

Mabel Clore Collection on Vardis Fisher, 1927-1972

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Clore, Mabel S.
Title	Mabel Clore Collection on Vardis Fisher
Dates	1927-1972 (inclusive) 1927 1972
Quantity	2.0 linear feet, (4 boxes) 2 linear feet (2 boxes)
Collection Number	MSS 002
Summary	Periodical issues with articles by Idaho author Vardis Fisher, articles about him, reviews of his work, bibliographies, advertisements, catalogs, clippings, and other material about Fisher and his writings, collected chiefly by Mabel S. Clore, secretary of Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho.
Repository	Boise State University Library, Special Collections and Archives Special Collections and Archives 1910 University Drive Boise ID 83725 Telephone: 208-426-3958 archives@boisestate.edu
Access Restrictions	Collection is available for research.
Languages	English
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided, in part, by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities

Historical Note

Vardis Fisher was born on March 31, 1895, in Annis, Idaho, to a family of Mormon pioneers. He was the first child of a man who preferred the wilderness and a woman who desired civilization. In 1901 Fisher's family moved to a remote river basin home in Southeastern Idaho. The Antelope Hills were totally isolated, and for the next five years (until he was sent to school) Fisher was "imprisoned by the wilderness" (according to biographer Wayne Chatterton). After graduating from Rigby High School in 1915, Fisher attended the University of Utah, where he married his childhood sweetheart, Leona McMurtrey. At the outset of World War I, Fisher enlisted as an officer candidate in the Air Force, resigned, and was then drafted, serving two years in the Army. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Utah in 1920. With his wife and two sons, he moved to Illinois to pursue graduate work in English Literature at the University of Chicago.

Fisher's writing skills were highly acclaimed by both universities. He received his masters degree in 1922 with a thesis on Daniel Defoe and London low life. His academic accomplishments, however, were overshadowed during this period by the suicide of his wife in 1924. Fisher completed his PhD, magna cum laude, in 1925 and returned with his sons to Salt Lake City, Utah, to assume a teaching

career at the University of Utah. Stifled by religious and academic pressures for conventionality and conformity, Fisher resigned in 1928. In search of intellectual freedom, he accepted a position as assistant professor at New York University.

Prior to leaving Utah, he wrote *Sonnets to an Imaginary Madonna* (1927), a reflection of his first marriage. While in New York, he married Margaret Trusler, a fellow student from the University of Chicago, the same year that his first novel, *Toilers of the Hills*, was published (1928). During his years in New York City, he developed a close friendship with fellow teacher and author Thomas Wolfe that would eventually be documented in Fisher's essay "Thomas Wolfe As I Knew Him" (1963).

Fisher made a commitment to a writing career and returned to Idaho to live in 1931. His second novel, *Dark Bridwell*, was published that same year. His next novels have been referred to as the "Vridar Hunter" tetralogy: *In Tragic Life* (1932), *Passions Spin the Plot* (1934), *We Are Betrayed* (1935), and *No Villain Need Be* (1936). The titles of these works were taken from a sonnet by George Meredith, the English poet, who influenced Fisher's writings and was the subject of his doctoral dissertation at Chicago. The tetralogy, considered by critics as being autobiographical, reflects his memories of the rigid, hard childhood he experienced in the Antelope Hills. Ironically, during this same period Fisher chose to homestead in the remote river bottom country of the Snake River's Hagerman Valley. During the Depression, Fisher accepted the position as the Idaho Director of the WPA writers Project (1935-1939). Under his editorship, the project produced the *Idaho guide* (1937), *The Idaho Encyclopedia* (1938), and *Idaho Lore* (1939).

After the publication of *April: A Fable of Love* (1937) and *Forgive Us Our Virtues: A Comedy of Evasions* (1938), Fisher wrote his most famous novel, *Children of God*, which won the Harper Prize for fiction in 1939. The book is a three-part novel concerning the early history of the Mormon church. Fisher attempted to portray the church impartially even though he had rejected its teachings in his late teens. Following this success, he wrote five other historical novels: *City of Illusion* (1941), *The Mothers* (1943), *Pemmican: A Novel of the Hudson's Bay Company* (1956), *Tale of Valor: A Novel of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (1958), and *Mountain Man* (1965).

Fisher and his second wife were divorced in 1939 and the following year he married Opal Laurel Holmes. In 1940, he began to write a series of novels exploring "the evolution of man's soul from beginning to the present day" (*Contemporary Authors*). The twelve volumes of the *Testament of Man* series (1943-1960) were philosophical and psychological rather than strictly historical in nature.

