

Eva Vivian Armstrong (1877–1962)



Eva Armstrong was born on December 22, 1877 in Key West, Florida. She completed her formal education upon graduating from Atlantic City High School, Atlantic City, New Jersey. She was not college educated. Armstrong began her career as secretary of the “Book Lover’s Library” while also serving as a tutor in foreign languages. In 1906 she became secretary to the director of the summer session at the University of Pennsylvania. She became secretary in 1909 to Edgar Fahs Smith, chairman of the chemistry department and then vice-provost of the University of Pennsylvania. She continued as Smith’s personal secretary when he became university provost and stayed with him after he retired in 1920, in order to assist in cataloging and organizing his very extensive collection of books, pictures, letters, manuscripts, medals, and other memorabilia (over 13,000 items at that time).

After Smith died in 1928, the Smith collection was closed to public access and Armstrong became secretary to Alfred Richards, professor of pharmacology in the medical school. However, after Mrs. Smith donated her husband’s collection to the University of Pennsylvania, Eva Armstrong became secretary and curator of the collection under an endowment provided by Mrs. Smith. The Edgar Fahs Smith Memorial Collection in the History of Chemistry was established in 1929 to provide a valuable source of information and artifacts to historians of chemistry. Armstrong served in this capacity until her retirement in 1949.

In the 1940s Armstrong played a major role in the publication of *Chymia*, a journal devoted to work in history of chemistry that was envisioned by Smith prior to his death. She served as secretary to the board of editors for *Chymia* from 1948 until her second retirement in 1953. During her period as curator of the Smith Collection she published 20 papers in *Chymia* and the *Journal of Chemical Education*. Most of her papers dealt with the Smith Collection and also with the lives of important chemists, using material from the collection. Her papers include “Johann Rudolf Glauber (1604–70): His Chemical and Human Philosophy,” *Journal of Chemical Education* 19 (1942): 3–8 (with C.K. Deischer), and “Lazarus Ercker and his *Probierebuch*. Sir John Pettus and his *Fleta Minor*,” *Journal of Chemical Education* 16 (1939): 553–562 (with H.S. Lukens).

Eva V. Armstrong received the Dexter Award in 1958 for her longtime contributions to the history of chemistry, particularly her work as the first curator of the Edgar Fahs Smith Collection, and as a member of the group that initiated the publication of *Chymia*.

Eva Vivian Armstrong died on May 10, 1962.

Sources

Aaron J. Ihde, *A Quarter Century of Dexter Awards*, 1981, unpublished manuscript. Copy in the University of Pennsylvania Library, QD21 .Q8 1981a; an abridged version can be found in *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry* 2 (1988):11.

Claude K. Deischer, “In Memoriam: To a Secretary, Librarian, Curator of a Library, and Historian, Eva Vivian Armstrong (1877-1962),” *Chymia* 9 (1964): 13–17.

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