

SOUTHWESTERN WRITERS COLLECTION
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Hart Stilwell
Papers, 1963-1975

Collection 013

2 boxes (1 linear foot) plus artifacts

Acquisition: Donation since 1988. Donors: Anne Stilwell Strong, Mary Gray Hughes.

Access: Open for Research.

Processed by: Jennifer B. Patterson, May 1994; Inventory revised by Brandy Harris, 2005.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hart Stilwell was born in 1902 in Yoakum, Texas. When he was two, his large family relocated to the Rio Grande Valley, an area they would roam throughout Stilwell's childhood as his father sought undeveloped farmland and the freedom of the frontier. Stilwell's upbringing was marked by psychological and physical conflict with his father, a former Texas Ranger prone to sudden mood-swings and threats of violence.

At the age of seventeen Stilwell entered The University of Texas at Austin, where he worked for *The Daily Texan* and graduated with a degree in journalism in 1924. One of his first jobs was as a reporter for *The Brownsville Herald*, a paper he also edited for two years. In the late 1920s Stilwell lost interest in working full-time and turned to free-lance writing, although for the rest of his life he regularly contributed articles to newspapers across Texas, including *The San Antonio Light*, *The Houston Chronicle*, and *The Austin American-Statesman*.

Stilwell's first novel was published in 1945. An indictment of race relations in the Rio Grande Valley, *Border Town* was narrated by a cynical reporter in love with a Mexican woman who had been raped by a wealthy Anglo businessman. Two years later, Stilwell published his most critically acclaimed novel, *Uncovered Wagon*, which included a thinly fictionalized account of Stilwell's relationship with his father, called "The Old Man" in the book. *Uncovered Wagon* was named one of the fifty best books of Texas by A.C. Greene, who wrote "you don't find many Texas writers who can face the bitter reality of rural poverty in a changing society as Stilwell does." Stilwell published a third novel, *Campus Town*, which was less successful than the others. All of his novels draw heavily from personal experience (Stilwell's daughter called *Uncovered Wagon* an "autobiography" and said that Stilwell changed names and place names only after his mother objected to the harshness of his narrative) and are marked by a fierce liberalism and hatred of intolerance.

Stilwell was also known for his nonfiction. He collaborated with Slats Rogers on Rogers' autobiography and helped write a book on neglected children, titled *The Child Who Walks Alone*, with his social worker wife, Anne Stilwell. He

was an avid sportsman and published two well-known books on hunting and fishing in Texas and Mexico. *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor*, *Hunting Yearbook*, and other outdoor sports magazines also published articles by Stilwell. In the early 1970s he began work on a full-length book on human interference in the natural world; he was particularly concerned about the domestication of wild animals and the increasing use of biological engineering on animals and plants consumed by humans. Stilwell was working on this book, tentatively titled *The Great White Immaculate Bird and Other Toys*, along with a manuscript on fishing, a children's book on wolves, and a number of short essays when he died on May 13, 1975 in Austin.

Stilwell married twice and had two children. His daughter, Mary Gray Hughes, is also a writer.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Two boxes of manuscripts, clippings, published articles, programs, correspondence, photographs, and artifacts (1963-1975, n.d.), contain the books and essays that Stilwell was working on at his death as well as related materials donated by his widow and daughter. The collection has been arranged into three series: Works, (1963-1975, n.d.), Personal Materials (1967, 1971, 1975, n.d.), and Photographs (n.d.).

See also gifts of Anne Stilwell Strong, Mary Gray Hughes, Jean Lee, and Wilfred and Bridget Webb for books by Hart Stilwell. The Russell Lee Collection contains photographs of Hart Stilwell. The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin has 23 letters from Stilwell to J. Frank Dobie in the Dobie Collection.

SERIES DESCRIPTION

SERIES 1: WORKS, 1963-1975, n.d.

