

Collection #  
P 0731  
BV 5444, 5446  
Flat File 28-K

**RUTH PRATT BOBBS  
PHOTOGRAPHS, CA. 1860S–1960S**

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Processed by

Maire Gurevitz  
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department  
William Henry Smith Memorial Library  
Indiana Historical Society  
450 West Ohio Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

[www.indianahistory.org](http://www.indianahistory.org)

## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 box of photographs, 1 folder of cold storage color photographs, 1 framed pastel portrait (flat file), 3 folders OVA photographs, 2 bound volumes, 2 PAA photo albums, 1 PAB photo album, 2 bins of slides, 1 printed item

COLLECTION DATES: ca. 1860s–1960s

PROVENANCE: Gift of Ms. Mary R. Williams and Ms. Robbie K. Williams Estate, Indianapolis, IN

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Mary Lyon Taylor Negatives, P0178

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2005.0343, 2005.0378

NOTES:

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ruth Augusta Pratt Bobbs (3 September 1884–15 January 1973) was born to Julius Fisher Pratt and Mary Ann Smith Pratt and sister, Lois, in Indianapolis. Her father, Julius (1845–1900), was a noted businessman in the city who was involved with the Consumer's Gas Trust Co., Merchant's National Bank, and the Woodburn "Sarven Wheel" Co. Her mother, Mary Ann (23 December 1894–12 September 1899), was the daughter of another Indianapolis businessman, Samuel F. Smith, of Osgood, Smith & Co. Mary Ann Pratt had a large art collection that was loaned to Herron Art School after her death, and she was involved in arts organizations in the city, such as the Katherine Merrill Club, the Portfolio Club, and the Contemporary Club. Ruth's sister, Lois (1882–1932) was married to Ernest Knefler, a manufacturer, in 1914 and had three children, Mary, Ernest, and David.

Ruth had an early interest in art, as she was a pupil of Mary Y. Robinson of Indianapolis. In 1900, she and her sister Lois lived together in Europe while Ruth was studying art in Paris at Academie Julian. In 1903, Ruth moved to New York and enrolled at the New York School of Art, where she studied with artist Robert Henri. In 1907, she returned to Indianapolis and began studying at the John Herron Art Institute. Over the course of her studies, she had also studied with Charles Woodbury and Charles W. Hawthorne. In April 1912, Ruth married William C. Bobbs of the Bobbs-Merrill publishing company. She remained a widower after Bobbs passed away in 1926.

Throughout her career as an artist, Ruth had to overcome the stereotype that she was just a wealthy hobbyist rather than a legitimate artist. She was most noted for her works of portraiture. Some of her notable works were a portrait of Gen. Robert H. Tyndall for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, and a portrait of poet Stephen Vincent Benet in 1928. She also displayed her work at the Hoosier Salon, the Indiana Artists Club, and the Art Association of Indianapolis. Eleven of Ruth's portraits reside in the permanent collection of the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

### Sources:

Ancestrylibrary.com

"Art and Artists." *The Indianapolis Sunday Star*, June 29, 1913

Burnet, Mary Quick. *Art and Artists of Indiana*. New York: Century Co., 1921.

Owings Jr., Frank N. "Ruth Pratt Bobbs." *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains loose photographs, a pastel portrait, pages torn out of a photo album, photo albums, slides, and a scrapbook that contains both Art History notes and fashion ads from the 1940s. Most of the loose photographs are of Ruth in the 1950s and 1960s. The loose album pages are mostly images taken from the Pratt family—Julius, Mary Ann, Lois and Ruth—vacationing in Crescent Beach, Connecticut with other families.

There are also interior and exterior scenes of what appears to be the Pratt family home. The photo albums also document the activities of the Pratt family. One album documents Lois and Ruth's travels around England and Scotland, as well as their father Julius's visit to them in 1900. Another album documents Lois Olivia Pratt's activities with friends and family around Indianapolis in the summer of 1898 as well as further images taken on her European tour with her sister Ruth. Scenes from this album include Military Park, Garfield Park, Sylvan Beach, Michigan, and Vienna, Austria. The third album is indeterminate of who the subjects of the photographs are but it seems to be the same men and women possibly enjoying outdoor wagon rides and walks at a large resort.

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Portraits, [Mary Ann Smith Pratt], ca. 1860s–1890s

Interiors and Exteriors, [Pratt Residence, Indianapolis], ca. 1890s

Snapshots, Ruth and Lois as children at play, ca. 1890

[Pratt Family at Crescent Beach, Niantic, Connecticut], ca. 1890s (1 of 3)

[Pratt Family at Crescent Beach, Niantic, Connecticut], ca. 1890s (3 of 3)

[Pratt Family at Crescent Beach, Niantic, Connecticut], ca. 1890s (3 of 3)

Portraits, Ruth Pratt Bobbs, 1896–ca.1950s

Unidentified Pratt Family Photo Album, ca. 1890s

Photo Album, Lois Olivia Pratt, Summer 1898; ca. 1900

Loose snapshots removed from the album of Julius, Lois, and Ruth Tour of the UK, ca. 1900

Photo Album, Julius, Lois, and Ruth Pratt Tour of the UK, ca. 1900

Snapshots, Ruth Pratt Bobbs, ca. 1900s–1940s

Portrait and Snapshots, Unidentified Individuals, ca. 1900s; ca. 1960s

Reproduction prints of Ruth Pratt Bobbs' Paintings, ca. 1930s–1950s

Reproduction prints of Ruth Pratt Bobbs' Paintings, ca. 1930s–1950s (1 of 3)

### CONTAINER

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 1

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 2

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 3

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 4

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 5

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 6

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 7

PAA Album Storage

PAA Album Storage

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 8

PAB Album Storage

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 9

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 10

Photographs,  
Box 1, Folder 11

OVA Photographs,  
Folder 1 of 3

Reproduction prints of Ruth Pratt Bobbs' Paintings,  
ca. 1930s–1950s (2 of 3)

OVA Photographs,  
Folder 2 of 3

Reproduction prints of Ruth Pratt Bobbs' Paintings,  
ca. 1930s–1950s (3 of 3)

OVA Photographs,  
Folder 3 of 3

Scrapbook, Art History Notes and Fashion Magazine  
Inspiration, ca. 1900s; ca. 1940s

BV5444

Scrapbook, Ruth Pratt Bobbs Clippings, ca. 1940s–  
1950s

BV5446

*Bundles for America, Selected Recipes with Culinary  
Herbs*, 1943

General Collection:  
2005.0343

[Pastel portrait of an unidentified woman, seated in  
profile], 1950

Flat File 28-K

Ruth Pratt Bobbs Entertaining Guests in Northport,  
Michigan, ca. 1950s–1960s (1 of 2)

Slides:

Bin 1 of 2

Ruth Pratt Bobbs Entertaining Guests in Northport,  
Michigan, ca. 1950s–1960s (2 of 2)

Slides:

Bin 2 of 2

Snapshots, Ruth Pratt Bobbs, ca. 1950s–1960s

Cold Storage,

Color Photographs:

Folder 1 of 1