

Brown, Ralph Minthorne, Papers

Ralph Minthorne Brown Papers

1872-1947



Title Statement

Brown, Ralph Minthorne, PapersRalph Minthorne Brown Papers, 1872-1947 Ms.1970.002

Author: John M. Jackson, Archivist

Publication Statement

Publisher: Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Special Collections and University Archives, University Libraries (0434)
560 Drillfield Drive
Newman Library, Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
Business Number: 540-231-6308
specref@vt.edu
URL: <http://spec.lib.vt.edu>



2008 (CC0 1.0)

Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2025-10-09 07:02:52 -0400.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.1970.002

Unit Date

1872-1947

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

This collection contains the papers of Ralph Minthorne Brown, Virginia Tech head librarian (1926-1947), amateur historian, and naturalist. It includes materials on Virginia Tech and local history, including typed transcripts of sources gathered for an intended history of Virginia Tech. Also included are Brown's Blacksburg ornithological and weather observations, a bibliography of Matthew Fontaine Maury, and other writings.

Creator

Brown, Ralph Minthorne, 1878-1958

Extent

2.3 Cubic Feet 5 boxes; 1 oversize folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use

The copyright status of this collection is unknown. Copyright restrictions may apply. Contact Special Collections and University Archives for assistance in determining the use of these materials.

Reproduction or digitization of materials for personal or research use can be requested using our reproduction/digitization form: <http://bit.ly/scuareproduction>. Reproduction or digitization of materials for publication or exhibit use can be requested using our publication/exhibition form: <http://bit.ly/scuapublication>. Please contact Special Collections and University Archives (specref@vt.edu or 540-231-6308) if you need assistance with forms or to submit a completed form.

Source of Acquisition

The Ralph Minthorne Brown Papers were donated to Special Collections in 1970 and 1971.

Processing Information

The processing, arrangement, and description of the Ralph Minthorne Brown Papers commenced in January 2008 and was completed in May 2008.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], Ralph Minthorne Brown Papers, Ms1970-002 Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Biographical Note

Ralph Minthorne Brown, head librarian of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) from 1926 to 1947, was born at Fort Shaw, Montana, in 1878. He graduated from Cornell University in 1901 and served as a librarian in Chicago and Buffalo, New York before becoming chief of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey's Division of Library and Archives in 1906. He remained in that position until serving as an ambulance driver in World War I. After the war, Brown worked as an editor for Rand McNally, then for *Popular Mechanics*, and finally as a librarian at North Dakota State College before arriving at Virginia Tech in 1926.

When not working, Brown indulged in his many personal interests, including poetry and genealogy; he was also an avid book collector, amateur historian and naturalist. During his time in Blacksburg, Brown actively collected and recorded the history of both Virginia Tech and the New River Valley, his chief accomplishment here perhaps being the compilation of *V.P.I. Historical Index, 1872-1942*. Other projects included legislative histories of both the school and Blacksburg as well as a bibliography of Matthew Fontaine Maury. Brown's interest in nature led him to keep and compile notes on local ornithological and weather observations. He frequently presented talks on these and other subjects to campus and community groups.

Brown retired from Virginia Tech in 1947 and died in Tulsa, Oklahoma on November 30, 1958, survived by one daughter.

Scope and Content

This collection contains the papers of Ralph Minthorne Browne, head librarian at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (1926-1947), amateur historian, naturalist, and genealogist. The papers include such materials as transcripts of historical documents, notes, correspondence and printed materials.

(NOTE: Many of the folder titles in this collection contain two sets of dates (e.g., "'Volume I: Presidents and Boards of Visitors, 1872-1944' 1925-1944"). Where two sets of dates are shown, the first set of dates are those to which the material within the folder relates, the second date set shows the years during which the information was actually compiled.)