Boxes 1-2

The body of this series contains the manuscripts that were unpublished at Stilwell's death. Three book drafts are represented. *Glory of the Silver King* is a manuscript about tarpon fishing in Texas and Mexico and *Old Two Toes* is a story about the hunt for a disabled wolf who is hunting sheep. The largest draft is *The Great White Immaculate Bird and Other Toys*, a series of essays criticizing human efforts to change animals for commercial purposes. There are three drafts of this typescript, all of which contain handwritten emendations. A number of short essays by Stilwell written for newspapers and magazines are also found in this series; many of these essays cover topics found in *The Great White Immaculate Bird*, but others discuss such subjects as feminism, football at The University of Texas, and the loss of the Southern dialect. One folder contains a few published articles by Stilwell, generally focussing on food but also covering such topics as javelin hunting, the demise of the jalapeño, and the death of outlaw Sam Bass. The correspondence in this series consists of two rejection letters.

SERIES 2: PERSONAL MATERIALS, 1967, 1971, 1975, n.d.

Box 2

Within this series are clippings, programs, promotional pamphlets, and artifacts belonging or related to Hart Stilwell. Separation sheets for the artifacts in the Stilwell Collection like his typewriter and camera are included in this series.

SERIES 3: PHOTOGRAPHS, n.d.

Box 2

This series contains photographs of Stilwell, the majority of which were taken by his good friend, photographer Russell Lee. Stilwell is featured with his wife, Anne, in many of the photographs, but there is one photograph of Stilwell with J. Frank Dobie. Also found in this series are publicity photographs and one Russell Lee photograph that was used on the cover of Stilwell's 1972 co-authored book, *The Child Who Walks Alone*.

Container List

Box Folder

Series I: Works, 1963-1975, n.d.

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| 1 | 1 | <i>Glory of the Silver King</i> , draft, n.d. |
| | 2 | <i>Glory of the Silver King</i> , updated draft, n.d. |
| | 3 | <i>Great White Immaculate Bird and Other Toys</i> . draft (pgs. 1-145), n.d. |
| | 4 | <i>Great White Immaculate Bird and Other Toys</i> , continued (pgs. 146-243 with edited insert), n.d. |
| | 5 | <i>Great White Immaculate Bird and Other Toys</i> , revised draft (pgs. 1-145), n.d. |
| 2 | 1 | <i>Great White Immaculate Bird and Other Toys</i> (pgs. 1-108), includes edited chapter entitled "Genesis, Paleface Style," n.d. |
| | 2 | <i>Great White Immaculate Bird and Other Toys</i> , continued (pgs. 109-243), n.d. |
| | 3 | "Old Two Toes," short story with rejection letter from Alfred A. Knopf, 1975, n.d. |
| | 4 | Short essays including "Benny the Toad Frog," "The 'Frank Erwin' of U.T. in the Roaring Twenties" (with rejection letter from <i>Texas Monthly</i>), and "How about Hizzer and Shehee and Manwo?" 1975, n.d. |
| | 5 | Magazine articles, including "Hog Calling for Javelina," in <i>Hunting Yearbook</i> , November 14, 1963, "Deflaming the Jalapeno," in <i>San Antonio Express News</i> , January 31, 1971, "Don't Let High Meat Prices Get You Down," in the <i>Houston Chronicle</i> , October 20, 1974, "I Saw them Kill Sam Bass," in <i>Badman</i> , Summer 1971, and "The Great Shrimp Boil," in the <i>Houston Chronicle</i> , July 13, 1975 |

Series II: Personal Materials, 1967, 1971, 1975, n.d.

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| 6 | Clippings including Stilwell's obituary, programs, materials from Stilwell's campaign for the Houston School Board, typewriter ribbons, and "The Judge, A Story," by Mary Gray Hughes in <i>The Atlantic</i> , 1967, 1971, 1975, n.d. |
| 7 | Originals of photocopied clippings |

Series III: Photographs, n.d.

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| 8 | Photographs, includes one of Stilwell with J. Frank Dobie, n.d. |
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