

Collection title:

Esther F. Bentley

Date:

Circa 1940 - 2003

Language of materials:

English

Physical location:

Bentley's photo screen is on display at the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives. Items processed by ONE Archives are stored off-site at the ONE Archives at University of Southern California Libraries. Bentley's paper collection is stored at the UCLA Southern Regional Library Facility.

Creator:

Ester Bentley

Conditions governing use and reproduction rights:

The property rights to this collection belong to the UC Regents and ONE Archives, while literary rights and copyright are retained by Bentley's families. This collection is open for research at both institutions.

Acquisition information:

The collection was acquired by the Mazer through the executor of Bentley's will after her passing. Papers donated to UCLA Library Special Collections in 2013 as part of a collection-building partnership between the Mazer, the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, and the UCLA Library.

Processing history:

Items at UCLA were processed through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to support the outreach and collection building partner between the Mazer, the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, and the UCLA Library.

Biography and history:

Bentley, a lifelong lesbian and Catholic, was born and adopted in Kentucky; she was uncertain of the exact date of her birth. In the 1930s, she coached teams in field hockey and tennis. She attended Spalding College, receiving a Bachelor of Science in education in 1941. During WWII, Bentley served as a director of USO programs aiding war workers and their families. Audio recordings in the collection by Bentley document her actions in the Civil Rights Movement by taking Black friends to segregated restaurants and serving them herself.

Bentley's career as a social worker was focused primarily on orphanages and community spaces for children. She received her Master of Science in social work from the National Catholic School of Social Service at the Catholic University of America (CUA) in 1949, and became Director of the Kentucky Society for Crippled Children. She eventually moved to California, where she worked in community planning and the Girl Scouts in San Bernardino, CA and Santa Ana, CA. During the 1960s, Bentley worked for the California State Department of Social Welfare in Norwalk, CA. From 1966 to 1974, she taught at UCLA. Her final professional role was as a specialist in the Regional Center of Orange County, working with the developmentally-disabled.

She participated in panels hosted by the Mazer in the 1990s. As an older lesbian activist, Bentley was a founding member of the Coalition of Older Lesbians (CoOL), Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, and served as a member of the Senior Program Advisory Committee for the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center (now Los Angeles LGBT Center). She was also a member of the Uptown Gay & Lesbian Alliance, as well as a lifetime advocate for gays and lesbians in the Catholic Church.

Ester Bentley died on January 20, 2004, at the age of 88 in Los Angeles, CA.

Scope and contents note:

This collection contains photographs, correspondence, awards, clippings, ephemera and memorabilia from lesbian activist, community organizer and social worker, Ester F. Bentley. The collection documents Bentley's professional career in community organizing in California, and includes research and reports that Bentley wrote and/or contributed to. The collection also includes material related to Bentley's advocacy work, in which she was specifically focused on issues affecting LGBTQ Catholic communities. Also included are material from organizations such as Women Against Violence Against Women, Coalition of Older Lesbians and Old Lesbians Organizing for Change. The collection also includes personal material such as photographs, correspondence and Bentley's writing and poetry. [Read the full finding aid for the Ester Bentley Collection](#) at the Online Archive of California.

Organization and arrangement:

Items processed by ONE Archives are arranged alphabetically in four boxes.

Items processed by UCLA Library Special Collections are arranged in the following series: Series 1 (Photographs), Series 2 (Correspondence), Series 3 (Personal Material and Memorabilia), Series 4 (Professional Material), Series 5 (Community Engagement Material).

Subjects and indexing terms (local):

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change – Archives

Catholic gays – United States

Lesbian activists

Lesbian community – Los Angeles

Photographs

Bentley, Ester F.

Related collections:

[Ester F. Bentley photographs and papers \(ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries\)](#)

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change records (UCLA Library Special Collections)

Finding aid creator:

The finding aid at UCLA was prepared by Stacy Wood, 2014 and Jessica Tai, 2017.

This digital finding aid was created by Dan Molloy, an MLIS student at UCLA, as part of Dr. Michelle Caswell's Community-Based Archiving course taught in Spring 2020.