Fisher's non-fictional writings include regional works: *The Caxton Printers in Idaho* (1944) and *Gold Rushes and Mining Camps of the Early American West* (1968), which he co-authored with his wife, Opal. He wrote *Suicide or Murder?* (1962), a biography of Meriwether Lewis, and *God or Caesar* (1953) containing advice for the beginning writer, as well as numerous essays and articles. The 1930s and early 1940s were Fisher's most prolific years for short stories and periodical articles, though he continued to write occasional articles through the 1960s. These shorter works appeared in such diverse journals as *Esquire*, *Coronet*, *Rocky Mountain Review*, and *Western Folklore*.

After being away from teaching for three decades Fisher was selected as the author in residence at the College of Idaho in 1968. Fisher died at the age of 73 on July 9, 1968, leaving two works in progress, his autobiography and a volume to be called *The Western United States, The World's Greatest Physical Wonderland*. In 1972 his novel *Mountain Man* was made into the motion picture *Jeremiah Johnson*. Directed by Sydney Pollock and starring Robert Redford, it was chosen to represent the United States at the 1972 Cannes Film Festival.

Joseph M. Flora wrote prior to Fisher's death, "He writes in the morning and does hard labor on the farm in the afternoons His inspiration comes from the scholarly books with which he surrounds

himself and the wilds of the nature around him. The Idaho terrain and Rocky Mountains have nourished Fisher's art from the first to last."

Sources:

Chatterton, Wayne. Vardis Fisher : The Frontier and Regional Works. Boise, Idaho : Boise State College, 1972. (Western Writers Series, number 1)

Contemporary Authors. Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research, 1969. v. 5-8. p. 383-385.

Flora, Joseph. Vardis Fisher. New York : Twayne, 1965. (Twayne's United States Authors Series, number 76)

Content Description

Mrs. Clore was, for many years, secretary of Caxton Printers in Caldwell, Idaho, publisher of many of Vardis Fisher's books. Her husband, Russell Clore, served as the firm's vice president and treasurer. The donation constitutes their personal collection of Vardis Fisher materials.

The Clore collection consists of early editions of Vardis Fisher's books (autographed and inscribed to the Clores), paperback editions, periodicals containing articles by and about Fisher, and bibliographies, clippings, book reviews, and advertisements collected by Mrs. Clore from the 1920s to 1970s. The collection also contains duplicate galley proofs (uncorrected) of Fisher's novel, *The Mothers*, the story of the Donner Party.

There are no manuscripts in the collection that might properly be considered Vardis Fisher's own. The largest collection of his own papers (chiefly correspondence and drafts of novels) was deposited in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. A copy of Yale's catalog of their Vardis Fisher collection has been added to the Clore collection.

The Clore collection at Boise State University contains most, but not all, of Vardis Fisher's novels, short stories, poems, non-fiction works, and essays. The most comprehensive bibliography of Vardis Fisher's writings to date was prepared by George Kellogg and published in *Western American Literature* (volume 5), Spring 1970 issue. That bibliography lists 45 short stories and essays by Fisher and 37 books written or edited by him. The Clore collection contains 43 of these stories and essays and 36 of the books. The collection also contains several periodical articles and anthologized works not listed in Kellogg's bibliography. There are a number of periodical articles about Vardis Fisher in the Clore collection, but only a small percentage of those listed Kellogg's bibliography. The collection's strength lays in writings by Fisher, not about him.

Forms part of the Idaho Writers Archive.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

[item description], Mabel Clore Collection on Vardis Fisher, Box [number] Folder [number], Boise State University Special Collections and Archives.

Administrative Information

Arrangement

Collection is arranged in eight series: 1. Biographical material, 2. Bibliographies, 3. Book reviews, 4. Writings about Vardis Fisher, 5. Catalogs and advertisements, 6. Miscellaneous, 7. Writings by Vardis Fisher in periodicals, and 8. Writings by Vardis Fisher in newspapers.

Acquisition Information

Gift of Mrs. Clore, 1972

Processing Note

Mrs. Clore donated original periodical issues, many which are in fragile condition. For that reason, the Library asks researchers to use photocopies instead. The original issues have been retained for reference use, if necessary. A few of the periodical articles contained within the Clore collection were obtained by the Library from other sources. They were added to the collection for the convenience of the researcher.

Separated Materials

The collection of first editions, translations, and paperback versions of Fisher's novels, donated by Mabel S. Clore, and augmented by later gifts and purchases, is located in the repository's Special Collections Department.

