

Title: Emma Barth Diaries

Record Family: **SWE**

Type: **Diaries**

Date: **Bulk Dates 1939-1979**

Location: **4W-A-3(5)**

Size: **3 Manuscript Boxes, 5 Storage Boxes**

ID #: **1539-barth**

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Background

The Emma Barth Diaries were deposited to the Society of Women Engineers archival collection in May of 1999, and opened for research in June 2003.

Mechanical engineer Emma C. Barth, PE, was part of the 20th-century generation of women who faced unprecedented employment opportunities as a result of World War II. Wartime circumstances created new organizations and programs specifically designed to recruit women into service, and in the call for womanpower, science and engineering played a central role. It was in this atmosphere that Emma Barth capitalized on her interest in engineering.

Prior to the war, during the Depression years, she received her education from the University of Pittsburgh, earning both a B.A. (1931) and an M.A. (1937) in German, and an M.A. in Education. Employment at that time, however, was scarce: the only teaching work available was part-time work in evening and summer schools. Anxious for full-time work, and interested in engineering because that was her brother's field of study, Barth enrolled in drafting courses at the Pittsburgh Aeronautics Institute in 1942. She secured a job as a draftsman for the H.J. Heinz Co. that same year.

For both women educated in engineering before the war, and women like Barth who took courses as part of a wartime training program, wartime labor shortages created opportunities to apply technical skill in the workplace. As a draftsman for Heinz, Barth worked in the canning plant, which was temporarily converted into a drafting office, and there she drafted wooden wings for gliders. Following her position at Heinz, she joined Westinghouse Electric as a draftsman in 1944, in the Turbine Generator Division at Westinghouse's East Pittsburgh Office.

Emma Barth's experience as a draftsman for Westinghouse, working in industry, inspired her to pursue a degree in engineering, in the hopes that she could remain employed in the field. When she began her job in 1944 there were 18 women in her department—which she believed was a fairly common number of women in drafting at the time. Barth, however, had hopes for advancing out of the women's drafting department. On the advice of a friend in the engineering department, she enrolled in engineering classes at the University of Pittsburgh in 1944. Paying for the classes herself, she went to school in the evening for seven years and in 1951 graduated with a B.S. in General Engineering—the only female in her class and the first woman to graduate in engineering from the University of Pittsburgh Evening School.

(Historical Background, cont'd)

An ambitious engineer, Emma Barth was committed to professional development. She was a founding member and later president of the SWE Pittsburgh Section, and was also the first editor of the *SWE Newsletter*. In 1952, she became an engineer-in-training and joined the Society of Professional Engineers. She obtained her Pennsylvania Professional Engineers License in 1961, and after she retired in 1977, she became a PSPE life member. For her years of service and encouragement to young women, she received the Westinghouse Community Service Award in 1977, the first woman to receive that award. Engineering wasn't her only passion, however; she was a serious drama student, who practiced voice exercises daily and participated in a local theatre group.

Scope and Contents

The Emma Barth Diaries chronicle the daily life of a woman engineer, 1939-1979 (not all years are covered). Series 1, arranged chronologically, consists of the original preserved diaries. A separate collection of user copies—photocopied and enlarged pages of each diary—is available as Series 2 of this collection.

Please note: for general use, researchers are first directed to user copies in Series 2. Original diaries are available for special use only, please see reference archivist for more information.

Emma Barth Diaries—Container List

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