



Guide to the Percy E. Ryberg papers, 1906-1991

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David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

411 Chapel Drive

Duke University

Durham 27708

askRL@duke.edu

URL: <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

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Summary

Collection Title:

Percy E. Ryberg papers, 1906-1991

Creator:

Ryberg, Percy E. (Percy Edward), 1908-2001

Source:

Josiah Charles Trent History of Medicine Collections (Duke University)

Abstract:

Collection primarily comprises New York psychiatrist Percy E. Ryberg's personal family correspondence (in particular with his wife, Barbara), diaries, and other personal papers, some of which speak to Ryberg's youth in Argentina. Professional correspondence, articles, and other items document his career and interests in sexual and mental health, substance abuse treatments, identity, spiritual and astrological aspects of medicine, and other topics, and the publication of his book, *Health, Sex, and Birth Control*. Also includes biographical and genealogical information; Ryberg's 1944 court martial and later notes about appealing it; photographs and photograph albums; and glass plate negatives. Acquired by the History of Medicine Collections at Duke University.

Extent:

6 Linear Feet (11 boxes; 1 oversize folder)

Language:

English. Some materials in Spanish.

Collection ID:

RL.01127

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m10m1v>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Percy E. Ryberg papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Background

Scope and Content

The collection consists primarily of psychiatrist Percy Ryberg's personal correspondence (in particular with his wife, Barbara), diaries, and other personal papers (1908-1991), some of which speak to his youth in Argentina and his military service in the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II. Ryberg's career as a physician and psychiatrist is represented through professional correspondence, writings, and medical research material. The material includes articles on the treatment of alcoholism in the mid-twentieth century, the publication of his book *Health, Sex and Birth Control*, and research on histamine reactions on the skin. Other topics that may be mentioned in the papers include mental health treatment, gender identity, schizophrenia, and spiritual and astrological aspects of medicine. The collection contains a copy of Ryberg's 1944 court martial, where he was charged with conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman for renting a London apartment with airmen accused of homosexual activity. There are also clippings and correspondence relating to the trial of William Koch (1940s), a U.S. physician who claimed to have developed a cure for cancer.

The collection also includes photographs (1906-1990s), mostly family snapshots and professional portraits of Ryberg, and photograph albums documenting Ryberg's travels and career. Glass plate negatives bear images of diplomas, and military portraits of Ryberg from 1942.

Acquired as part of the History of Medicine Collections at Duke University.

Biographical/Historical

Percy Edward Ryberg (February 26, 1908-December 16, 2001) was a New York-based psychiatrist whose work focused on the treatment of alcoholism, mental health, gender identity, and sexual health. He was also interested in spiritual and astrological aspects of healing.

Ryberg was born on February 26, 1908 in England and grew up in Argentina. After graduating with a medical degree from the University of Buenos Aires in 1935, Ryberg worked as a physician in the city. Then in 1938 he earned a three-year fellowship to the Mayo Clinic. Following the outbreak of World War II, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force as a medical officer. In 1942 he published *Health, Sex and Birth Control*, which included a chapter devoted to understanding homosexuality. He served overseas in England until his dismissal in December 1944 following charges of misconduct for renting an apartment with two gay airmen.

Following his discharge, Ryberg worked for Johns Hopkins University as a psychiatrist before relocating to New York and working there in a variety of hospitals and clinics. He served as the president of the American Society of Addiction Medicine from 1965-1967. He was married to Barbara "Bobbie" Ryberg (January 18, 1912-October 1, 2003) of Baltimore, Maryland. Ryberg died on December 16, 2001.

Sources cited: Barrett, Matthew. "Conduct Unbecoming an Officer and a Doctor: Medical Attitudes toward Homosexuality and the Court Martial of Dr. Percy Ryberg," *Canadian Journal of History* (Vol. 55 No. 1-2), 2020.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access Restrictions

Access restricted. Medical Research Materials series contains potentially sensitive information and requires permission from the curator to access. Contact Research Services to request access.

Access note. Glass plate negatives in this collection are fragile and may require extra assistance from staff. Contact Research Services for access.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Acquisition Information

The Percy E. Ryberg papers were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a purchase in 2003. Addition 2024-0054 received as a gift from John B. Thomas in 2024.

