

- [Visit](#)
- [Apply](#)
- [Give](#)
- [Search UMass.edu](#)

# Jonathan von Ranson Papers

1910-2023  
9 boxes (5.42 linear feet)  
Call no.: MS 1219

- [About SCUA](#)
  - [SCUA home](#)
  - [Credo digital](#)
- [Scope](#)
- [Inventory](#)
- [Admin info](#)
- [Download](#)
  - [xml version](#)
  - [print version \(pdf\)](#)



Read collection overview

## Background on Jonathan von Ranson

In 1978, after years of working in the fast paced world of journalism, writing for Life Magazine and later serving as editor and publisher of several New England newspapers, Jonathan von Ranson was burnt out. In the summer of that year, after divorcing his wife Linnea and selling his newspaper business, von Ranson moved from Newington, Connecticut to a property in Wendell, Massachusetts. It was here, two miles off a maintained state forest road, that he erected a tent and began constructing a stone house.

To von Ranson, the quiet serenity of rural Massachusetts offered refuge from the hustle and bustle of his previous life. An advocate of subsistence living, he and his second wife Susan fed and sheltered themselves in the home they built together. Von Ranson established himself as a local journalist by writing for the Wendell Post, a humble town newspaper known for its distinctive local perspective. He also contributed to local publications like the Greenfield Recorder, usually penning op-eds about environmental issues both local and global. A passionate craftsman, his writing in other publications focused on sustainable home-building. Von Ranson's personal writings, particularly those he refers to as his "unintelligible nighttime musings," reveal a sensitive and introspective man with a spiritual connection to the land he cultivated.

Von Ranson held various positions in Wendell town government, taught fourth graders homesteading skills, and held workshops ranging from writing to masonry, becoming a pillar of the community in his small rural town. He expressed his environmental, political and social convictions in ways large and small, whether it was reusing paper by typing manuscripts on the back of fliers, or refusing to pay taxes in protest of military spending.

## Scope of collection

The Jonathan von Ranson papers document von Ranson's time as a journalist, simple living advocate/homesteader, and Wendell/Franklin County activist and community leader. This is reflected through clippings of many of von Ranson's articles for Maine, Connecticut and Franklin county newspapers, meeting agendas and correspondence from his various positions in Wendell town government, and schematics for his first stone house built in 1978/1979 and his simple living apartment completed in 2015. The collection also includes confessional hand-written manuscripts, fliers for Wendell community events, von Ranson's Peace Corp application which reveals a breadth of biographical information, and even self-authored root cellaring guides. Other material reveals his involvement in a myriad of social and political groups dealing with environmentalism, the feminist men's movement, rural development, policing, and much more.

