



Walker Gibson Papers

1936-1993

3 boxes (2.5 linear ft.)

Call no.: FS 062bd

Collection overview

Walker Gibson, a professor of English at the University from 1967 to 1987, was a passionate teacher of writing and rhetoric and author of humorous verse. Gibson was born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1919 but was raised in Albany, New York. He earned his B.A. from Yale in 1940 and began graduate work at Harvard, however, his studies were interrupted by World War II, where he served in the U.S. Army Air Corps. After the War, Gibson earned his M.A. from the University of Iowa, where he was a research assistant for the Iowa Writers Workshop. For the next twenty years, Gibson taught English and writing at Amherst College and published prose and his signature humorous verse in the *New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, *Harpers*, and the *New York Times Magazine*. Gibson also published several books, including collections of verse, as well as prose works on writing, teaching composition, and literary criticism. Gibson died at the age of 90 in February, 2009.

The Walker Gibson Papers document the writer and teacher's career through published and unpublished early writings during his years at Yale, binders including his published writings from the 1950s, correspondence with Theodore Baird, his supervisor at Amherst College, and lecture notes from his University writing and English classes. Completing the collection are three folders of miscellaneous correspondence and a folder of Gibson's unpublished manuscripts from the late seventies and early eighties.

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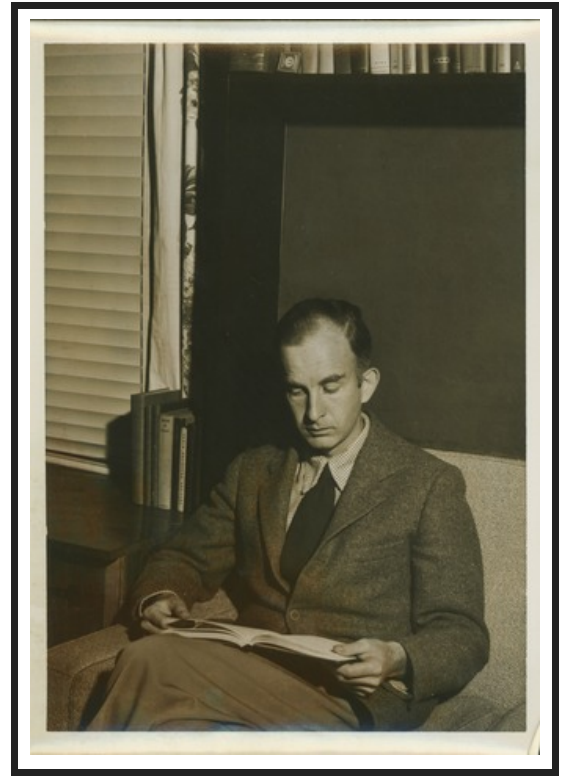
Background on Walker Gibson

A professor of English at the University of Massachusetts Amherst from 1967 to 1987, Walker Gibson was a passionate teacher of writing and rhetoric and author of humorous verse. Born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1919, but raised in Albany, N.Y., Gibson earned his BA from Yale in 1940 and began graduate work at Harvard before his studies were interrupted by World War II. After service in the U.S. Army Air Corps, he earned to academia to earn an MA from the University of Iowa, where held a research assistantship in the renowned Iowa Writers Workshop.

For the next twenty years, Gibson taught English and writing at Amherst College, teaching the freshman course in English and lecturing on the side at the Yale Summer Music School from 1948 to 1956. He left

Amherst for a position as director of freshman composition at New York University, becoming well known for his work on teaching composition and prose style. As a writer himself, his prose and signature humorous verse appeared in publications such as the *New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, *Harpers*, and the *New York Times Magazine*, and he wrote notable monographs on prose writing, including *Seeing and writing* (1959) AND *Tough, Sweet, and Stuff*: *An Essay on Modern American Prose Styles* (1966).

After taking a Guggenheim fellowship in 1963, Gibson accepted a position at UMass Amherst in 1967 as Professor of English and Director of Freshman English, later becoming Director of the Rhetoric Program (1970-1972) and Director of Undergraduate Studies in English (1974-1976). An energetic colleague, he ran numerous summer institutes for teachers of English during his time at UMass, taught at the Bread Loaf School in 1976 and 1977, and was President of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1973. He is credited with starting the University's doctoral program in composition and rhetorical studies in 1970.



W. Walker Gibson, 1955

Gibson was awarded the Chancellor's Medal at UMass Amherst in 1977, and after his retirement ten years later, the Department of English established an annual lecture in his honor along with the Walker Gibson Prize, awarded to the graduate student with the best essay on composition and rhetoric. Gibson died at the age of 90 in February 2009.

