



ArchivesSpace

## Berenice Abbott collection, 1950-1991

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Maine Women Writers Collection

Abplanalp Library  
University of New England  
716 Stevens Avenue  
Portland, Maine 04103  
[cmiller10@une.edu](mailto:cmiller10@une.edu)  
URL: <http://www.une.edu/mwwc>

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	Maine Women Writers Collection
<b>Creator:</b>	Abbott, Berenice, 1898-1991
<b>Title:</b>	Berenice Abbott collection
<b>ID:</b>	0004
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	1950-1991
<b>Physical Description:</b>	.25 linear feet 14 folders
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English

### Preferred Citation

Berenice Abbott collection, Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England, Portland, Maine

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## Biographical/Historical Note

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Berenice Abbott was born July 17, 1898 in Springfield, Ohio. She attended Ohio State University, but left early in 1918, moving to New York City's Greenwich Village. She was immersed in the world of the city's literati very early on, sharing an apartment with Djuna Barnes, Kenneth Burke, and Malcolm Cowley. She traveled to Europe in 1921, studying sculpture in Paris and Berlin. In 1923, Abbott was hired by Man Ray to work as his studio assistant in Montparnasse. Impressed by her work, Man Ray allowed Abbott to use the studio to take her own photographs. This was the beginning of her long and illustrious photography career, and in 1926 the gallery Au Sacre du Printemps held her first solo exhibition. She started her own studio on the Rue du Bac, and then traveled to Berlin to study photography. Returning to Paris in 1927, she opened a second studio on the Rue Servandoni. Abbott's early focus was portraiture, and her subjects were well known in arts and literary circles in the city and the world, such as Jean Cocteau, James Joyce, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Sylvia Beach. In 1925, Abbott saw the prints of photographer Eugene Atget in Man Ray's studio and became determined to seek him out. She eventually found Atget, and befriended him, even taking his photograph in 1927. But before she could show him the results, he died. Abbott's concern for the fate of his photographs led her to Atget's executor, Andre Calmettes, who had more than 1,000 negative and 5,000 prints in his possession. Abbott managed to buy the photographs from Calmettes, who saw her passion for the work,

and she began her quest to promote Atget's work, which was largely unknown. In 1929 she traveled to New York City to find an American publisher for Atget's photographs and discovered the great photographic potential in the urban landscape. Abbott's photographs of the city were sharp, detailed, and atmospheric, calling to mind the work of her mentor, Atget. She documented several buildings and neighborhoods in the city that are now destroyed. She began teaching at the New School of Social Research in 1933 to support herself, and in 1935 was hired by the Federal Art Project as supervisor for "Changing New York." In 1939, when she resigned from the Project, 305 photographs of the city were deposited at the Museum of the City of New York, and a book, titled *Changing New York*, was also published. During this time Abbott moved in with Elizabeth McCausland, a writer and great supporter of Abbott's work. The two collaborated on a project in the 1960s in which they traveled along U.S. Route 1, taking photographs of the small towns along the way. Shortly after McCausland's death in 1965, Abbott moved to Maine, publishing *A Portrait of Maine* in 1968. Abbott's work is widely praised for its simplicity in that the photographs are not manipulated, both in subject matter and during the developing process. Abbott captured the world as it was, but did not shy away from innovation. In fact, she invented many ingenious photographic appliances, such as the distortion easel and telescopic lighting pole. She exhibited and published widely and was the recipient of numerous awards and honorary degrees including the Westbrook College Deborah Morton Award in 1977, an Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts from Bowdoin College in 1982, Women's Caucus for Art Award in 1982, a BA from Portland School of Art in 1983, and the International ERICE Prize for Photography in 1987. She died at her home in Maine on December 9, 1991.

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## Collection Scope and Content

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This collection consists primarily of published articles about Abbott and her work, dating from the 1970's into the 1990's. Also included are exhibition catalogs and ephemera from the exhibits which featured Abbott's work, material regarding awards received, and a small amount of correspondence from Abbott to the MWWC. There is also documentation about the collection of photographs donated by Abbott to Westbrook College in 1985--now located in the University of New England Art Gallery Collection.

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## Arrangement

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This collection is organized as a single series.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

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URL: <http://www.une.edu/mwwc>

### Access

Collection is open for research.

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## Related Materials

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### Related Materials

University of New England Art Gallery, University of New England  
Museum of the City of New York: Changing New York, New York Public Library  
Berenice Abbott papers, New York Public Library

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## Controlled Access Headings

- Photography
- Blanchard (Me.)
- Correspondence
- Exhibition catalogs
- Ephemera
- Clippings
- Abbott, Berenice, 1898-1991
- Abbott, Berenice, 1898-1991

## Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
Maine awards and citation, 1977-1986	Box 1	Folder 001
Correspondence to D. Healy, 1975-1986	Box 1	Folder 002
Invitation to 90th birthday, 1988	Box 1	Folder 003
Documentary film - Maine Humanities Grant, 1990	Box 1	Folder 004
Exhibition catalogs / invitations, 1973-1990	Box 1	Folder 005
Clippings, 1970s	Box 1	Folder 006
Clippings, 1980-1983	Box 1	Folder 007
Clippings, 1985-1986	Box 1	Folder 008
Clippings, 1988-1998, undated	Box 1	Folder 009
Clippings, undated	Box 1	Folder 010
Westbrook College Photography Collection, 1986-1990	Box 1	Folder 011
ICP Seventh Year Report	Box 1	Folder 012
Greeting card w/ signature	Box 1	Folder 013
Correspondence- letters to astrologer David Cornell, 1977	Box 1	Folder 014