# Inventory

1910-2023

Barn social flier

ca.2015

Box 1: 1

Basic attendance clinical skills course: Readings, notes

1997

Box 1: 2

Bill Ambler memorial service: Lists of attendees, notes, correspondence

1996

Box 1: 3

Campaign against Route 2 expansion: Correspondence, clippings, diagrams

1998-1999

Box 1: 4

Chicago trip boarding passes

2002 Feb.

Box 1: 5

Chimney repair at Good Life Center: Correspondence, notes, clippings

2001-2002

Box 1: 6

Circle counseling guides

ca.2002

Box 1: 7

Clippings

1969-1979

Box 1: 8

Clippings

1980-2011

Box 1: 9

Clippings

1980-2011

Box 1: 10

Clippings

1980-2011

Box 1: 11

Community Policing Advisory Committee certificate

2001 Jun. 28

Box 1: 12

Composting records: Spreadsheets, invoices, notes

2011-2014

Box 1: 13

Copied readings for "Writing on Earth" workshop

2001

Box 1: 14

Cordwood sale fliers

ca.2000

Box 1: 15

Cuba trip: Correspondence re: donations

2002 Mar.

Box 1: 16

Cuba trip: Havana Club rum label

2002 May

Box 1: 17

Cuba trip: Letter from White House

2005 Nov. 15

Box 1: 18

Divorce: Correspondence

1978-1995

Box 1: 19

Early drafts: Annotated drafts, manuscripts

1991-1999

Box 2: 1

Excercises for writing workshops: Guides, clippings, photo

ca.1999

Box 2: 2

Farm/homestead: Agriculture guides, livestock guides, clippings, notes

1993-2000

Box 2: 3  
Fathers Day card  
ca.1980  
Box 2: 4  
Five Rivers Council: Notes, fliers, clippings, meeting agendas, correspondence  
2006-2007  
Box 2: 5  
Five Rivers Council: Notes, fliers, clippings, meeting agendas, correspondence  
2005-2006  
Box 2: 6  
Franklin County Progressive Newsletter  
1991-1996  
Box 3: 1  
Franklin Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board records  
2013-2015  
Box 3: 2  
Friends of the Wendell Meeting House newsletter  
2023 Dec.  
Box 3: 3  
James O'Keefe MA State Treasurer campaign materials, notes  
2002  
Box 3: 4  
Local food and energy: Correspondence, news clippings  
2010-2012  
Box 3: 5  
Lyrics, sheet music  
ca.1980-2010  
Box 3: 6  
Masonry guides, product brochures, schematics  
1951-1984  
Box 3: 7  
Masonry stove construction: Drawings, clippings, resources  
1998  
Box 3: 8  
Mens group: Clippings  
1990-1991  
Box 3: 9  
Mens group: Membership lists, invoices, correspondence, notes  
1990-1991  
Box 4: 1  
NOFA membership expansion: Correspondence, newsletters, notes  
2003  
Box 4: 2  
NOFA Summer Conference workshop presentations: Guides, forms, newsletters  
2000  
Box 4: 3  
Outline of memoir by Charles Smith  
2020-2021  
Box 4: 4  
Parents divorce/post-death giving: Writings, clippings, legal documents  
1946-1983  
Box 4: 5  
Peace Corps: Application, correspondence, assignment pamphlets  
1995-1996  
Box 4: 6  
Peace Corps: Critical readings  
1990-1992  
Box 4: 7  
Poems for "Writing on Earth" workshop  
ca.2001  
Box 4: 8  
Root cellaring guide, photos  
ca.2009  
Box 4: 9  
Route 2 expansion op-eds: Drafts, correspondence  
2001  
Box 4: 10  
Salmon run: Clippings, readings

1910-1990  
Box 4: 11  
Salmon run: Correspondence, pamphlets  
1988  
Box 4: 12  
Sanctuary Magazine, November 1984  
1984 Nov.  
Box 4: 13  
Secondary dwellings: Permit applications, notes, photos, correspondence  
2005-2009  
Box 5: 1  
Simple living apartment: Barnraising day, photos, lists of volunteers  
2008  
Box 5: 2  
Simple living apartment: Board findings and deed restrictions  
2009-2017  
Box 5: 3  
Simple living apartment: Board of health applications, correspondence, notes  
2009-2016  
Box 5: 4  
Simple living apartment: Clippings  
2008-2013  
Box 5: 5  
Simple living apartment: Correspondence  
2008-2014  
Box 5: 6  
Simple living apartment: Correspondence  
1997-2009  
Box 5: 7  
Simple living apartment: Invoices construction plans, notes  
2009-2014  
Box 5: 8  
Simple living apartment: Permit applications  
2010-2014  
Box 5: 9  
Simple living apartment: Petitions to Wendell town officials  
2009  
Box 5: 10  
Simple living apartment: Schematics diagrams, photos  
2014-2015  
Box 5: 11  
Simple living apartment: Well and septic plans, notes  
2010-2014  
Box 5: 12  
Stone Oak House construction: Invoices, correspondence, notes  
1980-1990  
Box 6: 1  
Stone Oak House property tax disputes: Correspondence. notes, spreadsheets, readings  
1990-1998  
Box 6: 2  
Stone Oak house sale: Correspondence, notes, schematics, contracts  
1997-1998  
Box 6: 3  
Stone Oak house sale: Correspondence, notes, schematics, contracts  
1997-1998  
Box 6: 4  
Stone Oak house sale: Correspondence, notes, schematics, contracts  
1997-1998  
Box 6: 5  
Susan's speech folder: Sheet music, lyrics  
ca.2013  
Box 6: 6  
Systems for a non-electric home workshop pamphlets  
2015 Dec.  
Box 6: 7  
Tax refusal: Clippings, correspondence, fliers  
1982-2004  
Box 6: 8

