
Guide to the Ruth Comfort Mitchell Collection, ca. 1879-1961

Collection number: Mss 84

Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Ruth Comfort Mitchell Collection,

Date (inclusive): ca. 1879-1961

Date (bulk): (bulk 1930s-1940s)

Collection Number: Mss 84

Creator: Mitchell, Ruth Comfort, 1882-1954

Extent: 1 linear foot (2 document boxes 1 thin oversize box)

Repository: University of California, Santa Barbara. Library. Department of Special Collections
Santa Barbara, California 93106-9010

Physical Location: Del Sur and Del Sur Oversize

Language: English

Access Restrictions

None.

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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

Gift from William Wreden, 1966.

Biography

Ruth Comfort Mitchell, perhaps best known for her novel *Of Human Kindness*, which she wrote as a counterpoint to John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, had a long and successful career as a writer, producing numerous novels, poems, short stories, and one-act plays.

Born on July 21, 1882 in San Francisco, Mitchell spent a good deal of time in Los Gatos, California, where her parents owned a summer home. It was here that her first poem was published in the local newspaper, when she was 14 years old. She pursued a literary career after her marriage to Sanborn Young in 1914, when the couple moved to New York City. Within two years, she had a play opening on Broadway and a published volume of poems, to be followed soon after by her first novel.

The Youngs soon returned to Los Gatos and began building their elaborate Chinese-styled home, which they dubbed Yung See San Fong, on a hilltop ranch. In 1925, Sanborn Young was elected to the California State Senate, where he would serve until 1938, becoming a close friend to President Herbert Hoover. Ruth proved to be a tireless campaigner and was active in a number of conservative organizations, even serving twice as a delegate to the Republican National Convention.

Sanborn Young returned to life as a cattle rancher after retiring from the Senate and, as such, he and his wife were upset by Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, which appeared soon after, in 1939. Ruth Comfort Mitchell determined to tell their side of the story, the result being her novel *Of Human Kindness*, in which a gentleman farmer's family must overcome the tribulations brought by migrant workers, union organizers, liberal academics, and Communists.

Ruth Comfort Mitchell continued to write throughout the 1940s and was an active member of the Christian Science Church of Los Gatos. She died at home on February 17, 1954 of heart failure.

Scope and Content of Collection

The collection contains correspondence, typescripts of articles and speeches, research files, photographs, and ephemera of American author Ruth Comfort Mitchell. Correspondents include William C. Morrow, Robert W. Service, and Wendell Wilkie. Much of the collection relates to Mitchell's research and writing on the migrant question of the late 1930s, after the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, as seen from the perspective of the area farmers and ranchers.

The collection also contains a number of books, including some by Ruth Comfort Mitchell, which have been cataloged separately and which may be searched on Pegasus, the UCSB Libraries online catalog.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Mitchell, Ruth Comfort, 1882-1954

Series 1. Correspondence

Box 1: 1 - 15	Incoming
Box 1: 1	Anslinger, Harry J., 1961 (to Sanborn Young), n.d.
Box 1: 2	<i>Atlantic Monthly</i>, 1943
Box 1: 3	Council for Social Action, 1939
Box 1: 4	D. Appleton - Century Co., 1923
Box 1: 5	Garrette, Eve, 1943
Box 1: 6	Morrow, William C., 1900-1915
Box 1: 7	Rooney, Alicia L., 1939-1940
Box 1: 8	Shepard, Arthur C., 1939-1940
Box 1: 9	U.S. Department of Labor, 1939
Box 1: 10	Wilkie, Wendell, 1943
Box 1: 11 - 14	Miscellany
Box 1: 11	A-F, ca. 1921-1955
Box 1: 12	G-L, ca. 1939-1943
Box 1: 13	M-R, ca. 1940-1943
Box 1: 14	S-Z, 1921-1940
Box 1: 15	Unidentified, ca. 1908-1940
Box 1: 16	Outgoing, 1935, 1945

Series 2. **Legal Documents**

Box 1: 17

Legal Documents (includes writing contracts), 1908-1913

Series 3. **Writings and Speeches**

Scope and Content Note

Includes typescripts, publishers' notices, and related material.

Box 1: 18	Lists of Writings (stories, novels, plays), n.d.
Box 1: 19	Analysis of <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>, ca. 1939
Box 1: 20	Novel - <i>Of Human Kindness</i>, 1940
Box 1: 20	Plays (includes <i>Flags of California</i> and <i>Please Stand By</i>), n.d.
Box 1: 21 - 22	Poetry (typescripts and printed copies), ca. 1916-1937, n.d.
Box 1: 23	Reviews, 1939, n.d.
Box 1: 24	Screenplay - "Perjury", 1922
Box 1: 25	Short Stories, n.d.
Box 1: 26	Speeches, n.d.
Box 2: 1 - 3	Stories and Articles (printed copies), 1917-1941

Series 4. **Research Files**

Box 2: 4 - 5 **Migrant Question**
Box 2: 4 **Clippings, ca. 1939-1940**
Box 2: 5 **Reports and Speeches, ca. 1939-1940**
Box 2: 6 **Mitchell Family (clipping, theatre programs), ca. 1879-1880s**

Series 5. **Ephemera**

Box 2: 7

Guest Book, ca. 1922-1947

Box 2: 8

Miscellany (includes biographical sketch), n.d.

Series 6. **Photographs**

Box 2: 9

Photographs - Robert W. Service (2 items, including postcard with note from Service), ca. 1910s

Series 7. Oversize

- Box 3: 1 **Scrapbook - mainly clippings relating to migrant issues, 1939-1940**
- Box 3: 2 **Writings**
- Box 3: 2 **Copies of stories for newspapers and magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1928-1937**
- Box 3: 2 **List of Stories, n.d.**