Processing Information

Processed by Ann Langford

Completed April 15, 2003

Encoded by Elizabeth Arnold

Collection re-processed and finding aid updated by Katrina Martin, June 2015.

Description and authority heading revised and subject headings added, Paula Jeannet, April 2019.

Accession 2024-0054 added by Meghan Lyon, June 2024.

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Names and Subjects

- Alcoholism -- Treatment
- Astrology -- Therapeutic use
- Identity (Psychology)
- Mental illness -- Treatment -- United States
- Mental health
- Psychiatrists -- Correspondence
- Psychiatrists -- Diaries
- Psychiatry -- History
- Sexual health -- United States
- Spiritual healing
- Substance abuse -- Treatment
- Argentina -- History
- New York (N.Y.)
- Diaries
- Glass plate negatives
- Photograph albums
- Photographic prints
- Soldiers -- Diaries
- Courts-martial and courts of inquiry.

- Gay military personnel
- Ryberg, Percy E. (Percy Edward), 1908-2001
- Canada. Royal Canadian Air Force
- Koch, William Frederick, 1885-1967
- Josiah Charles Trent History of Medicine Collections (Duke University)

Collection Inventory

Genealogy, undated

Biographical sketch	Box 1
Physical Description: 1 folders	
Family tree and notes	Box 1 Folder Oversize Folder 1
Descendants of Joseph and Ann Taylor	Box 1
Taylor memoirs	Box 1
Correspondence, 1942-1987, 1942-1987	Box 1
Printed material, clippings	Box 1
Photographs	Box 1

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Professional Activities, 1910s-1960s?

Citizenship, national residency, birth records	Box 1
Curriculum vitae and professional profile	Box 1
Announcements and events	Box 1
Forms and applications	Box 1
Certifications, memberships, diplomas	Box 1 Folder Oversize Folder 1
Awards, honors	Box 1

Royal Canadian Air Force court martial of
Ryberg, 1944, 1950

Box 5

Scope and Contents

Contains a copy of the proceedings of a general court martial held at R.C.A.F. Overseas Headquarters of Flight Lieutenant Percy Edward Ryberg. Ryberg was accused of knowingly allowing and promoting homosexual activities at his apartment in London, and was discharged from service. The appeal notes date from 1950 and include Ryberg's defense.

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Correspondence, 1918-1991

General Correspondence

1918-1929	Box 2
1930-1939	Box 2
1940-1949	Box 2
1950-1954	Box 2
1955-1959	Box 2
1960-1969	Box 2
1970-1979	Box 2
1980-1991 and undated	Box 2
Insurance	Box 2

Physical Description: 2 folders

Professional Correspondence

1937-1940	Box 2
1950-1959	Box 2
1960-1969	Box 2
1970-1979	Box 2
1980-1991	Box 2

Printed material from professional correspondence	Box 2
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William Koch Trial, 1938-1943

Correspondence, 1938-1943	Box 2
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Clippings, 1943	Box 2
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Writings, 1950s-1980s

"Alcoholismo y medicina psicomatica" by Dr. Jamie Braver, 1985 and "A Social Perception of Freedom" by Dr. Hector Fontarosa, 1985, undated	Box 3
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Seminar on Alcoholism for Social Workers at Bronx Lebanon Hospital, undated	Box 3
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Correspondence regarding establishment of weekly column, 1954	Box 3
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Correspondence regarding publication of Health, Sex, and Birth Control, 1948-1955	Box 3
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Drafts, "A Combined Hospital Setting and AA in the Treatment of Alcoholism", 1968-1971	Box 3
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Scope and Contents

Includes Spanish translations

Correspondence regarding "A Combined Hospital Setting and AA in the Treatment of Alcoholism", 1968-1971	Box 3
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Drafts, "A Medically Oriented Program for Handling Alcoholism in the City of New York" and "Report on Some Aspects of Alcoholism in England", October 1963, undated	Box 3
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Drafts, "Lecture on Venereal Disease", undated	Box 3
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Miscellaneous drafts	Box 3
Miscellaneous correspondence	Box 3

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Medical Research Material

Access Restrictions:

Access restricted. Medical Research Materials series contain potentially sensitive information and require permission from the curator to access for 100 years. Contact Research Services to request access.

