

SOUTHWESTERN WRITERS COLLECTION
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Winifred Mahon Sanford
Papers, 1911 – 2003

Collection 076

3 boxes (2 linear feet)

Acquisition: gift donated by Helen J. Sanford

Access: Open for Research.

Processed by: Kristen Davis, November 15, 2004

Biographical Note

Born in Duluth, Minnesota on March 16, 1890 to Henry S. Mahon and Helen Brooks Mahon, Winifred Mahon Sanford enjoyed a brief but noteworthy literary career from 1925 to 1931. Her 15 short stories appeared popular magazines of the day such the *American Mercury* and the *Woman's Home Companion*. She has been called an "unjustly forgotten" Texas author whose work realistically captures the social transition in post-World War I Texas brought about by the oil boom.

Educated for a year at Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts (1909), she received a degree in English from the University of Michigan in 1913. Before marrying law student and naval officer Wayland H. Sanford in 1917, Winifred Mahon taught high school in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan and in Idaho, then worked as a librarian in New York City. In 1920, the Sanford's first daughter, Emerett, was born in Duluth. Soon after that, Winifred Sanford followed her husband to Wichita Falls, Texas, where he had found employment as an oil and gas attorney. Their second daughter, Helen, was born in their new home in 1922.

Although she is known primarily for her short stories, Sanford's first published work, "England and the Home-Rule Question," appeared in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* in 1913 when she was still at the University of Michigan. Her early work includes unpublished, possibly autobiographical stories she wrote as a child and portraits of family members.

Once established in Wichita Falls, Sanford joined The Manuscript Club, a literary group that met for the first time in 1922 and included published authors Anne Pence Davis and Fay M. Yauger. Along with three other members of The Manuscript Club, Sanford was elected as a member of the Texas Institute of Letters. The women belonging to this club encouraged each other's writing aspirations, providing a forum in which to discuss and critique members' works. By January 1925 Sanford's story "Wreck" was published in the *American Mercury*, edited by H. L. Mencken. Sanford and Mencken established a regular correspondence in which he encouraged her writing endeavors. She went on to publish eight more short stories in the *American Mercury*, as well as others in the *Woman's Home Companion*, *The North American Review*, and *Household* until 1931. In addition, three of her works were listed in J. O. O'Brien's *The Best Short Stories of 1926*, which brought her to the attention of several literary agencies.

One such agency was the Paget Literary Agency, which represented Sanford for several years. Sanford began working on a novel in 1925 that she submitted to Paget two years later.

In 1931 the Sanford family moved to Dallas, where Winifred Sanford continued to work on her novel but had little success publishing it, nor is there any record of short stories written during this time. Because no copy of her novel appears in her Papers, it is assumed that she disposed of it. The Sanford's third daughter, Mary, was born in 1933. The next year an article entitled "Derrick Jargon," co-authored with Clyde Jackson, was published in 1934 by Southern Methodist University in *The Southwest Review*.

Winifred Sanford suffered a long-term illness in 1937 which kept her bed-ridden for over a year, after which no other new articles, novels, nor stories were published. In 1938 Sanford submitted a detective novel to the Paget Literary Agency with no success. She attempted to sell one last short story, "Deep C," to three magazines in 1945, but none of the editors thought the story would appeal to their readers.

Sanford's story "Windfall" was reprinted in several anthologies and textbooks from 1928 to 1988, and other stories appeared in collections in 1982 and 1998. However, no collection was dedicated solely to her works until 1980. She and her family privately published *Windfall and Other Stories*, a collection of 13 of her 15 short stories originally printed between 1925 and 1931, as well as two stories not originally intended for publication.

Winifred Mahon Sanford died at the age of 93 on March 24, 1983, but she left a distinguished legacy. *Windfall* had caught the attention of Suzanne Comer, senior editor at Southern Methodist University Press, who in 1987 began the process of securing permission to reprint the collection as a part of the Southwest Life and Letters Series of SMU Press. The family agreed to the reprinting, and in November 1988 it appeared and gained regional acclaim, with reviews appearing in newspapers and such publications as *Legacies*, *Belles Lettres*, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, *Western American Literature*, and *Texas Books in Review*. *. Her writing skills have been compared to Katherine Ann Porters', and one critic claimed that Sanford's fiction was "some of the best creative work to date on Texas during the oil boom of the 1920s." **

This flurry of attention to Sanford's work led to a film entitled *The Stars Fell on Henrietta* in 1995. The screenplay, based on Sanford's story "Luck," was written by

Sanford's grandson Philip Railsback and produced by Clint Eastwood's production company. In early 1997 The Dallas Museum of Art and the Friends of the Dallas Public Library hosted a program called "Arts and Letters Live: A Literary Celebration," in which Sanford's "Windfall" was read by Sheriden Thomas. In 2004, Helen Sanford donated her mother's literary papers to the Southwestern Writers Collection.