Separated Material

Four files relating to Brown's official duties as Virginia Tech's head librarian were transferred to University Archives Record Group 23/1/1. File subjects included library inventories (1912-1939); library staff (1926-1946); supplies and equipment (1939-1940); and talks delivered by Brown on various library-related subjects (1933-1943).

See the Records of the Virginia Tech University Libraries, RG 23 for RG 23/1/1.

Related Archival Material

Brown's papers as head librarian of Virginia Tech may be found in Record Group 23/1/1. Several of Brown's works (mostly cataloged typescripts) may be found through an author search in the University Libraries' catalog.

See the Records of the Virginia Tech University Libraries, RG 23 for RG 23/1/1.

Keywords

Blacksburg (Va.)

Faculty and staff

Local/Regional History and Appalachian South

Montgomery County (Va.)

University History

Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute (1896-1944)

Virginia Polytechnic Institute (1944-1970)

Rights Statement for Archival Description

The guide to the Ralph Minthorne Brown Papers by Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, is licensed under a CC0 (<https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/public-domain/cc0/>).

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in four series based on topic:

Series I: Virginia Tech History, 1872-1946. This series contains materials relating to the history of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). Largely gleaned from various published sources, the series contains typescripts of items Brown had apparently assembled in anticipation of a published history of the school and for ready reference in responding to questions about the school's history. The series is divided among the following subseries:

Subseries A: V.P.I. History, 1925-1944. This subseries contains typescript copies of material assembled by Brown in anticipation of a published history of Virginia Tech. It includes information about the board of visitors (both the body and its individual members), as well as a university chronology, bibliography, legislative history, and data gleaned from newspapers, university bulletins, and other published sources. Arranged in a rough chronological order.

Subseries B: V.P.I. Index, 1938-1946. Within this subseries are several versions of Brown's V.P.I. Index (eventually published as *Bulletin of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute*, vol. 35, no. 12) each containing handwritten updates and corrections. The index provides a history of the school, arranged by subject, and referrals to other sources for more information. Arranged chronologically by date of compilation or revision.

Subseries C: Subject files, 1872-1946. Arranged alphabetically, this subseries contains materials gleaned from various sources by Brown regarding various aspects of Virginia Tech history. The files relate not only to the school's institutional history, but specific topics as well, including buildings, funding, and legislative history. Of particular interest, perhaps, is a file relating to activities and programs on campus during World War II.

Series II: Local History, 1926-1944. This series contains folders relating to various aspects of Blacksburg, Montgomery County, and Southwest Virginia history. As with Brown's Virginia Tech files, these materials consist largely of typescript copies of materials gleaned from various published sources. The folders relate to such disparate subjects as the Blacksburg town spring, Draper's Meadows, and the Jackson Ferry Shot Tower. Of special interest within the series is Brown's compilation of Blacksburg's legislative history and his historical directory of Blacksburg business and professional men, women and firms. Also of significance is a large collection of materials relating to the Wilderness Road. Arranged alphabetically by topic.

Series III: Nature, 1926-1946. Brown's activities as an amateur naturalist are represented in several files relating to his bird observations in Montgomery County. Also included is a description of his 1941 South American bird-watching trip (in the October-November 1941 issue of *The Raven*) and an essay titled "Antics of the Mockingbirds" by John M. McBryde. Also included is a copy of Brown's *Blacksburg (Virginia) Weather, 1893-1944* (published as *Bulletin of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute*, vol. 38, no. 5) and texts from talks he delivered to local groups on nature-related subjects. The series is arranged by subject matter, then chronologically.

Series IV: General Interests, 1930-1947. This series contains materials relating to Brown's other myriad interests. The series includes a file devoted to Matthew Fontaine Maury, including copies of both the first and second editions of Brown's work, *Bibliography of Matthew Fontaine Maury* (in *Bulletin of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute*, vol. 24, no. 2 and vol. 37, no. 12). Also included are texts of talks Brown presented on various topics, a bibliography of his works, and a compilation of his poetry.

