

NORTON, MARGARET CROSS
(1891, ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS, U. S. – 1984)
NATIONALITY: AMERICAN
COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: UNITED STATES



EDUCATION

- University of Chicago: B.A. in history, Chicago, Illinois, United States, 1913
- University of Chicago: M.A. in history, Chicago, Illinois, United States, 1914

AREAS OF ARCHIVAL SPECIALIZATION

State and national archives (U. S.); records management; archival education.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN ARCHIVAL FIELD

Norton organized the newly founded Illinois State Archives as its first archivist and helped define the emerging archival profession in the United States. She advocated the legal and administrative value of state and institutional records and the importance of arrangement by provenance. Norton helped establish the National Archives of the U.S. and taught some of the first archival courses in the U. S.

CAREER HISTORY

- Cataloger, Vassar College Library, 1915-1918
- Cataloger, Missouri State Historical Society, 1920-1921
- Archivist, Illinois State Archives, 1922-1957

HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHY

Margaret Cross Norton was born in Rockford, Illinois in 1891. Her parents were both record keepers by profession. Her mother was deputy county treasurer for Winnebago Count, and her father was deputy county clerk. As a child, Norton spent a lot of time at work with her father, in the county record vaults. She wanted to be a librarian from childhood. However, after working as a Cataloger at Vassar College she concluded that she was “not suited to library work” (Norton interview transcript). In 1915 she decided she wanted to be an archivist after attending an American Historical Association (AHA) presentation on government archives and the poor condition of national archival records. In 1922 Norton was hired by the Illinois State Library as head of its newly establish archives. Here she took an active role in the acquisition of records, campaigning for the regular transfer of state records to the State Archives and promoting archival administration of records as a useful service for state officials. She oversaw construction of a designated archives building, which was designed to Norton’s specifications and nationally recognized as a model archives facility. Throughout her career, Norton was active in many professional associations, including AHA, the American Library Association, and

National Association of State Libraries. She served on the Public Records Commission of AHA, which encouraged the federal government to establish a National Archives. She helped found the Society of American Archivists (SAA), and served as its first Vice President (1936-1937) and later as President (1943-1945). She also edited SAA's journal, *American Archivist*, from 1946 to 1949. In 1940 Norton taught 'American Archival Technique' at Columbia University, one of the first archival courses offered in the U. S. After World War II, Norton served as Chair of the State Records Commission in Illinois. At her urging, the commission was given authority to approve destruction of state records in 1951, and in 1956 records management was officially designated as a function of the State Archives. After retiring from the State Archives, Norton travelled around the world, in Asia, Europe, the Middle East.

PARTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY LISTING BOOKS AND THEN ARTICLES

- What Does an Archivist Do? Illinois State Library, 1947
- Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival & Records Management. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975
- "Establishing Priorities for State Records: Illinois Experience" in *The American Archivist*, Vol. 5, No. 1, January 1942
- "Some Legal Aspects of Archives" in *The American Archivist*, Vol. 8, No. 1, January 1945
- Norton, Margaret Cross [interviewee] and Rountree, Georgia [interviewer]. Margaret Cross Norton Memoir [interview transcript], 1972. Retrieved in August 2013 from <http://www.uis.edu/archives/memoirs/NORTON.pdf>
- "Archives in Illinois: The Pioneer Period" in *Illinois Libraries*, Vol. 63, March 1981

AUTHOR OF BIOGRAPHICAL ENTRY/DATE OF SUBMISSION

Molly Bruce, September 2013

SECONDARY SOURCES FOR BIOGRAPHY

- Norton, Margaret Cross [interviewee] and Rountree, Georgia [interviewer]. Margaret Cross Norton Memoir [interview transcript], 1972. Retrieved in August 2013 from <http://www.uis.edu/archives/memoirs/NORTON.pdf>
- Illinois State Archives, Margaret Cross Norton: A Biographical Sketch. 1993. Retrieved in August 2013 from <http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/nortonbio.html>
- Randall C. Jimerson, "Margaret C. Norton Reconsidered" in *Archival Issues*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2001
- Erin Lawrimore, "Margaret Cross Norton: Defining and Redefining Archives and the Archival Profession" in *Information & Culture: A Journal of History*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2009

EDITOR/EDITING DATE

Susanne Belovari, October 2013

ICA-SUV WHO'S WHO IN ARCHIVES GLOBALLY

<http://www.library.illinois.edu/ica-suv/index.php>