Scope of collection

The Gibson papers document a productive career in teaching English composition, spanning the years from Walker Gibson's graduate study at Yale through his time at Amherst College and eventually two decades at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The collection includes selected publications from the 1950s, correspondence with Theodore Baird (Walker's supervisor at Amherst College), and lecture notes from his University writing and English classes, along with material from his presidency of the National Council of Teachers of English.

The Gibson collection also includes a transcript of an interview with Gibson by Margret Stain, three folders of miscellaneous correspondence, and a handful of unpublished manuscripts from the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Inventory

inventory

Baird, Theodore: Transcripts of interviews on Theodore Baird	ca.1992	Box 1: 40
Biographical info on Gibson, Walker	1975-1990	Box 1: 1
Correspondence	1946-1989	
Baird, Theodore (Amherst College)	1946-1957	Box 1: 38
Baird, Theodore (Amherst College)	1949-1993	Box 1: 39
Correspondence	1960s	Box 1: 2
Correspondence	1970s	Box 1: 3
Correspondence	1980s	Box 1: 4
Interview: A Nest of Singing Rhetorical Birds	ca.1975	Box 1: 9
Modern Literature: British and American Lectures and Notes: Part 1	ca.1963	Box 1: 10
Modern Literature: British and American Lectures and Notes: Part 2	ca.1963	Box 1: 11
Modern Literature: British and American Lectures and Notes: Part 3	ca.1963	Box 1: 12
Modern Literature: British and American Lectures and Notes: Part 4	ca.1963	Box 1: 13
National Council of Teachers of English	1972-1976	Box 1: 21
National Council of Teachers of English: Doublespeak	1974-1991	Box 1: 22
National Council of Teachers of English: Doublespeak	1971-1976	Box 1: 23
National Endowment for the Humanities	1973-1975	Box 1: 24
National Endowment for the Humanities Seminar of UMass 1976-1977 Final Report	1976-1977	Box 1: 25
New York University	1957-1967	Box 1: 26
New York University: A few experiences	ca.1965	Box 1: 27
New York University Materials on A41,00001 Composition	1965-1966	Box 1: 28
Poetry	1943-1957	
Poems	1943	Box 1: 7
Poems Reviews, etc., Amherst College Period	1946-1957	Box 2:
Poems in Magazines	1956-1957	Box 3:
War Poems	1940s	Box 3:
War Poems	1943-1946	Box 3:
War Poems	1950-1956	Box 3: 1
Reviews: Tough Sweet and Stuffy	1965-1980	Box 1: 31
Reviews: Persona	1969	Box 1: 32
Reviews: Reckless Spenders Library of Congress reading	ca.1950-1960	Box 1: 33
Reviews: Tough Sweet and Stuffy Computers	1972	Box 1: 34
School: Records	1936-1940	Box 1: 35
School: Yearbook	1936	Box 1: 36
Television	1962-1963	Box 1: 37
University of Massachusetts	ca.1967-1977	Box 1: 41
University of Massachusetts Annual Faculty Reports 1967- 1987	1967-1987	Box 2: 1
Writings	1940-1993	
The Basic Debate	1976-1977	Box 1: 14
College writings	1940	Box 2: 2
Euphemism	1974	Box 2: 3
The Gaudy Atlas	1956	Box 1: 5
The Man Who Bought Europe	1956	Box 1: 6
Notes on Two Grandparents	1993	Box 1: 15
Oh me Alone: A letter to Susan from her Father	1977	Box 1: 16
Poetry, a magazine of verse	1943	Box 2: 4
Reading and Writing for the New Student, 0-85	ca.1977	Box 1: 29
Reading and Writing for the New Student, 86-197	ca.1977	Box 1: 30
Such Quandaries 0-93	1982	Box 1: 17
Such Quandaries 94-186	1982	Box 1: 18

Such Quandaries	1981-1982	Box 1: 19
Twenty College Courses	1993	Box 1: 20
White Chart	ca.1947	Box 1: 8
Writings on Writing	1950-1978	Box 2: 5
Magna Tape	ca.1965	Box 2:

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Walker Gibson, 1994.

Processing Information

Encoded by Daniel Cronin, April 2017.

Language:

English

Copyright and Use (More information)

Cite as: Walker Gibson Papers (FS 062). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

- English language--Study and teaching
- National Council of Teachers of English
- University of Massachusetts Amherst--Faculty
- University of Massachusetts Amherst. Department of English

Contributors

- Gibson, W. Walker. **[main entry]**
- Baird, Theodore, 1901-

Genres and formats

- Poetry

Link to similar SCUA collections

Literature and language

UMass (1947-)

UMass faculty