

**S0488 Pepper, Selwyn (1914-2008)**  
**Papers, 1928-1986**  
**43 Folders, 2 Photographs**

This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri](http://The State Historical Society of Missouri). If you would like more information, please contact us at [shsresearch@umsystem.edu](mailto:shsresearch@umsystem.edu).

Began career as journalist on *The Scrippage*, the Soldan High newspaper; joined the staff of the *Post-Dispatch* in 1935; in the 1930s and 40s, Pepper covered many important news stories, including heat waves, riverfront bond issue fraud, IRS corruption, the 1947 mine disaster in Centralia, toxic pollution in Donora, PA, and the Cardinals' World Series win in 1946; edited the Post's report on events leading to Nixon's resignation. Include articles from throughout Pepper's career.

See also: S0580 Pepper, Selwyn (1914-2008), Addenda, 1928-1995

Selwyn Pepper, retired city editor for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, donated his papers to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-St. Louis in two increments, on July 7 and 13, 1988.

Selwyn Pepper's career as a journalist began with the school newspaper of Soldan High, *The Scrippage*. As an editor and reporter for the paper in 1931, Pepper published a report on the son of *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* news editor Ben Reese, a Soldan alumnus who at the time played basketball for Yale University. Reese noticed the story and gave Pepper a summer job as cub reporter. Pepper served in the U. S. Armed Forces as a sergeant while editor for the Jefferson Barracks Hub in 1941 and 1942. As a major in 1945, Pepper reported on the war crimes trial of Japanese General Yamashita in Manila. After Pepper received a political science degree from Washington University in 1935, he joined the regular staff of the Post.

Pepper's earliest assignment was to report on events at City Hospital during the 1934 and 1936 heat waves that caused the deaths of over forty people. He also developed stories for the Post's best-known investigative reporters, John Rogers and Theodore Link. In 1936 Pepper shared a Pulitzer Prize with the Post's staff for a series about election fraud on a bond issue intended to clear riverfront property. He also covered many infamous local crime stories, including the Bobby Greenlease kidnap/murder and the Mary Catherine Reardon murder.

Pepper also worked on two other Pulitzer Prize winning exposes: the first uncovered corruption in the Internal Revenue Service leading to the resignation of the national and local heads of the agency; the second reported on a 1947 mine disaster in Centralia, Illinois in which 111 miners died. The latter report led to the enactment of significant changes in mine safety laws. Other significant stories written by Pepper included a report on bail bonds abuse in 1947 and one on the deaths of nineteen people from toxic pollution in Donora, Pennsylvania in 1948, an early instance of reporting on environmental hazards. Pepper also wrote the front page news feature on the St. Louis Cardinals' 1946 World Series win.

In the early 1950s Pepper wrote a major series covering the impoverished conditions of city schools, and another on organized crime in the U. S., the latter written with Ted Link. In

1950 Pepper interviewed Kansas City crime boss Charles Binaggio just prior to Binaggio's assassination. Pepper also contributed to the Post's investigation of the Navy's Alaska Oil Reserve fight.

In October 1973 Pepper edited the front page Post story reporting on Richard Nixon's "Saturday Night Massacre" dismissal of Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox and Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus. He worked with reporter Richard Dudman on an important series about the Vietnam War entitled Dateline: Vietnam in 1977.

Pepper served as the president of Sigma Delta Chi, the St. Louis Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists from 1984 to 1985. Under his leadership, the Society sponsored talks by Jeffrey Gluck, the last publisher of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat. Gluck, a local entrepreneur who attempted to revive the failing paper with questionable business practices, angered local journalists to whom he wrote bad paychecks. His appearance at the professional society for journalists caused a storm of controversy among members.

During the course of his career at the Post, Pepper worked at various times as city editor, news editor, features magazine editor, reporter and rewriter. At the time of his retirement from the newspaper in 1982, Pepper was serving as its Reader's Advocate. In 1986 the Journalism Foundation gave Pepper its lifetime achievement award for his contributions to St. Louis journalism. Pepper continued as a writer, editor and public relations consultant after retirement, and as an interviewer for the Creative Aging radio program on KWMU.

### **SCOPE AND CONTENT**

The Selwyn Pepper Papers, 1931-1986, document Pepper's career as a local reporter and city editor. The collection includes his earliest work for the Soldan High School newspaper, The Scrippage, as well as articles written in retirement for Washington University's Law magazine. It also includes issues of Washington University's Student Life and the Jefferson Barracks Hub edited by Pepper and a public relations guide Pepper wrote for the U. S. Army Press section in 1945. The bulk of the collection, however, is comprised of newsclippings from Pepper's work at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. It includes the stories on the Centralia mine disaster and the deadly pollution at Donora, PA; Pepper's coverage of the Cardinals' World Series win in 1946; his 1947 reports on bails bonds abuse; the 1950s series on decay in city schools and organized crime; his editing of the front page Post story of the Watergate "Saturday Night Massacre" in 1973, and the 1977 Richard Dudman series on Vietnam. The last Post story written by Pepper included in this collection reports on the reunion of Douglas MacArthur's public relations staff in 1985. The collection also contains Pepper's remarks to the American Press Association's City Editor's Seminar in 1965; an outline for a public relations talk in 1985; and profiles Pepper wrote of St. Louis lawyers Abraham Margolin and Robert H. McRoberts for Washington University's Law magazine.

