in the [regulations of the Vassar College Archives and Special Collections Library](#).

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Related Material

Separated Material

- [Five leaves from a manuscript copy of *Haft Paykar*, a Persian epic poem, were separated from Box 13 of the collection, cataloged as Persian MS 6, and added to the Islamic Manuscripts Collection, December 2024.](#)

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Subject Headings

Names:

- Heath, William, 1737-1814
- Lossing, Benson J. (Benson John), 1813-1891
- Nader, Ralph
- Palmer, Rachel Lynn
- White, William Allen, 1868-1944

Organizations:

- Farrar and Rinehart
- Food for Freedom, Inc
- National Congress of Parents and Teachers
- United States. Food and Drug Administration

Subjects:

- Advertising--Cosmetics

- Advertising--Drugs
- Consumer education
- Consumers--Societies, etc.
- Drugs--Law and legislation
- Ergot
- Fishery processing
- Food law and legislation
- Krebiozen
- Manuscripts, Sanskrit
- Seafood
- Women in politics

Places:

- Hudson River (N.Y. and N.J.)--Pictorial works
- India--History--1947-
- India--History--British occupation, 1765-1947
- United States--Politics and government

Document Types:

- Advertisements
- Correspondence
- Illuminated manuscripts
- Prints (visual works)
- Realia
- Scrapbooks
- Sheet music

VCL Categories:

- East Asia, South Asia, and India
- Politics

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Encoded by Laura Streett and Elizabeth Clarke, November 2006. Updated by Emma Gronbeck, May 2025.

[Top](#)**Administrative Information****Preferred Citation**

Ruth Lamb Atkinson Papers, Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College Libraries.

Processing Information

Collection is partially processed.

Updated by Dean Rogers, September 2006.

Updated by Emma Gronbeck, June 2023 and May 2025.

Acquisition Information

Gift of Ruth Lamb Atkinson, 1975, 1977.

Additional correspondence of Atkinson's transferred from the VC Anthropology Department, 1992.

A Sanskrit manuscript donated by Atkinson at an unknown time was added to the collection, January 2024.

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Container List

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Folder 1.1 | "Personal Miscellany" - degree, awards, Food and Drug Act, childhood writings, circa 1939 |
| Folder 1.2 | Farrar & Rinehart - correspondence with publisher regarding <i>American Chamber of Horrors</i> , 1934-1937 |
| Folder 1.3 | Copies of speeches: "What Educators Should Know about...the Food and Drug Administration," and others |
| Folder 1.4 | "Magic Oyster," manuscript of an unpublished novel, 1928 |
| Folder 1.5 | Typescripts of articles and speeches - early history of food and drug legislation |
| Folder 1.6 | Publications containing articles by Mrs. Atkinson, 1928-1940 |
| Box 1 | 52 publications and publishers' brochures (primarily 1936) containing articles by or about Ruth Lamb Atkinson, the FDA, reviews and comments on <i>American Chamber of Horrors</i> , and testimony before Congressional committees |
| Box 1 | Large green box of reviews and letters about <i>American Chamber of Horrors</i> , circa 1936 |
| Box 2 | Notes, photostats of articles, pamphlets etc., used in writing <i>American Chamber of Horrors</i> . Also typescript of chapter 7 (11 folders) |
| Box 3 | Typescript of <i>The Devil's Candle: An Informal History of the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act and Its Operation in Our Social Economy</i> . 23 folders of materials used in writing this book, as well as some clippings, etc., on drug and food legislation, 1960-1963 |
| Folders 4.1-4.3 | Historical and other materials on food and drug legislation and regulation |
| Folder 4.4 | "Krebiozen" - clippings, reports, etc., on rejection of this drug, by Ruth Lamb Atkinson, 1961-1966 |
| Folder 4.5 | Seafood - clippings, reports, etc., on regulation of this industry |
| Folder 4.6 | "Consumers" - clippings on Ralph Nader, circa 1970 |
| Folder 4.7-4.9 | Material, including bibliography, on food and drug legislation |
| Box 4 | Envelope of <i>American Chamber of Horrors</i> Photographs: exhibition, Food and Drug Administration |
| Box 4 | Photostats of articles on ergot, food, and whiskey adulteration (22 items) |
| Box 4 | Copies of bills before Congress on regulation of food, drugs, and cosmetics, 1933-1939 (32 items) |

- Boxes 5-6 Subject files which include material on food and drug regulation (folders 5, 11, 20, 36, 37, 44)
- Boxes 5-6 Subject files which include material on the fight to get a strong food and drug bill through Congress, 1933-1938 (folders 4, 12, 16-19, 25, 31, 32, 34, 35, 43, 47, 48)
- Boxes 5-6 Subject files which include material on Ruth Lamb Atkinson's work with Massachusetts and other consumer groups (folders 15, 23, 27, 29)
- Boxes 5-6 Subject files which include material on Food for Freedom, Inc. (folder 26)
- Box 5 16 pamphlets on food and drug regulation, and a copy of "The Chemical Feast" by James Turner (folder 51; see also folders 18-19)
- Boxes 5-5a Materials relating to drug industry's propaganda
- Boxes 8a-8b Carbon copies of letters, 1934-1939
- Box 9 *American Chamber of Horrors*, galley proof
- Boxes 10-12 Government documents relating to food and drug laws
- Box 12 *Advertising & Selling*, 1933-1934 (5 issues)
- Box 12 *Tide*, 1935-1939 (6 issues)
- Box 12 *Trained Nurse and Hospital Review*, 1938 Feb
- Box 13 Indian Miscellany — Indian government document: "Report of the Health Survey and Development Committee" (Vol. I Survey; Vol. II Recommendations; Vol. III Appendices; Vol. IV Summary)
- Box 13 Indian Miscellany — 10 miscellaneous publications (mostly about art)
- Box 13 Indian Miscellany — Portfolio of Indian manuscript pages, drawings and paintings, (8 leaves)
- Box 13 Indian Miscellany — Portfolio of 12 illustrations of individual Indians
- Box 13 Indian Miscellany — Chips from the poet's tomb - Chene-ka-Ranja (?) on the approach to Agra. (Few pieces in small plastic bag)
- Box 14 Indian Miscellany — Press clippings relating to Indian independence, 1945-1947
- Box 15 Miscellaneous Americana — Communication of General William Heath to Governor Clinton from Head Quarters Continental Village (mounted on cardboard), 1781 Oct 28
- Box 15 Miscellaneous Americana — Portfolio of 6 Benson J. Lossing prints of the Hudson
- Box 15 Miscellaneous Americana — Facsimile of George Washington's communication on the defense of Boston
- Box 15 Miscellaneous Americana — 3 pieces sheet music published in Boston. Includes "Grand Centennial March," 1830
- Box 17 Miscellaneous Americana — Antique wooden fife with brass fittings, circa 1800
- Box 17 Miscellaneous Americana — Correspondence on the antique wooden fife, 1975
- Box 15 Large scrapbook of drug and cosmetic advertisements, etc., written by Ruth Lamb Atkinson - "Madame X Reducing Girdle," etc., circa 1920-1929
- Box 16 Sanskrit Manuscript, illuminated and illustrated, undated

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