Description of Subordinate Components

Series I: Virginia Tech History

Unit Date 1872-1946

Subseries A: V.P.I. History

Unit Date 1925-1944

"Volume I: Presidents and Boards of Visitors, 1872-1944"

Unit Date 1925-1944

box 1

Container 1 (folder)

General Physical Description note [3 folders]

"Volume II: 1872-1889"

Unit Date 1925-1944

box 1

Container 2 (folder)

General Physical Description note [5 folders]

"Volume III: 1890-1903"

Unit Date 1925-1944

box 1

Container 3 (folder)

General Physical Description note [4 folders][see also Box 2, Folder 1]

"Volume III: 1890-1903"

Unit Date 1925-1944

box 2

Container 1 (folder)

General Physical Description note [see also Box 2, Folder 3]

"Volume IV: 1904"

Unit Date 1925-1944

box 2

Container 2 (folder)

General Physical Description note [5 folders]

Subseries B: V.P.I. Index

Unit Date 1938-1946

"V.P.I. Historical Index, October 1, 1872 to December 31, 1938"

Unit Date 1938

box 2

Container 3 (folder)

General Physical Description note [typescript with handwritten revisions of [1939]]

"V.P.I. Historical Index, October 1, 1872 to December 31, 1938"

Unit Date 1938

box 2

Container 4 (folder)

General Physical Description note [typescript with handwritten revisions of [1941]]

"V.P.I. Historical Index, October 1, 1872 to December 31, 1941"

Unit Date 1942

box 3

Container 1 (folder)

General Physical Description note [typescript]

"V.P.I. Historical Index, October 1, 1872 to December 31, 1941"

Unit Date 1942

box 3

Container 2 (folder)

General Physical Description note [includes handwritten revisions and accompanied by typescript errata and supplement]

"V.P.I. Historical Index Supplement, January 1, 1942 to July 31, 1946"

Unit Date 1946

box 3

Container 3 (folder)

General Physical Description note [typescript]

Subseries C: Subject Files

Unit Date 1872-1946

Agricultural and Industrial Education History

Unit Date 1927-1932, n.d.

box 3

Container 4 (folder)

Alumni Association Officers

Unit Date 1890-1944

box 3

Container 5 (folder)

Athletics, Intercollegiate

Unit Date 1936

box 3

Container 6 (folder)

Biographical References

Unit Date ca.1900-1930

box 3

Container 7 (folder)

Block and Bridle Club

Unit Date 1936

box 3

Container 8 (folder)

Buildings and Grounds**Unit Date** 1920-1941**box** 3**Container** 9 (folder)**Chaplains****Unit Date** 1891-1941**box** 3**Container** 10 (folder)**Corps of Cadets Controversy****Unit Date** 1942**box** 3**Container** 11 (folder)**Engineering (Norris, E. B., "A Short History of Engineering at V.P.I.")****Unit Date** 1939**box** 3**Container** 12 (folder)**Entomology (Jefferson, Roland Newton, "The Teaching of Entomology at Virginia Polytechnic Institute")****Unit Date** 1942**box** 3**Container** 13 (folder)**Federal and State Receipts****Unit Date** 1872-1946**box** 3**Container** 14 (folder)**Federal and State Allotments to VPI Under the Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act****Unit Date** 1917-1938**box** 3**Container** 15 (folder)**Interest and Sinking Funds****Unit Date** 1896-1946**box** 3**Container** 16 (folder)**Land Grant College Fund****Unit Date** n.d.**box** 3**Container** 17 (folder)**Legislative History****Unit Date** 1872-1945**box** 3**Container** 18 (folder)

McBryde, J. M. - Letter to "Mr. Glass"

Unit Date 1904

box 3

Container 19 (folder)

Necrology

Unit Date 1917-1942

box 3

Container 20 (folder)

Phillips, Ulrich B., "The Historic Civilization of the South" talk at V.P.I.

