

Information Sheet

R Sowers, Edward Walter, 1905-1982.
135 Papers, 1942-1980 (bulk 1961-1979).
107 folders.

This collection is available at The State Historical Society of Missouri. If you would like more information, please contact us at shsresearch@umsystem.edu.

This collection consists of correspondence, business papers, and miscellaneous printed material of a newspaper editor and publisher at Rolla, Phelps County, Missouri. Topics include the Sowers family, journalism and the newspaper business, the University of Missouri, and United States politics and foreign relations.

Edward Walter Sowers was born on 1 April 1905 at Waverly, Missouri, the first of ten children born to William and Alice Staley Sowers. He was reared on farms near Hazel Hill and Mayview, and was educated at schools in Mayview and Higginsville. He attended the University of Missouri at Columbia, and earned a degree in journalism in 1928. Soon after his graduation he moved to Boonville, Missouri, upon being offered a position as editor of the *Boonville Advertiser*. It was in Boonville that he met Alma Skerik, whom he married in June 1937. Sowers continued to edit newspapers in Boonville and Excelsior Springs until 1942, when he and two silent partners bought the weekly *Rolla New Era*. He soon bought out his partners and reorganized the paper as a five-day daily, the *Rolla Daily News*. In partnership with his wife and three sons he continued to publish the paper until his death from heart disease in 1982.

The Sowers collection consists largely of personal and business correspondence, with a lesser amount of printed material and clippings. Nearly all of the material is dated between 1961 and 1979. The papers are arranged topically, following Sowers's own filing system wherever it was evident. Subject categories include journalism and the newspaper business, press associations, the University of Missouri, politics and United States foreign policy, and general correspondence. A complete inventory of the folders can be found in the Information Folder.

During his lifetime Sowers was editor and/or owner and publisher of ten Missouri newspapers. They included the *Boonville Advertiser* and *Central Missourian* in Boonville, the *Excelsior Springs Daily Standard*, the *St. James Leader* and *St. James Journal*, the Fort Leonard Wood *Sentinel* and *Gateway Guide*, and the *Rolla Advertiser*, *Rolla New Era*, and *Rolla Daily News*. Most of the material in the collection pertains only to the *Rolla Daily News* and the *Gateway Guide*, but there are two folders of correspondence and allied material concerning the *Sentinel*, a weekly paper published by Sowers for one year under contract with the U.S. Army at Fort Leonard Wood. He later founded the weekly *Gateway Guide*.

The collection also contains correspondence with several press associations in which Sowers held memberships. He was a president of the Missouri Associated Dailies in 1968, and pursued a scheme to forward grass roots editorial opinion to the Nixon administration through presidential press aide Herbert Klein. However, the plan was unsuccessful and it was discontinued after Sowers left office.

The University of Missouri was one of Sowers's constant concerns, particularly in regard to operations related to its campus at Rolla. Although he was an alumnus of the Columbia campus, and served as president of its Alumni Association in 1962-1963, Sowers remained sensitive to the needs of the Rolla campus. He successfully lobbied against the separation of the Rolla campus, then known as the University of Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy, from the University System, although this collection does not include material from this interesting campaign. However, the files do contain numerous letters to and from governors, legislators, curators, and chancellors, and they reflect Sowers's concern for the Rolla campus, especially in searches for new chancellors.

Sowers was intensely interested in American foreign policy, and there are a dozen folders concerned with the topic. He traveled extensively throughout the world on tours that were as much “fact-finding” trips as they were vacations. His itineraries included Europe, South America, Africa, China, and Taiwan. His impressions during these travels led him to worry that the United States was losing its grip on world leadership to communism, and he was convinced that the American government was pursuing absolutely the wrong courses in instituting trade sanctions against Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and in opening negotiations which would transfer control of the Panama Canal, the latter a subject of his fiercest editorials. His observations were printed as editorials in the *Rolla Daily News*, and later he published them in a three-part series of pamphlets, “Jet Hopping Up and Down and Around the World.” Part Three of the series describes his visit to the Orient in 1977 as a member of a “Study Mission” sponsored by the National Newspaper Association. Several members of the group also published their own observations on the trip, which included both China and Taiwan. These publications are included in the collection.

A prolific correspondent and editorialist, Sowers had a long-standing policy of forwarding copies of his significant writings to numerous state and federal legislators, officials, and fellow newspapermen. His files contain correspondence with many Missouri governors and legislators, including John M. Dalton, Christopher “Kit” Bond, Stuart Symington, James Kirkpatrick, and Richard Ichord. He also corresponded frequently with officials of the Nixon administration and with Ronald Reagan’s campaign committees.

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Shelf List

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Folders 1-6: Sowers family, 1963-1980.

Miscellaneous papers, including a genealogy of the Sowers family and an autobiography by Edward W. Sowers; correspondence concerning the Rev. and Mrs. Paul Skerik of Vsetin, Czechoslovakia, cousins of Alma Skerik Sowers; and a printed pamphlet concerning the Sowers family’s trip to Europe in 1964.

Folders 7-21: Sowers Newspapers, Inc., 1942-1980.

Correspondence, notes, printed material, and clippings concerning newspapers owned, edited, and published by Edward W. Sowers and his family, especially the *Rolla Daily News*, the *Fort Wood Sentinel*, and the *Fort Gateway Guide*.

Folders 22-26: Newspaper associations, 1962-1979.

Correspondence concerning several press associations with which Edward W. Sowers was allied as a member and/or officer.

Folders 27-31: University of Missouri, 1957-1980.

Correspondence with chancellors and officers of the University of Missouri system, particularly in connection with the Rolla and Columbia campuses, and search for a chancellor at UM-Rolla. There are also materials related to Sowers’s tenure as president of the University of Missouri Alumni Association, 1962-1963, and reunions of the Class of 1928 at Columbia, Missouri.

Folders 32-35: Politics and foreign relations (printed material), 1973-1977.

Miscellaneous printed material, including the three-part series, “Jet Hopping Up and Down and Around the World,” summarizing Sowers’s observations during travels to South America, Europe, Africa, China, and Taiwan. There are also several pamphlets published by

other members of the trip in 1977 to the Orient, a study mission sponsored by the National Newspaper Association.

Folders 36-45: Politics and foreign relations (correspondence), 1968-1979.

Correspondence, editorials, and miscellaneous printed material concerning various conservative political causes and associations, organized alphabetically by topic.

Folders 46-107: Correspondence, 1947-1980.

General correspondence with legislators, public officials, business associates, and personal friends. Arranged alphabetically.

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