The Peoples Voice of Franklin County Newsletter: Correspondence, mailing lists, artwork  
1996  
Box 7: 1  
Town Crier acquisition agreement  
1972  
Box 7: 2  
Town Moderator: Agendas, budgets, correspondence, guides  
1996-1999  
Box 7: 3  
Unintelligible nighttime musings: Notes, handwritten manuscripts  
1989-1990  
Box 7: 4  
Unpublished "Gaia" project: Drafts, clippings, notes  
2011  
Box 7: 5  
Valley Community Land Trust: Correspondence, pamphlets, notes  
1989-1991  
Box 7: 6  
Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant protests: Lyrics, non-violent protest guides, clippings  
2012  
Box 7: 7  
Victoria Seus epitaph  
2001 Jul.  
Box 7: 8  
VMag volume 30  
2000 May  
Box 7: 9  
Wendell cabin: Drawings, notes, correspondence, product brochures, clippings  
1972-1978  
Box 7: 10  
Wendell Chorus: Programs, sheet music, lyrics, CD  
2015  
Box 7: 11  
Wendell community healing post-9/11: Fliers, correspondence, clippings  
2001  
Box 7: 12  
Wendell Community Policing Committee: Agendas, notes, correspondence, clippings  
1988-2000  
Box 7: 13  
Wendell Community Policing Steering Committee: Correspondence, clippings, evaluations  
2002-2003  
Box 8: 1  
Wendell Community Works: Fliers, readings, correspondence, clippings  
1991  
Box 8: 2  
Wendell emergency planning documents  
2009-2014  
Box 8: 3  
Wendell Energy Taskforce: Agendas, meeting minutes, clippings  
2009-2010  
Box 8: 4  
Wendell Energy Taskforce: Mission statement annotated drafts  
ca.2009  
Box 8: 5  
Wendell Energy Taskforce: Sustainability guides, notes, clippings  
2008-2009  
Box 8: 6  
Wendell Harvest Festival: Artwork, correspondence, clippings, notes  
1993  
Box 8: 7  
Wendell Simple Living Committee: Agendas, correspondence, clippings, notes  
2010-2011  
Box 8: 8  
Wendell town election records  
2010  
Box 8: 9  
Wendell Town Wall construction project: Correspondence, clippings, contract  
1994

Box 8: 10  
Wendell Towne Forum newspaper: Early correspondence, first issue, notes  
2004  
Box 8: 11  
Works in progress: Fiction/non-fiction manuscripts, correspondence  
1999-2015  
Box 9: 1  
Workshops: Grant applications, guides  
2013 Jan.  
Box 9: 2  
Writing starts and ideas: Annotated drafts, notes, manuscripts  
1994-2018  
Box 9: 3  
Writing workshops: Handouts, lists of members, notes, readings  
1999-2001  
Box 9: 4  
Zookalike: Clipping  
2010  
Box 9: 5

## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Gift of Jonathan von Ranson, 2024.

### Processing Information

Processed by Dan McGlynn, August 2024.

### Language:

English

### Copyright and Use ([More information](#))

Cite as: Jonathan von Ranson Papers (MS 1219). Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Research Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

## Search terms

### Subjects

- Activism--Franklin County (Mass.)
- Environmentalism
- Journalism, Regional
- Sustainable living--Franklin County (Mass.)
- Wendell (Mass : Town)

### Contributors

- von Ranson, Jonathan [main entry]
- 

### Genres and formats

- Clippings (information artifacts)
- Correspondence
- Fliers (printed matter)
- Manuscripts (documents)

Special Collections & University Archives

[University Libraries](#) : [UMass Amherst](#)

154 Hicks Way : Amherst, Mass. 01003-9275

Ph. 413-545-7282 (545-SCUA)

[f](#) [@](#) [t](#) [✉](#) [Email an archivist](#)

2020 [Site Policies](#) [Accessibility](#)