Detailed Description of the Collection

1: Biographical material

Container(s)		Description	Dates
Box	Folder		
1	1	Western Writers Series (Chatterton)	1972
1	2	Fisher of the Antelope Hills (Crandall)	1949
1	3	Miscellaneous	

2: Bibliographies

Container(s)		Description	Dates
Box	Folder		
1	4	Kellogg	1969
1	5	Kellogg	1961
1	6	Clore	
1	7	Idaho Falls Public Library	1946
1	8	Idaho Falls Public Library	1946

3: Book reviews

Container(s)		Description	Dates
Box	Folder		
1	9	Children of God	
1	10	Darkness and the Deep	
1	11	Mountain Man (Jeremiah Johnson)	
1	12	Miscellaneous	

4: Writing about Vardis Fisher

Container(s)		Description	Dates
Box	Folder		
1	13	Bishop	1937
1	14	Caxton Printers	1939
1	15	Doig	1978
1	16	Duncan	1965
1	17	Flora	1963

Container(s)		Description	Dates
1	18	Flora	1969
1	19	Foote	1963
1	20	Holmes	1963
1	21	"Idaho Individualist"	1961
1	22	Kellogg	1967
1	23	Margarick	1963
1	24	North	1947
1	25	Reiter	1963
1	26	Stegner	1939
1	27	Swallow	1959
1	28	Taber, Idaho Yesterdays	1968
1	29	Taber, Pacific Northwest Quarterly	1968

5: Catalogs and advertisements

Container(s)		Description	Dates
Box	Folder		
2	1	Ablelard Press	
2	2	Casanova Press	
2	3	Caxton Printers	
2	4	Scallawagiana Book	
2	5	Pocket Books	1972
2	6	Alan Swallow	

Container(s)	Description	Dates
2 7	Harry W. Schwartz	
2 8	Miscellaneous	

6: Miscellaneous

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box	Folder	
2 9	Dust jackets	
2 10	Galley proofs: The Mothers (I)	1943
2 11	Galley proofs: The Mothers (II)	1943
2 12	Galley proofs: The Mothers (III)	1943
2 13	Galley proofs: The Mothers (IV)	1943
2 14	General	
2 15	This Book Collecting Racket (Harry Schwartz)	1943
2 16	Fisher collection at Yale: Catalog	
2 17	Fisher collection at WSU: Finding aid	

Drawer

1	A Literary Map of the United States: Books that Sharpen Perception of the American Scene, Holiday Magazine	1947
	See Series IV	

7: Writings by Vardis Fisher in periodicals

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box	Folder	

Container(s)	Description	Dates
2 18	Alan Swallow Interviews...	1965
2 19	Antelope People: The North Family (Poems)	1929
2 20	Antelope People: Slim Scott... (Poems)	1928
2 21	As Death is Lonely	1959
2 22	Authors' Field Day	1934
2 23	Books and I	1936
2 24	Caxton Printers in Idaho	1945
2 26	Charivari	1939
2 26	Children of God, abridged	1940
3 1	Children of God, abridged	1940
3 2	Comment on Vietnam	1966
3 3	Creative Historical Research...	1940
3 4	Crime and the Great Society	1967
3 5	Darkness and the Deep, abridged	1943
	An Essay for Men	1936
3 7	Fifteen Against Death	1943
3 8	Hometown Revisited...	1949
3 9	Idaho Primitive	1937
3 10	Joe Burt's Wife	1934
3 11	Laughter	1936
3 12	A Legend of Red Hair	1935

Container(s)		Description	Dates
3	13	The Lingering Frontier	1966
3	14	Mr. Graham Takes a Bath	1945
3	15	The Mormons	1944
3	16	The Mother	1933
3	17	The Mothers, abridged	1943
3	18	My Experiences with Thomas Wolfe	1951
4	1	Myths about Authors	1933
4	2	Novel Writing is My Trade	1950
4	3	The Novelist and his Background	1953
4	4	The Novelist and his Characters	1963
4	5	Old Timers	1937
4	6	Overalls or Tails?	1938
4	7	Overalls or Tails?: Reaction	1938
4	8	A Parable for Librarians...	1939
4	9	A Pinch of Advice	1940
4	10	Portrait of Towser	1936
4	11	Profanity	1929
4	12	The Scarecrow	1934
4	13	Sonnets to an Imaginary Madonna I-X (Poems)	1927
4	14	The Storm	1947
4	15	Thomas Wolfe and Maxwell Perkins	1951

Container(s)		Description	Dates
4	16	Thousand Springs Valley	1952
4	17	A Trivial Excursion in Modesty	1942
4	18	Vardis Fisher Comments...	1963
4	19	The Western Novel	1964
4	20	The Western Writer and the Eastern Establishment	1967
4	21	A Word About Censors	1937

8: Writings by Vardis Fisher in newspapers

Container(s)		Description	Dates
Box	Folder		
4	22	Flying Southern Idaho	1936
4	23	Why Should Anyone Leave Idaho...?	1938
4	24	Newspaper Columns	1943-1950

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

American literature--20th century
 American literature--Idaho
 Authors, American--Idaho

Other Creators :

Personal Names :

Fisher , Vardis, 1895-1968
 (author)

Finding aid prepared by Collection processed by Mary Carter and Alan Virta, assisted by RaeAnn Herker
 1988