* *Legacies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1989); *Belles Letters* (Spring 1990); *SHQ* (Apr 1990); *WAL* (vol XXV no. 2); *TBIR* (Summer 1989)

** attributed to a member of the SMU Press in *Dallas Woman*, (Dec 1988); *San Marcos Daily Record* (Dec 4, 1988); *Literature & History* (Winter 1988)

Bibliography:

Sanford, Winifred. *Windfall and Other Stories*, 1980.

Sanford, Winifred, *Windfall and Other Stories*, Dallas : Southern Methodist University Press, 1988.

Scope and Contents Note

Correspondence, printed material, handwritten notes, tearsheets, newspaper clippings, published magazines, and one VHS cassette (1 linear foot), document the literary career of the author and posthumous publication of her works. More detailed descriptions of the series are listed in the Series Description and Series Summary.

The collection is arranged into six main series, Personal Documents, Correspondence, Writings by Winifred Sanford, Reviews, Writings by Others, and Clippings. The first two series contain documents and letters that pertain to the author's life and literary creations. The letters are mainly professional in nature, shedding little light on the author's personal life. However, included is the first 6 pages of one letter written to her sister, Helen Mahon Toulme, in March 1925 which is more personal than most. For the most part, correspondence from the 1980s deals with the publication of *Windfall and Other Stories*, a collection of Sanford's short stories. These letters trace the evolution from the 1980 edition of *Windfall*, privately printed by the Sanford family, to the 1988 edition, published by SMU Press.

The third series contains both published and unpublished creative works by Winifred Sanford. These stories appear in several formats, including original publications of magazines, tearsheets from these magazines, typewritten and handwritten manuscripts, and photocopies, all saved by the author or members of her family. Fourteen of Sanford's 15 short stories appear in this series, as well as her non-fiction works. One short story, "The Wedding," appeared in *The Women's Home Companion* in 1931, but no copy of it appears in this collection.

The last three series include materials gathered from a variety of sources: newspapers, publishing catalogs, literary and historical journals, and a VHS cassette of *The Stars Fell on Henrietta*. They contain a variety of materials that pertain to Sanford's literary career but that were not penned by her. The reviews indicate how Sanford's works were received by the public. The last two series reflect the literary interests of the author and her family.

Series Description

Series I : Personal Documents, 1911 - 1983

Box 1

Maintained by the author and her family, Personal Documents contain only a few materials related to Winifred Sanford's university career and her funeral. These documents provide biographical data about the author. Included are photocopies of University of Michigan class record and Alumni information, the Minister's notes for Sanford's funeral service, and "Dallas Unitarian," newsletter announcing Sanford's death.

Series II : Correspondence, 1924 - 2003

Box 1

The Correspondence Series is arranged chronologically and constitutes the bulk of the record group. The Winifred Sanford subseries, 1924 - 1982, is divided into two categories, the first of which contains letters documenting her literary career. Of special interest are numerous letters to and from H. L. Mencken, many of which contain his encouragements and advice to her, (see Correspondence List). The series also includes original incoming letters written by publishers and editors to Winifred Sanford as well as carbon copies of typed letters and handwritten drafts of her responses to them. Of note is an incomplete list of her own short stories drawn up by the author on June 26, 1958. The second category includes personal letters written to the author after the private printing in 1980 of her collected short stories, entitled *Windfall and Other Stories*.

The Helen Sanford subseries, 1981 - 2003, for the most part contains correspondence to and from Winifred Sanford's daughter, Helen J. Sanford, at the end of the author's life and after her death. It is also subdivided into two categories, the first of which reflects the efforts of various publishing companies to gain permission from the Sanford family to reprint Winifred Sanford's short stories in anthologies and collections. Of note is a letter to Betty Wiesepape granting her permission to use Sanford's correspondence for her Master's thesis entitled *Winifred Sanford: Her Life and Times*. This thesis is catalogued in the SWWC book collection. Also included are letters and contracts regarding the 1988 publication of *Windfall and Other Stories* as well as the family's wish to donate Sanford's papers to the Southwestern Writers Collection. The second category contains personal letters written to Helen Sanford regarding her mother's death and the death of Suzanne Comer, senior editor at SMU who was instrumental in publishing the 1988 printing of *Windfall*.

Series III : Writings by Winifred Sanford, 1924 - 1988

Boxes 1 and 2

The Writings Series is divided into the Published Works subseries, 1924 - 1988, and the Unpublished Works subseries, 1945 - 1986. The first contains tearsheets and photocopies of Sanford's published short stories, arranged alphabetically by title. Of

special interest is a collection of eight of Sanford's short stories and one article gathered by her mother-in-law Helen Hall Sanford and placed in a small folder for posterity. Original copies of the *American Mercury* and *Woman's Home Companion* are catalogued and housed separately in order to better preserve these fragile items. Copies of *Windfall* (1980 and 1988) are also included in the SWWC book collection. Also contained within this subseries are original receipts and Assignments of Copyright for Sanford's short stories sold to the *American Mercury* and the Paget Literary Agency, as well as materials relating to Mira von Hollander-Munkh's German translation of "The Forest Fire."

