

**The New York Public Library
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

**Joel Sayre Papers
1918-1979**

**John D. Stinson
July 2004**

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Summary

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| Main entry: | Sayre, Joel, 1900- |
| Title: | Joel Sayre Papers, 1918-1979 |
| Size: | 3.2 linear feet (11 boxes) |
| Source: | Donated by the Estate of Nora Sayre, January 2003 |
| Abstract: | The papers reflect the life and career of Joel G. Sayre (1900-1979), journalist, author, screenwriter and foreign correspondent. |
| Access: | Apply in the Special Collections Office for admission to the Manuscripts and Archives Division. |
| Preferred citation: | Joel Sayre Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. |
| Special formats | Diaries, Scrapbooks, Photograph albums, Photographs. |

Provenance note

The Joel Sayre Papers were donated to The New York Public Library as part of the Nora Sayre Papers.

Related materials note

Nora Sayre Papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Biographical note

Joel G. Sayre was a journalist, author, screenwriter and foreign correspondent. He was born December 13, 1900 in Marion, Indiana, the son of Joel Grover Sayre, a businessman, and Nora Clemens Sayre, a photographer and interior decorator. He grew up in Columbus, Ohio, attended the Columbus Academy there, and a private school in Cleveland. One of his childhood friends became the notable author James Thurber. At age sixteen, with the encouragement of the Governor of Ohio, James M. Cox, who took a personal interest in him, he attempted to enlist in the American army, but was refused because of his age. Fortified with a false certificate of birth, he succeeded in joining the Canadian Army and was sent to Siberia with its Expeditionary Force.

After the war he took a degree in literature at Oxford University in England, and studied medicine, briefly, at Heidelberg. He began his career in journalism as police reporter for the *Columbus Journal*, a hometown newspaper which did not provide adequate scope for his burgeoning talent. After a brief stint as sports columnist for *The Boston Herald*, he became a reporter for the *New York World* and the *New York Herald Tribune* where he specialized in crime reporting covering closely the career of the notorious criminal, John Thomas "Legs" Diamond. During this period he wrote numerous articles for *The New Yorker* and published two successful satirical novels, *Hizzoner the Mayor*, and *Rackety Rax*, which dealt with corruption in politics and in college football. During the mid-thirties he was called to Hollywood as screenwriter on several films including *Annie Oakley*, *Gunga Din*, and *The Road to Glory*. On the latter film he collaborated with the novelist, William Faulkner.

During World War II, as foreign correspondent for *The New Yorker*, he covered the Persian Gulf Command which supplied the Soviet Union with munitions and other materials through Iran. As correspondent he was present at the historic Teheran Conference of 1943. His *New Yorker* articles were later reproduced in his book *Persian Gulf Command; Some Marvels on the Road to Kazvin*. In 1945 the *New Yorker* sent him to Germany to cover the last phases of the war in Europe. His book, *The House Without a Roof*, about a Jewish family in the Third Reich, resulted from his experiences there.

In the 1950s Sayre continued to write for *The New Yorker* and other magazines. In mid-decade he left *Time* magazine where he had briefly been a staff writer, to return to screenwriting and to his peregrinations abroad, living for a time in London. In 1960 he returned to America to take a teaching position at the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1971 he retired from teaching and settled in Virginia. The year before his death on September 9, 1979, he moved to Taftsville, Vermont to be with his life-long friend, Jeanette Lowe. His wife, Gertrude, died in 1960. At the time of his death he was survived by his daughter, Nora Sayre, and a niece, Mary Sayre Haverstock, of Arlington, Virginia.

Scope and content note

The papers include miscellaneous correspondence received; letters sent to his daughter, the author and cultural historian, Nora Sayre, and to his wife, Gertrude Lynahan Sayre; typescript and holograph drafts of his novels, plays, and articles; clippings of his published newspaper articles and sports columns; diary notes; reminiscences of his childhood in Columbus, Ohio and of life as newspaper reporter in New York City and as Hollywood screenwriter; and photographs of himself, his wife, daughter and friends.