### **SERIES DESCRIPTION**

The papers primarily consist of newsclippings of stories written by Selwyn Pepper arranged chronologically. Pepper's work on the Soldan High School Scrippage can be found in the first folder; issues of Washington University's Student Life appear in folders 2-6; issues of the Jefferson Barracks Hub are in folders 8-10 and a U. S. Army Press Section Public Relations Guide written by Pepper in 1945 is located in folder 12.

Newsclippings from the Post-Dispatch comprise the rest of the collection, folders 7 and 13 through 36. Folder 18 contains a copy of the last edition of the St. Louis Star-Times. Pepper's remarks to the American Press Institute in 1965 can be found in folder 31 and the 1985 talk at a public relations seminar appears in folder 40. Folder 39 contains correspondence on Jeffrey Gluck's appearances at the Sigma Delta Chi society. The collection includes one photograph on the pollution disaster in Donora, PA, #488.1 in folder 24.

## **FOLDER LIST**

### **BOX 1**

1. Soldan High School Scrippage, Feb. 6, 1931- May 29, 1931
2. Washington University Student Life, Sept. 25, 1934-November 9, 1934
3. Washington University Student Life, Nov. 23, 1934-Dec. 21, 1934
4. Washington University Student Life, Jan. 8, 1935-March 12, 1935
5. Washington University Student Life, March 15, 1935-May 7, 1935
6. Washington University Student Life Newsclippings, Oct. 2, 1934-March 26, 1935
7. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Newsclippings, July 26, 1936-March 10, 1938
8. Jefferson Barracks Hub, June 28, 1941-September 13, 1941
9. Jefferson Barracks Hub, Sept. 20, 1941-Dec. 27, 1941
10. Jefferson Barracks Hub, Jan. 3, 1942-Feb. 28, 1942
11. Diggers (Aussie Soldiers), Frank Johnson, Sydney, Australia, 1943
12. Public Relations Guide, Press Section, U. S. Army Forces, Pacific, August 1945

### **BOX 2**

13. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Dec. 9, 1928
14. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Newsclippings, 1928-1935
15. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Newsclippings, 1937-1954
16. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "Franklin D. Roosevelt: Photo Sketch of Career of the War President," April 13, 1945 (oversize in map drawer)
17. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Newsclippings and Typed Copy, General Yamashita War Crimes Trial, 1945
18. St. Louis Star-Times, Last Edition, July 11, 1946
19. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Newsclippings, 1946-1951

20. St. Louis Post-Dispatch "Bail Bondsmen," Newsclippings, 1947
  21. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Newsclippings, 1947
  22. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Newsclippings, 1947-1949
  23. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "The Centralia Mine Disaster" Special Section, April 30, 1947; and PD Notebook Volume 2, Number 11, Jan. 1952 (oversize in map drawer)
  24. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Donora, Pennsylvania Pollution Disaster Series, 1948 (Includes Photographs 488.1 and 488.2)
  25. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Newsclippings, 1948-1951
  26. St. Louis Post-Dispatch "Progress or Decay?" Series, Collected Edition, May 1950 (oversize in map drawer)
  27. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Newsclippings, 1954, 1960
  28. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, PD Notebook, March 1957
  29. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Advertisement, June 24, 1960
  30. American Press Institute, City Editors Seminar, Jan.-Feb. 1965
  31. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 14 Historic Pages, 1969 (oversize in map drawer)
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32. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "Nixon Fires Cox, Ruckelshaus; Atty. Gen. Richardson Resigns," edited by Pepper, Oct. 21, 1973
  33. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Richard Dudman's "Dateline: Vietnam," 1977
  34. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "Ideals In Transition: Tomorrow's America," March 25, 1979
  35. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "Progress And Reform: The First Hundred Years," March 25, 1979
  36. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Reader's Advocate Column, "The Janet Cooke Hoax: Could It Happen Here?," April 26, 1981
  37. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, "An Old Soldier's Stories," Reunion of Douglas MacArthur's public relations staff, Nov. 23, 1985
  38. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Original Weatherbird Sketch and Typographic Plate, nd.
  39. Sigma Delta Chi, Appearance by Jeffrey Gluck, Correspondence and Articles, Sept. 1984-Sept. 1985
  40. Outline for Talk At Public Relations Seminar, 1985

41. Margolin, Abraham E., Story and Research, Washington University Law Magazine, 1986
42. McRoberts, Robert H., Story and Research, Washington University Law Magazine, 1986
43. "Active Retirement Is The Spice of Life," Interview with Selwyn Pepper, The Second Fifty Years, Sept. 1986

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