"Observations on Histamine Skin Reactions Before and Following Administration of Histamine and Antihistamine "	Box 4
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Observations on histamine skin flares	Box 4
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Access Restrictions:

This material is restricted for 100 years. Contact the History of Medicine curator for permission to use these materials at least four weeks in advance of your visit.

Skin tests of histamines, 1939, 1939	Box 4
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Access Restrictions:

This material is restricted for 100 years. Contact the History of Medicine curator for permission to use these materials at least four weeks in advance of your visit.

Patient charts	Box 4
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Access Restrictions:

This material is restricted for 100 years. Contact the History of Medicine curator for permission to use these materials at least four weeks in advance of your visit.

Treatment notes	Box 4
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Access Restrictions:

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Notes Box 4

Access Restrictions:

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Dr. Carl H Hannssen affidavit Box 4

Access Restrictions:

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Printed material Box 4

Access Restrictions:

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Diaries

Diary number 26, 1925 August 18-1925
November 7 Box 5

Diary number 27, 1925 November 8 - 1926
February 1 Box 5

Diary number 28 (photocopy), 1926 February 2
- 1926 April 25 Box 5

Diary number 29, 1926 April 26 - 1926 July 23 Box 5

Diary number 30, 1926 July 23 - 1926 October 8 Box 5

Diary number 31, 1926 October 5 - 1926
December 20 Box 5

Diary number 32, 1926 December 21 - 1927 March 28	Box 5
Diary number 33, 1927 March 29 - 1927 June 8	Box 5
Diaries (2 volumes), 1937-1938	Box 5
Diary, 1942, 1944	Box 5
Loose entries and red notebook, 1936-1938	Box 5
Diary, 1963	Box 5
Diary, 1965	Box 6
Loose pages, 1979	Box 6
Desk diary, 1990, 1991	Box 6
Address book, approximately 1940s	Box 6

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Printed Material

Travel ephemera	Box 6
Clippings and photocopies	Box 6
Al Servicio del País, 1902-1952	Box 6

Scope and Contents

Materials in Spanish. Includes Ryber's thoughts on sexual education as a teenager.

Life-Giving Light by Charles Sheard, 1933	Box 7
Events	Box 7
Clippings	Box 7

Scope and Contents

Includes materials in Spanish

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Photographs, 1906-1980s

Access Restrictions:

Access note. Glass plate negatives in this collection are fragile and may require extra assistance from staff. Contact Research Services for access.

Portraits of Percy Ryberg, undated	Box 7
From professional activities, 1934, 1971, 1983, undated	Box 7 Oversize-folder 2
Family portraits, 1906-1913, undated	Box 7
World War II era, 1940s	Box 7
Wedding snapshots, Portrait of Barbara "Bobbie" Ryberg, undated	Box 7
Snapshots of Percy Ryberg, 1969, 1986, 1987, undated	Box 7
Family snapshots, 1967-1991, undated	Box 7
Snapshots, people	Box 7
Snapshots, landscapes, 1948, 1958, 1982, undated	Box 7
Negatives, copies of certificates, 1941	Box 7
Photograph album (black), undated	Box 7
Photograph album (red), undated	Box 7
Portraits of others, 1927, 1960, 1968, undated	Box 7
Argentina: Ryberg family home, 1912	Box 7
Snapshots: Travel, Iguazu Falls and Niagara Falls, 1940	Box 7
Photograph album	Box 8
Photograph album	Box 8

Photograph album, Travel in Germany and United Kingdom, 1937	Box 8
Family Portraits, oversize, 1946, undated	Box 8
Photograph album	Box 9
Glass plate negatives, 1940s	Box 10 Box 11

Scope and Contents

Glass negatives bear images of Ryberg's diplomas and two military portraits of Ryberg. One portrait (from 1942) has received treatment from Conservation.

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements

Because glass plates are fragile and vulnerable, digital surrogates are preferred for research access. Please contact the Rubenstein staff before coming to use these materials.

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