Arrangement note

The Joel Sayre Papers are organized in the following series:

- Series I. Correspondence
- Series II. Writings
- Series III. Diary Notes and Reminiscences
- Series IV. Personal Miscellaneous Papers
- Series V. Photographs

Series descriptions and container list

Series I. Correspondence

The correspondence is arranged into three subseries: A. Letters Received; B. Correspondence Sent; and C. Gertrude Lynahan Sayre

A. Letters Received

The letters received are arranged chronologically in the period 1918-1975. Included is a letter from James M. Cox, Governor of Ohio, addressed to William Ireland of the *Columbus Post Despatch*, in which he gives instructions for getting Joel Sayre, who was under age, inducted into the U.S. Army during World War I; and a letter in which he introduces Sayre to the Chancellor of Oxford University. There are also several letters from Norman Sommerville of the Empire Club of Canada introducing Joel Sayre to authorities in England. Included also is a letter from his father; two cables from his mother; letters from his newspaper reporter friends, Bill Cunningham of *The Boston Post*, and S. Walker of the *New York Herald Tribune*; and cables from his literary agent, John McCormick in Los Angeles regarding screenplay assignments.

| <u>Box</u> | <u>Fol</u> | |
|------------|------------|--|
| 1 | 1 | 1918-1975; n.d. Finis Farr, 1972-1979; n.d. The letters from the author, Finis Farr, consist of some forty lengthy typewritten letters containing humorous commentary on current social and political events, literary matters, anecdotal reminiscences of newspapers, newspaper reporters and columnists in the 1940s; and Hollywood stars and the motion picture industry. |
| | 2 | 1972-1976 |
| | 3 | 1977-1979 and undated |

B. Letters Sent

The bulk of the letters sent by Joel Sayre consist of some ninety-two lengthy, holograph and typewritten letters sent to his daughter, Nora Sayre, written from various places including Berlin, Germany in 1945, while he was a war correspondent, and from Los Angeles, during his employment as screenwriter in the motion picture industry. The letters, which are exceptionally rich in the description of his social and literary life and activities, were written mostly while Nora was a student in private school, while she was studying at Radcliffe College, and while she was abroad in Europe and England during the late 1950s.

There are also some eighteen, lengthy typewritten letters and cables sent (1938) by Joel Sayre to his wife, Gertrude Lynahan Sayre, describing in detail his life and activities as a screenwriter in the motion picture industry. One letter (4/7/38) alludes to meetings of the Screenwriter's Guild and to its political composition.

There are also letters sent (1926-69) to his friend and former lover, Jeanette Lowe, relating to his screenwriting assignments for Warner Brothers, RKO, MGM and Twentieth Century Fox; two letters to her written from Marburg, Germany while he was studying medicine; two letters (1949) to Nunnally Johnson; and three letters (1943-44) to his mother.

| | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | 4 | Letters to Nunnally Johnson, 1949 |
| | 5 | Letters to Jeanette Lowe, 1926-1969 |
| | | Letters to Nora Sayre, 1938-1952 |
| | 6 | 1938-1952 |
| | 7 | 1954-1959 |
| | 8 | 1960-1975 & undated |

| <u>Box</u> | <u>Folder</u> | |
|------------|---------------|--|
| | 9 | Letters to Gertrude Lynahan Sayre, 1938 |
| | 10 | Letters to his mother, 1943-1944 |
| 1 | 11 | C. Gertrude Lynahan Sayre, 1931-1958 One folder of correspondence received by Gertrude Lynahan Sayre, wife of Joel G. Sayre, including three letters to her from Nunnally Johnson; and one letter from H. L. Mencken dated 6/6/38. |

Series II. Writings

The writings are arranged into four subseries: A. Fiction; B. Plays; C. Articles; and D. Clippings of Published Writings by Joel G. Sayre

A. Fiction

This subseries consists of a file of typescript drafts of short stories, sketches, and novels arranged alphabetically by title. Included is a fragment of an early draft with holograph emendations of *Hizzoner the Mayor*; a draft with corrections and emendations of *Rackety Rax*; drafts of *The Red Tiger* and *The Tie That Binds* (short novels); and multiple drafts of a story, "The Unquenchable Mostyn", based upon Sayre's experiences while filming on location.

