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Rebecca Hourwich Reyher collection, 1960-1987

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Maine Women Writers Collection

Abplanalp Library
University of New England
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Portland, Maine 04103
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URL: <http://www.une.edu/mwwc>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Maine Women Writers Collection
Creator:	Reyher, Rebecca Hourwich, 1897-1987
Title:	Rebecca Hourwich Reyher collection
ID:	0314
Date [inclusive]:	1960-1987
Physical Description:	5 folders

Preferred Citation

Rebecca Hourwich Reyher collection, Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England, Portland, Maine

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Biographical/Historical Note

Rebecca Hourwich Reyher was born on January 21, 1897, in New York City, the second child of Isaac Hourwich (1860-1924) and his second wife Louise Elizabeth "Lisa" (Joffe) Hourwich (1866-1947). Rebecca enrolled at Columbia University's extension school in 1915 and took classes at the University of Chicago in the early 1920s; she received her bachelor's degree in 1954, after taking summer school classes at the University of Chicago. While living in Washington, D.C., Rebecca became interested in the women's movement, and in March 1913, she began her life's work for women's rights by participating in the first national suffrage parade in the United States. She carried her new-found passion to New York City and beyond, organizing street meetings and opening offices for the National Woman's Party. In 1917, she married fellow writer Ferdinand Reyher. Their daughter Faith was born in 1919. The marriage was unconventional from the beginning, with Reyher continuing to travel for the National Woman's Party; by the late 1920s she was raising Faith by herself. Because she traveled extensively, Reyher often left her daughter in the care of others, occasionally at her cherished house in Robinhood, Maine. The couple divorced in 1934. In 1924, Reyher took her first trip to South Africa as a journalist; it opened her eyes to the plight of women in other countries, and inspired at least four more trips to the African continent. She wrote many books and articles (some unpublished) regarding women's rights throughout Africa, India, and Sri Lanka. Back in the United States, Reyher continued her work with the National Woman's Party, maintaining close friendships with many of the women and men who fought for equal rights for women. Reyher worked a wide variety of jobs in the 1930s. In the early part of the decade, she was a public relations assistant to the president of the board of aldermen of New York City, Joseph

V. McKee; she wrote a column, "Your City and Mine," for the New York Evening World under his signature and also helped prepare speeches and articles for him. She also worked for both the Federal Works Progress Administration and the People's Mandate Committee, serving as part of the latter's "Flying Caravan" mission, which traveled through South and Central America supporting ratification of the Buenos Aires Peace Treaties. In 1934, she again traveled to Africa, this time with her daughter. They spent six months in Zululand, where Reyher met Christina Sibiya. Sibiya had been brought up in a Christian compound but left it at the age of fifteen to become the first wife of Solomon ka Dinuzulu, King of the Zulus. Reyher and Sibiya had many conversations (via a translator), leading to Reyher's book *Zulu Woman* (1948), the story of Sibiya's first meeting with Solomon, her experiences as one of his sixty-five wives, and his increasingly violent behavior, which finally caused her to leave him. The book also addressed the increasing Westernization of Africa and the ensuing conflict with traditional customs and practices. In the 1940s, Reyher wrote two children's books, edited a book of baby cartoons and an anthology of writings on children and childcare, as well as writing *Zulu Woman*. In 1949 she traveled to West Africa, to visit the Fon of Bikom, a tribal chieftain who had gained worldwide notoriety due to reports that he had over one hundred wives. Her book, *The Fon and His Hundred Wives*, was published in 1952. She traveled to South Africa again in 1950 and during this trip wrote columns for several Cape Town newspapers. Both these trips provided material for several additional articles. In 1957, she traveled to Uganda and the Belgian Congo; she was also active on the United States lecture circuit in the 1950s and 1960s. She took classes at the New School for Social Research in the 1960s and began teaching there, primarily on Africa. In 1965, she traveled to Africa for the last time, and interviewed many influential African women, continuing work she had begun in the 1950s. She planned two books based on this research: "Africa's First Ladies," and "African Women: The Key to the Continent," but neither was ever published. During her travels around the African continent, Reyher collected many artifacts, which were donated to Westbrook College as the Sinon-Reyher Collection of Africana and Americana. Reyher spent a considerable portion of her time in the late 1960s and early 1970s caring for her sister Olga ("Dicky"), whose health was deteriorating. Reyher herself suffered from increasing ailments during this time, but continued to live in her New York City apartment, despite failing eyesight, until 1984, when she moved to Maryland to live with her daughter. Reyher died of pneumonia on January 9, 1987.

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Collection Scope and Content

This collection contains correspondence (1976-1987), articles, photographs, speeches and Reyher's obituary. The letters are mostly concerned with the donation of the Sinon-Reyher Collection to Westbrook College and the Maine Women Writers Collection. There is documentation of the collection, including photographs of artifacts and information on the first exhibition of the collection in 1977. There is some biographical and suffrage information. The Maine Women Writers Collection also houses a portion of Reyher's book collection.

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Arrangement

This collection is organized as a single series.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access

Collection is open for research.

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Related Materials

Related Materials

Rebecca Hourwich Reyher Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Rebecca Reyher Collection, University of Minnesota Libraries Children's Literature Research Collections, Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Controlled Access Headings

- Robinhood (Me.)
- Correspondence
- Photographs
- Clippings
- Obituaries
- Promotional materials
- Yearbooks
- Ephemera
- Reyher, Rebecca Hourwich, 1897-1987
- Reyher, Rebecca Hourwich, 1897-1987

General

Encoded by:
Laura Taylor

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Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
Correspondence to Dorothy Healy, 1977-1987	Box 17	Folder 001
Photographs (2) and program Sinon-Reyher opening, 1978	Box 17	Folder 002
Bryn Mawr Commencement address, 1978	Box 17	Folder 003
Biographical information--correspondence, articles, obituary	Box 17	Folder 004
Lincolnian 1932 -- yearbook of the Lincoln School of Teachers College, 1932	Box 17	Folder 005

Book promotional as enclosure found in The Stork Run by Reyher

