

**BENEDICT, Suzan R.** November 29, 1873–April 8, 1942.

SMITH COLLEGE (BS 1895), COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY (TEACHERS COLLEGE) (MA 1906), UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN (PhD 1914).

Suzan Rose Benedict was the youngest of seven children of Harriett (or Harriott) Melvina (Deaver) (1835–1909), born in New York, and David DeForest Benedict (1833–1901) of Ohio. Her parents were married in 1856. All of the children were born in Ohio, presumably in or near Norwalk, where the family lived and where David D. Benedict practiced medicine. During the Civil War he had served as a surgeon for the Union army. In the 1880 census report the children were listed as Mary D., twenty-two; Hattie M., twenty; Agnes C., eighteen; Fannie B., sixteen; Frederick B., fourteen; Ellen E., eleven; and Susan R., six. In 1900 six were living of the seven born, and David D. Benedict had given up his medical practice and was described as a capitalist, apparently because he was looking after his land interests.

Suzan Benedict attended the high school in Norwalk, Ohio, before entering Smith College in the fall of 1891, where her major was chemistry and her minors were mathematics, German, and physics. After her graduation in 1895, she returned to Norwalk and taught mathematics there for the next decade. A note for her tenth reunion at Smith indicates that she is “a teacher of High School mathematics, a real estate agent, managing the affairs of a widowed mother, and a model aunt, endeavoring to show four sisters how to bring up children” (Box 1432: 1895, Benedict, Smith College Archives).

In the fall of 1905 Benedict entered Teachers College, Columbia University. Three of her courses, history of mathematics, history and teaching of mathematics, and a seminar course, were taken with David Eugene Smith, and she wrote her 1906 master’s thesis under his direction. Her thesis concerned the development of algebraic symbolism from about 1500 to 1650 and was based in part on books that were in the private collections of David Eugene Smith and George Arthur Plimpton until these collections were donated to Columbia University in the 1930s. Benedict’s work first appeared as a supplement to a report of the mathematics department of Teachers College, “Courses for the training of teachers of mathematics and other information relating to the Department: 1906–1907,” and later as an article in *School Science and Mathematics*.

In January 1906 Benedict wrote to Smith College to inquire about a position. She was hired for the year 1906–07 as an assistant in mathematics for \$800. In October 1906 she wrote to D. E. Smith “we are planning to give our girls in the mathematical club a little work on the teaching of secondary mathematics, and I find that my course last year is going to be most useful. In fact, in every way I am grateful for the work I was able to do there, and to you for making it possible” (D. E. Smith Professional Papers). Benedict joined Eleanor P. Cushing, Harriet R. Cobb, and [Ruth G. Wood](#) in the mathematics department at Smith. She was reappointed for 1907–08 as instructor for \$900, then for a three-year term at \$1,000, \$1,100, and \$1,200, per annum, and then for an indeterminate term. In April 1907 she wrote to D. E. Smith that “the girls are inspired to know more about the history of mathematics, and I really think that a one hour course for Juniors and Seniors may be introduced next year. I realize my boldness in trying to teach such a class, but I have decided that the only way to find out what one can do is to do it” (D. E. Smith Professional Papers).

In May 1911 Benedict wrote to D. E. Smith, “I am planning this summer to take a few courses in mathematics at the University of Michigan which is near my home, and am venturing to ask you to write to Professor Beman concerning the work that I did with you. I hope that he may admit me to his course in Differential Equations and to the other graduate courses to be given this summer” (D. E. Smith Professional Papers). She continued her work at Michigan in the summers of 1912 and 1913, and took a leave from Smith in 1913–14 to finish her course work in mathematics (real variables, infinite series, astronomy, complex variables, projective geometry, and harmonic analysis) and her dissertation in the history of mathematics with L. C. Karpinski. In several reviews of other works, Karpinski mentioned her 1914 dissertation.

Benedict returned to Smith in the fall of 1914 as associate professor, became professor in 1921, and was department chairman 1928–34. She was class dean, one of the first four appointed, 1918–26. She was on leave the first semester 1927–28 and the second semester 1940–41. It is probable that during her first leave she did the research for her 1929 article on Francesco Ghaligai, a sixteenth-century Florentine who wrote a popular introductory mathematics text. In her November 1928 correspondence with D. E. Smith about the article, Benedict credits him with teaching her to love the sixteenth-century books that she read whenever she could find the time and the books.

In the late 1930s Benedict described her chief interest as teaching. Although she had continued her research in the history of mathematics, Benedict wrote to [Helen Owens](#) in May 1940 that “it was not modesty that prevented my sending you a long list of published papers, but a scarcity of such papers. I have lost track of the very few I have written, as I have been much more interested in teaching and administration than in research” (Owens Papers).

Benedict was an Episcopalian and a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. From at least 1918 she shared a home in Northampton with [Susan M. Rambo](#). Rambo, who had graduated from Smith in 1905, returned as assistant in mathematics in 1908, received her PhD from Michigan in 1920, and was promoted through the ranks in the mathematics department until her retirement in 1948.

Benedict retired at sixty-eight as professor emeritus on February 1, 1942. She indicated in the February *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* that she had expected to go south but changed her plans when war was declared and would “stay at home to be near the Red Cross and other opportunities for service.” She died suddenly of a heart attack at her home in Northampton, Massachusetts, in April and was buried in Norwalk, Ohio. She was survived by two sisters. In the minute read to the faculty after her death, it was noted that she had continued her research in the history of mathematics and “it is owing to her interest that the College library possesses a collection of rare books dealing with that field,” and that “she was impatient with those who suggested that any branch of science was too difficult for girls to attempt” (Smith College Archives). The Suzan R. Benedict Prize, to be given to a member of the sophomore class who has done outstanding work in differential and integral calculus, was established by the college president, former members of the mathematics club, and others. Her home was bequeathed to Susan Rambo. Upon Rambo’s death it was to go to Smith to be sold with the proceeds to be used for a scholarship fund. Rambo died in 1977.

**Organizational affiliations:** AMS, MAA (charter member), Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi.

**Thesis and dissertation:**

**1906** The development of algebraic symbolism from Paciolo to Newton. MA thesis, Columbia University, directed by David Eugene Smith. See also **1909**.

**1914** A comparative study of the early treatises introducing into Europe the Hindu art of reckoning. PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, directed by Louis Charles Karpinski. Printed, 1916, Rumford Press, Concord, NH.

**Publications:**

**1909** The development of algebraic symbolism from Paciolo to Newton. *Sch. Sci. Math.* 9:375–84. Introductory note by D. E. Smith. Published version of MA thesis.

**1929** The algebra of Francesco Ghaligai. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 36:275–78. Reviews: *JFM* 55.0010.08 (G. Feigl); *Rev. semestr. publ. math.* 35:9 (R. C. Archibald).

**Abstract:**

**1923** The honor student in mathematics. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 30:409 #3. Presented to the MAA, Poughkeepsie, NY, 5 Sept 1923. Report on discussion of paper 409–10.

**References to:** AmMSc 3–7, [BioWMath](#), DcNAA, WomWWA.

“Dr. Susan [*sic*] Benedict of Smith Is Dead.” *New York Times*, 10 Apr 1942.

**Other sources:** Owens questionnaire 1937; Owens Papers; David Eugene Smith Professional Papers 1860–1945, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University; Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; Smith College Archives; communication with University Library, University of Michigan; US Census 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910 OH, 1920, 1930 MA.

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