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| 2 | 1 | Added Attraction |
| | 2 | Be Prepared |
| | 3 | The Best Policy |
| | 4 | Compulsion Neurosis |
| | 5 | Get Him! Get Him! |
| | 6 | Hizzoner the Mayor (fragment of early draft) |
| | 7-9 | Rackety Rax (early drafts) |
| | 10 | The Red Tiger |
| | 11 | The Squirrel |
| | 12 | The Tie That Binds (rough draft) |
| | 13 | The Unquenchable Mostyn |
| 3 | 1 | Untitled draft of a novel [early version of Hizzoner the Mayor?] |
| | 2 | Untitled and incomplete script |
| | 3 | Fragments of scripts |

B. Plays

This subseries consists of multiple typescript drafts, bearing various titles and with copious holograph emendations, of a play, a police comedy, written by Joel Sayre and Edward McNamara. The draft bearing the title, *Police! Police!*, is accompanied by a letter dated February 26, 1938 from the producer, George Abbott, to Edward McNamara in which Abbott agrees to produce the play provided that it is rewritten by Robert Sherwood. Other drafts of the play are entitled *The Captain's Always Joking*, *Hi, Braves*, and *Over on the Jersey Side*. Included also is a typescript draft dated October 5, 1936 of a play by Joel Sayre entitled *She Sang for Her Supper*, and an outline and plot summaries for a play entitled *We're Only Human*.

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| 4 | 1 | The Captain's Always Joking |
| | 2 | Hi, Braves |
| | 3-6 | Over on the Jersey Side |
| 5 | 1-4 | Police! Police! |
| | 5 | She Sang for Her Supper, 1936 Oct 5 (2nd draft continuity. Incomplete.) |
| | 6 | We're Only Human |

C. Articles

This subseries consists of typescripts of articles by Joel Sayre arranged alphabetically by title; and a file of scripts of his book reviews arranged by author of the book reviewed. Included are a few fragments of scripts. The article entitled "You're a Better Man Than I Am," contains Sayre's reminiscences as screenwriter for the motion picture film *Gunga Din*.

| <u>Box</u> | <u>Folder</u> | |
|------------|---------------|---|
| 6 | 1 | All the Tea in China |
| | 2 | Coote |
| | 3 | Crickett |
| | 4 | Edmund Wilson / A Reminiscence |
| | 5 | Footnote on W[alt] W[hitman] |
| | 6 | Fors, Doubtfuls, and Outs |
| | 7 | The Guest Word |
| | 8 | A Hex on the House |
| | 9 | Hips Ahoy! |
| | 10 | Hommage to Vladivostok |
| | 11 | James Thurber / A Reminiscence |
| | 12 | John O'Hara, Earlier On |
| | 13 | La maison sans toit. French translation of The House Without a Roof |
| | 14 | Memorable Experience |
| | 15 | Newspaper Town, 1949 |
| | 16 | Note [for his book Hizzoner the Mayor?] |
| | 17 | Notes on Football Musical |
| | 18 | Small Sherry Party |
| | 19 | Speakeasies |
| | 20 | Speaking Volumes - Father Knew Walt Whitman |
| | 21 | You're Better Than I Am |
| | 22 | Fragments |
| | 23 | Book Reviews by Sayre |

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D. Scrapbooks and Clippings

This subseries contains three scrapbooks of clippings of Sayre's published writings:

-a scrapbook of clippings of his daily sports column entitled, "High-Ups and Low-Downs", published in *The Boston Herald*, July 10 - September 2, 1933; a clipping of an article by him in the *New Outlook* (Aug. 1933); and a few clips of columns by Westbrook Pegler. Included are loose clippings of Sayre's articles in the *New York Herald Tribune* and personal publicity clippings.

- a scrapbook of clippings (1932-76) of reviews of Sayre's books, *Rackety Rax* (including reviews of its filmed version) and *Hizzoner the Mayor*, personal publicity; clippings of his book reviews; his articles published in *The American Spectator* and in *The New Yorker*, and clippings regarding his work as Hollywood screenwriter and his film *Gunga Din*.

-a scrapbook (unbound) of clippings (1928-1931) of articles by Sayre published mainly in the *New York Herald Tribune* and in the *New York Telegram*.