Unit Date 1931-1938

box 3

Container 21 (folder)

Radford-VPI Merger

Unit Date 1944

box 3

Container 22 (folder)

Second Virginia Volunteer Infantry Regimental Band

Unit Date n.d.

box 3

Container 23 (folder)

Serial Publications

Unit Date 1872-1937

box 3

Container 24 (folder)

Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College

Unit Date 1872-1894

box 3

Container 25 (folder)

World War II

Unit Date 1940-1944, n.d.

box 3

Container 26 (folder)

World War II U.S. War Bonds Poster

Unit Date 1944

oversize 1 (folder)

Series II: Local History

Unit Date 1926-1944

"Augusta County Deeds, 1749-1769"

Unit Date 1943

box 4

Container 1 (folder)

Black Family of Montgomery County

Unit Date n.d.

box 4

Container 2 (folder)

"Blacksburg Business and Professional Men and Women and Business Firms, 1819-1941"

Unit Date 1942

box 4

Container 3 (folder)

"Blacksburg Legislative History, 1798-1934"

Unit Date n.d.

box 4

Container 4 (folder)

Blacksburg Miscellanea

Unit Date 1935-1944

box 4

Container 5 (folder)

Blacksburg Town Spring

Unit Date 1932

box 4

Container 6 (folder)

"Botetourt County Deeds, 1770-1785"

Unit Date 1943

box 4

Container 7 (folder)

Christiansburg History (Crush, Charles W., "Early Days in Christiansburg")

Unit Date 1940

box 4

Container 8 (folder)

Civil War

Unit Date 1942, n.d.

box 4

Container 9 (folder)

Coal Mines

Unit Date 1942-1943

box 4

Container 10 (folder)

Draper's Meadows

Unit Date 1926, n.d.

box 4

Container 11 (folder)

"Fincastle County Land Surveys, 1772-1775"

Unit Date 1943

box 4

Container 12 (folder)

Geology

Unit Date 1935-1944, n.d.

box 4

Container 13 (folder)

"Montgomery County Deeds, 1750-1800"

Unit Date 1943

box 4

Container 14 (folder)

Montgomery County Miscellanea

Unit Date 1935-1944

box 4

Container 15 (folder)

Roads and Trails

Unit Date 1937-1943, n.d.

box 4

Container 16 (folder)

Scope and Contents note

[see also Wilderness Road]

Shot Tower (Jackson's Ferry)

Unit Date 1936

box 4

Container 17 (folder)

Smithfield

Unit Date 1931-1942

box 4

Container 18 (folder)

Springs, Mineral

Unit Date 1932-1944, n.d.

box 4

Container 19 (folder)

Virginia Fairs

Unit Date 1937

box 4

Container 20 (folder)

Wilderness Road**Unit Date** 1931-1943**box** 4**Container** 21 (folder)**General Physical Description note** [4 folders]**Series III: Nature****Unit Date** 1926-1946**Bird Observations****Unit Date** 1926-1946**Unit Date** 1926-1933**box** 4**Container** 22 (folder)**Unit Date** 1934-1939**box** 4**Container** 23 (folder)**Unit Date** 1940-1946, n.d.**box** 5**Container** 1 (folder)**Blacksburg, Virginia Weather, 1893-1944****Unit Date** 1945**box** 5**Container** 2 (folder)**Nature Camps****Unit Date** 1940-1944, n.d.**box** 5**Container** 3 (folder)**Talks and Writings****Unit Date** 1930-1944, n.d.**box** 5**Container** 4 (folder)**Series IV: General Interests****Unit Date** 1930-1947**Matthew Fontaine Maury****Unit Date** 1930-1947**box** 5**Container** 5 (folder)**Talks and Writings****Unit Date** 1930-1933**box** 5**Container** 6 (folder)

"Verses [by] Ralph M. Brown"

Unit Date 1932

box 5

Container 7 (folder)