The second subseries contains various unpublished materials, arranged alphabetically by title. Included are a typewritten copy of an "Choosing Your Type of Story," an outline prepared by Winifred Sanford in the 1940s on how to write a short story, two typewritten copies of "Deep C," a short story submitted to several magazines in 1945 but not published, "Memories" and "Memories by Buttercup Bailey," two undated, handwritten works by Winifred Mahon when she was a child, and two undated copies of "Star in the East," found among the possessions of Winifred Sanford's sister after the latter's death in 1986.

Series IV : Reviews, 1925 - 1996

Box 2

The Reviews Series contains photocopies and original reviews of Winifred Sanford's works. The bulk of this material pertains to reviews of the 1988 printing of *Windfall*. Included are materials relating to the 1996 "Arts and Letters Live," in which "Windfall" was read by Sheriden Thomas.

Series V : Writings by Others, 1933 - 1995

Box 2

Collected and maintained by Winifred Sanford and her family, the Works by Others Series includes materials that were not written by Sanford. Represented are an article by Anne Pence Davis and a story by Fay M. Yauger, both members of the Wichita Falls Manuscript Club. In addition, there are various tearsheets of articles on how to write short stories from the *Writer's Digest*, and a typewritten screenplay for and VHS cassette of *The Stars Fell on Henrietta*. This film was based on Sanford's short story "Luck" and was written by her grandson, Philip Railsbeck. It is catalogued and housed in the SWWC book collection.

Series VI : Clippings, 1947 - 1990

Box 2

The Clippings Series contains photocopies and original newspaper clippings pertaining to various topics of interest to Sanford or to her family: a 1947 newspaper clipping about oilfield jargon; a broadside from the Southwestern Writers Collection; newspaper articles about Texas painter Jerry Bywaters, whose painting "Oil Field Girls" appeared on the cover of *Windfall* (1988); materials relating to the death of Suzanne Comer.

Container List

Box Folder

Series I : Personal Documents, 1911 - 1983

1 1 University of Michigan Records by date, 1911 – 1938
Funeral service documents, 1983

Series II : Correspondence, 1924 - 2003, n.d.

A. Winifred Sanford by date, 1924 - 1981, n.d.

Literary Correspondence, 1924 - 1962

1 2 1924 - 1927
3 1928 - 1931, n.d
4 1932 - 1945
5 1953 - 1962

Personal Correspondence, 1980 - 1982, n.d.

1 6 Letters and Cards, 1980 - 1982, n.d.

B. Helen Sanford by date, 1981 - 2003

Permissions, 1981 - 2003

1 7 1980 - 1983
8 1984
9 1987 - 1988
10 1989 - 2003

Personal Correspondence, 1983 - 1990

1 11 Letters, Cards, 1983 - 1990

Series III : Writings by Winifred Sanford, 1924 - 1986, n.d.

A. Published Works by title, 1924 - 1980,

1 12 Tearsheets of stories, collected by Helen Hall Sanford
Original Publications (catalogued and housed in
SWWC)
13 Tearsheets from original publications
14 Tearsheets from original publications and Typescripts

Box Folder

**Series III : Writings by Winifred Sanford, 1924 - 1986, n.d.
(continued)**

A. Published Works by title, 1924 - 1980 (continued)

1	15	Copyright Documents, 1924 - 1926
2	1	Copyright Documents, 1927 - 1980
	2	Translation Materials, 1926

B. Unpublished Works by title, n.d., 1945 - 1986

2	3	Typescripts and Manuscripts
	4	Typescripts

**Series IV : Reviews of Winifred Sanford's Writings by date, 1925
- 1996**

2	5	1925 - 1982
	6	1988
	7	1988
	8	1989
	9	1990 - 1997

Series V : Writings by Others by date, 1933 - 1995

2	10	Stories, Articles written by members of Wichita Falls Manuscript Club
		Articles collected by Winifred Sanford
	11	Typescript of <i>The Stars Fell on Henrietta</i>
	12	Newspaper articles about <i>The Stars Fell on Henrietta</i> VHS cassette of <i>The Stars Fell on Henrietta</i> (catalogued and housed in SWWC)

Series VI : Clippings by date, 1947 - 1990

2	13	Newspaper Clippings, Broad sides collected by the author
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Series VII: Printed Materials, c. 1929-1940

American Mercury and *Woman's Home Companion* issues
containing contributions by Sanford