Series III. Diary Notes and Reminiscences

This series consists of two pocket diaries (1921; 1924, 1926); a pocket memorandum book (1921); an holograph fragment of diary notes; a typed transcript copy of his personal reminiscences; and a transcript copy of an interview with Joel Sayre regarding James Thurber conducted by Lewis G. Branscomb, Dec. 16, 1975.

The pocket diary for 1921 which was kept at Exeter College, Oxford University, England, contains entries describing his social life and activities for the month of January 1921. The pocket diary for 1924, 1926 contains personal expenses in German marks for the months of May and June of 1924; and entries dated January, 1926 made when he was a student of medicine in Germany. These latter entries contain self criticisms and admonishments regarding his failure to apply himself to his studies; and a list of courses required for the degree of medicine. (The entries are made in a printed calendar diary for the year 1924). The pocket memorandum book which is dated September 1, 1921 contains a few miscellaneous notes. The holograph fragment of diary notes (4 pages) which is dated November 6 [1934?] relates mainly to his resolve to complete a literary manuscript in progress.

The typed transcript copy of Sayre's reminiscences was made from audiotapes recorded October 30-31, December 18-19, and 28, 1973; and February 20-21, 1974. The reminiscences include descriptions of his childhood in Columbus, Ohio, the nature of the town, its neighborhoods and entertainments (vaudeville shows, local theatre and movies); the schools he attended in Columbus and in Cleveland, Ohio; his service with the Siberian Expeditionary Force; his student life and activities at Oxford University in England; his work as police reporter for the *Ohio State Journal* in Cleveland where he received many anecdotal accounts of the life of the author, O. Henry; his activities as cub reporter for the *New York World* and the *New York Herald Tribune* including numerous colorful accounts of the mores of newspapermen and their favorite speakeasies; his stint as columnist for the *Philadelphia Ledger*; his work in Hollywood as screenwriter for the films *Annie Oakley* and *Gunga Din*; his friendship with fellow screenwriter, William Faulkner, who collaborated with him on the film *Road to Glory*; his relationship with MGM and his association with the Screenwriter's Guild. The reminiscences contain many references to literary figures, motion picture personalities, and others whom he encountered, or who influenced him. Included also are passages relating to his experiences as correspondent with the Persian Gulf Command, an anecdotal account of the Teheran Conference, and his activities in Germany as a correspondent for *The New Yorker* at the end of World War II.

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| 8 | 1 | Pocket diaries, 1921, 1926 |
| | 1 | Diary fragment, c. 1934 Nov 6 |
| | 2-4 | Reminiscences (Typed transcript from audiotapes.) |
| | 5 | Transcript of interview with Joel Sayre re James Thurber conducted by Lewis C. Branscomb, Dec 16 1975 |

Series IV. Personal Miscellaneous Papers

This series consists of a file of miscellaneous papers in topical arrangement including yearbooks of the Columbus Academy which contain references to Joel Sayre's student activities; his death certificate; copyright assignments to Sayre for stories published in *The American Mercury*; memorabilia; obituaries; and other miscellany.

| <u>Box</u> | <u>Folder</u> | |
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| 9 | 1 | Columbus Academy |
| | 2 | Copyright assignments |
| | 3 | Death certificate |
| | 4 | Memorabilia |
| | 5 | Miscellany |
| | 6 | Obituaries |
| | 7 | Syllabus for course in journalism |

Series V. Photographs

This series contains photographic portraits of Joel Sayre as adult; childhood photos of Joel with his mother; group photos of Joel with classmates; albums (unbound) of photos of Joel and Gertrude Sayre, family and friends; and miscellaneous Sayre family photos. Included are oversized photographic portraits of Joel Sayre with classmates in baseball and basketball uniforms; and oversized portraits of Gertrude Sayre, and of Nora Sayre as child.

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| 10 | 1 | Photographic portraits of Joel Sayre |
| | 2 | Childhood photos of Joel Sayre |
| | 3 | Joel Sayre and classmates |
| | 4 | Joel and Gertrude Sayre and friends |
| | 5-7 | Joel Sayre, family and friends |
| | 8 | Miscellaneous Sayre family |
| 11 | | Photograph album pages and oversized photographs |