

WOOD, Ruth G. January 29, 1875–May 5, 1939.
SMITH COLLEGE (BL 1898), YALE UNIVERSITY (PhD 1901).

Ruth Goulding Wood was the younger of two children of Kate Bassett (Pond) (1850–1932) and Samuel Eugene Wood (ca. 1844–1891). Her mother’s family was from Brooklyn, New York, and her father’s was from Central Falls, Rhode Island, where she was born. Her parents married in 1869; her father was a bookkeeper in the 1870s and manager of the yarn department of a manufacturing company in the late 1880s. Ruth’s brother, Kenneth, was born in 1873 and became a mechanical engineer.

Ruth Wood attended Pawtucket High School in Rhode Island before entering Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. She took the literary course at Smith, with major subjects mathematics, German, and the sciences, and graduated in 1898. She entered Yale University immediately after her graduation; she held a scholarship in 1899–1900 and a fellowship in 1900–1901. Although there is no formal indication of her advisor, most of her course work was taken with, and the department recommendation for her PhD in 1901 was signed by, James Pierpont, Percy F. Smith, J. Willard Gibbs, and William Beebe.

Wood was an instructor at Mount Holyoke College 1901–02 before joining the two-person mathematics department at Smith College as instructor in 1902. Eleanor P. Cushing, MA and Smith class of 1879, was professor and had joined the faculty in 1881; Harriet R. Cobb, MA, was instructor and had joined the faculty as assistant in mathematics in 1895. Wood spent her career at Smith except for the year 1908–09, when she was studying at the university in Göttingen. She was instructor 1902–09, associate professor 1909–14, professor 1914–35, and emeritus professor after 1935. She became chairman of the department when Cushing retired in 1922 and remained so until 1928.

Excerpts from the notebook of the mathematical club of Smith give some indication of the interests and activities of Wood. In 1903 she spoke on the laboratory method of teaching mathematics; in 1904 she explained beginning and spherical geometry; in 1907 she spoke on “Transformations,” and in 1909 she described her university experience at Göttingen. In 1918 she discussed her work the previous summer at New York Life Insurance Company, and in fall 1928 she and [Susan Rambo](#) gave talks about their visit to the International Congress in Bologna. Wood had also attended international congresses in Cambridge, England, in 1912 and in Toronto in 1924. She began attending meetings of the AMS when she was still a graduate student and continued until the summer before her retirement.

Other details emerge from Wood’s notes in the *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* and from ship passenger lists. Her interest in traveling is evident. She and her mother were in Europe in 1909; Wood traveled again to Europe in 1912. She spent the summer of 1913 in Newfoundland and was in Europe the following summer. In her July 1929 entry in the *Quarterly* she anticipates a short trip to the Pyrenees in August. She was again in Europe in summer 1933. In February 1934 she began her first sabbatical semester since she joined the Smith faculty in 1902 and traveled in Egypt, Greece, and Turkey with her sister-in-law and two nieces. In June 1935 she resigned from the Smith faculty at age sixty. In August 1936 she reported that the previous winter she went to California via the Canal, visited Yosemite, and did not miss teaching. In February 1937 she sailed on a cruise to South America, went down the west coast, crossed the Andes by auto and mountain lakes by boat.

In 1931 Wood had moved to Florence, Massachusetts, a few miles from Northampton, to a house she had designed. The house included a greenhouse to accommodate her expertise as a gardener. She also had a summer home in Cummington, in the Berkshire foothills. Wood’s mother, who had been living with her, died in May 1932.

Wood died of coronary thrombosis at sixty-four in 1939 in Springfield, Massachusetts. She had no immediate survivors. In the minute read at Smith after her death it was

recorded that she “loved the beautiful in music and literature. She was an accomplished needlewoman and an almost professional gardener. She had a genius for friendship and to all who knew her she was the embodiment of thoughtfulness, generosity and courage” (Smith College Archives). Newspaper accounts indicate that upon the death of the last of three beneficiaries of a trust fund she had set up, the fund and accumulated interest were to go to the trustees of Smith College to assist in paying “one or more women professors in the mathematics department a salary equal to the highest salary paid to any member of the teaching staff of the college” (*Springfield Union*, 30 May 1939). In 1949 a gift of \$5,000 was given to the college in memory of Wood. Her ashes were interred in Swan Point Cemetery, Providence, Rhode Island.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi.

Dissertation:

1901 Non-Euclidean displacements and symmetry transformations. PhD dissertation, Yale University. Printed version, 1901, reprinted from *Ann. of Math.* 2nd ser., 2:161–71.

Publications:

1901 The collineations of space which transform a non-degenerate quadric surface into itself. *Ann. of Math.* 2nd ser., 2:161–71. Published version of PhD dissertation. Reviews: *JFM* 32.0632.04 (E. Wölffing); *Rev. trimestr. publ. math.* 10, pt. 1: 11–12 (W. A. Wythoff). Presented to the AMS, New York City, 28 Dec 1900; abstract: *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 7:207 #11.

1902 Mathematics as a necessary requirement in a college curriculum. *Smith College Monthly* (May): 523–24.

Abstract not listed above:

1902 Non-Euclidean displacements and symmetry transformations. *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 8:370 #5. Presented to the AMS, New York City, 26 Apr 1902. Based on PhD dissertation.

References to: AmMSc 1–6, AmWomSc, BiDWSci, [BioWMath](#), WomScSearch, Wom-WWA.

“Smith Fund to Keep Salaries of Women High: Professors of Mathematics Will Benefit from Ruth Wood Will.” *Springfield Union*, 30 May 1939.

Obituary. *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* (Aug 1939): 364

“Ruth Goulding Wood.” *Yale Obituary Record 1938–1939*.

Other sources: Owens questionnaire 1937; Williams Papers; Smith College Archives; Yale University Archives; Whitman, “Women in the American Mathematical Society before 1900,” pt. 3; US Census 1870, 1900 RI, 1910, 1920, 1930 MA.

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