

A Guide to the James Southall Wilson Letters

James Southall Wilson Letters 1931
1931

A Collection in the Special Collections Department 38-428 and 3422
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History

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A Guide to the James Southall Wilson Letters

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Descriptive Summary

Collection Number

38-428 and 3422

Language

English

Creator

James Southall Wilson

Extent

75 items

Repository

University of Virginia. Library. Special Collections Dept.

Alderman Library
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903
USA

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

See the [University of Virginia Library's use policy](#).

Acquisition Information

This collection was given to the Library by James Southall Wilson of Charlottesville, Virginia on November 28, 1931 and February 26, 1950.

Funding Note

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Preferred Citation

James Southall Wilson Letters, Accession 38-428, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library

Scope and Content

This collection consists chiefly of 75 letters and telegrams, 1931, to Mr. James Southall Wilson, who invited several Southern authors to attend the Southern Writers Convention, sponsored by the Virginia Quarterly Review, at the University of Virginia on October 23-24, 1931. The authors include the following: Conrad Aiken, Sherwood Anderson, Katharine Anthony, Emily Clark Balch, John Peale Bishop, James Boyd, Roark Bradford, Herschel Brickell, Struthers Burt, James Branch Cabell, Henry Seidel Canby, Willa Cather, Maristan Chapman, Irvin S. Cobb, Donald Davidson, William E. Dodd, William Faulkner, John Gould Fletcher, Ellen Glasgow, Isa Glenn, Paul Green, Sara Haardt, Archibald Henderson, DuBose Heyward, Gerald W. Johnson, Mary Johnston, H. L. Mencken, Margaret Prescott Montague, Julia Peterkin, Ulrich B. Phillips, Josephine Pinckney, Burton Rascoe, Lizette Woodworth Reese, Alice Caldwell Hegan Rice, Cale Young Rice, Elizabeth Maddox Roberts, Herbert Ravenel Sass, Helen Purefoy Poteat Stallings, T. S. Stribling, Allen Tate, Amelie Rives Troubetzkoy, Irita Van Doren, Thomas Wolfe, and Stark Young.

The letters are often concerned with the writing profession from the author's point of view. In a March 3, 1931 letter, Willa Cather writes that she wants "to eliminate in so far as possible all intrusions from the outside" during her mother's illness, but would be prohibited from doing so should she allow the use of her name on any committee since "many unforeseen complications may ensue." John Gould Fletcher urges a more politically-based discussion for the conference, which would integrate the role of economics in the role of the Southern author's duties to his public (September 24, 1931). Allen Tate believes "we should have regionalism for literature," but that politics should involve only sectionalism (October 29, 1931). Thomas Wolfe, however, favors a more personal topic, that of the writer's inner struggle to create. In his letter of September 4, 1931 he speaks at length of his own efforts to write, likening them to "a hell of possibly useless labors."

Above all, Wilson stresses repeatedly that the conference is to be a pleasant experience, as he explains in a letter to Mary Johnston (n.d.). He insists that "the chief idea of the meeting is that it will be experimental and will have its main value in the opportunity for the members of the group to talk with one another." In an anecdote in which he compares himself to a country hound dog that is intimidated by formal society, William Faulkner expresses appreciation for the informal gathering Wilson has proposed (September 24, 1931). Many letters compliment the successful outcome of the meeting, noting especially its relaxed atmosphere.