

**Sylvia Wright (1911-)
Papers, 1934-1980, Bulk 1944-1947
MSA 431-433**

Introduction

This collection consists of letters, reports, newspaper clippings, and notes of Sylvia Allen Beckman (Mrs. Norman B.) Wright (1911-) documenting her activities as representative to the Vermont General Assembly from the town of Rupert (1945-1947). Also included are some personal papers. The collection was donated by the creator in 2006 (ms. acc. no. 2006.11) and is housed in three archival flip-top boxes which occupy 1.25 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Sketch

Sylvia Allen Beckman was born on May 11, 1911, in Naperville, Illinois, the youngest daughter of Bernard C. and May (Ballou) Beckman. Mr. Beckman, born of German parents, was owner of a roofing manufacturing company. Sylvia's elder sisters, Bernice and Eleanor, were born circa 1903 and 1906 respectively. Sylvia graduated with a bachelor's degree from Wells College in Aurora, New York, in 1933, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa (1951). After attending London School of Economics to study international relations in 1933 and 1934, she returned to the States.

In September 1935 Sylvia Beckman married Norman B. Wright (1901-1971) of Chicago, Illinois, son of Frank G. and Kathryn Wright. Sylvia and Norman Wright settled on a farm in Rupert, Vermont, in June 1940. Norman, an artist and dairy farmer, was a founder of the Southern Vermont Art Center in Manchester, Vermont, for which Sylvia served as clerk. From 1946 to 1947 Mrs. Wright served on Gov. Mortimer Proctor's Art Advisory Committee, assigned to assess the state's art holdings.

To pursue an ardent interest in public education, child welfare and state institutions, Mrs. Wright acted as legislative liaison for the Vermont Congress of Parents and Teachers, the Vermont League of Women Voters, the Vermont Federation of Women's Clubs, and the Vermont Conference of Social Welfare during the period of 1944 to 1947. She also served as regional vice president of the National Council on State Legislation (1945-1946), and as member of the Vermont Joint Legislative Council (1944-1947). Although she served them as lobbyist, Wright continued her relationship with these organizations after her election to the Vermont State House.

In 1944 Sylvia Wright ran for office and was elected on the Republican ticket as Rupert town representative to the Vermont House of Representatives; she was reelected in 1946. Following her election to the General Assembly, Sylvia Wright served on the House Committee on Institutions as its clerk (1945-1946). In 1945 Wright was appointed member of the Public Welfare Survey committee. That year the institutions committee took up legislation to fund construction projects at the Brandon State School and the state hospital at Waterbury. On Sept. 26, 1946, Governor Proctor convened a special

legislative session to work on the pressing issues of the post-war veterans' housing shortage and building funds for state institutions, which fell under the purview of Mrs. Wright's committee.

While serving on the institutions committee, Wright continued to further the interests of her education-related organizations. In 1946 Rep. Wright was appointed by governor-elect Ernest Gibson to serve on an unprecedented pre-inauguration advisory committee to study "education and the normal school." Gibson's inaugural address of 1947 contains the product of this committee's work and provides a useful overview of Rep. Wright's legislative efforts in education (see Folder 431:0; also the committee's report in Folder 432:1). As Chair of the House Committee on Education in 1947, Sylvia Wright was well-positioned to advance Gibson's ambitious platform. During this time, she gave numerous speeches around the state on the topic of legislation for children, with her advocacy organizations providing venues.

In June 1947 Rep. Wright resigned her seat in the General Assembly. She was asked by Gov. Gibson to become a member of the State Board of Education, but declined. Sylvia and Norman Wright were divorced in August of 1947. In 1948 Sylvia Wright moved to the Washington, DC area where her sister Bernice (Mrs. Everett Wilson) was then living. After Sylvia married Robert Warner on August 24, 1950, they took up residence in Bethesda, Maryland. Mr. Warner had been Representative from Dorset to the Vermont legislature for the 1943 and 1947 sessions. He had also served as Vermont's Secretary of Civil and Military Affairs under Governor Wills. While living in Washington, Sylvia Warner worked at the CIA in various capacities from 1949 until at least 1955, and possibly thereafter. She began as an Information and Editorial Specialist and progressed to Intelligence Officer. How long her work there continued is not known. Mrs. Warner was widowed in 1991. She is alive as of this writing and resides in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Scope and Content

The bulk of the collection consists of Sylvia Wright's papers while representing the town of Rupert in the Vermont General Assembly for three legislative sessions, 1945 to 1947, during the administrations of Mortimer Proctor and Ernest Gibson. Papers relating to her political life and her personal life are also included, as well as documentation of her CIA career. The material contains many annotations by the creator of the collection, including a handwritten statement about her Vermont career, found in MSA 432:4. A transcription of this statement is found in MSA 431:0.

The collection is arranged in four series:

I. The first series treats the subject of Mrs. Wright's political career, including her run for office, her political life as legislator in the Republican Party, and her dealings with colleagues. The materials consist primarily of correspondence, news clippings, and official papers. Of particular interest are documents from the Republican primary election in Rupert, Vermont; a resolution introduced by Rep. Wright in the Vermont House to *not*

give women preference in choice of seats in the chamber; and notes on Rupert town used by Wright for the 1945 and 1946 town meetings. A group of newspaper articles characterizing the political scene in Vermont from 1944 to 1947 are found in this series.

II. The second series provides a rich store of documents covering Wright's legislative activities in the Vermont House of Representatives from 1945 to 1947. The materials include notes, reports, correspondence, news articles, and some printed matter, and much background information.

This series documents Mrs. Wright's work on the House Institutions and Educations committees, and on Governor (Mortimer) Proctor's Advisory Art Committee (1945-1946, Leon S. Gay, Chair). Of particular interest is Gov. Proctor's message to the General Assembly in Special Session, and a collection of weekly legislative reports written by Mrs. Wright for the Granville (New York) *Sentinel* newspaper.

Another group contains notes and reports on Wright's education agenda, especially her "Proposed Legislation Program for Children" of 1946, as supported by the VCP&T and the VLOWV. This group contains her correspondence with Dr. Ralph Noble, Commissioner of Education, and with John R. Fisher, Chair of the Vermont State Board of Education.

III. The third series consists of documents relating to the women's and educational advocacy organizations Wright represented before and during her tenure in the legislature. The copious correspondence, position statements, notes, legislative reports, organizational information, texts of speeches, news clippings, and studies illustrate Mrs. Wright's energetic participation in these organizations to promote her education and welfare agendas.

IV. The fourth series contains personal information on Sylvia Wright, including her *curriculum vitae*, her CIA personnel file, and several documents from various stages of her post-Vermont life. Of special interest are Mrs. Wright's Phi Beta Kappa certificate, and a ticket from a White House tea with Mamie Eisenhower.

Related Collections and Materials

A watercolor of the Pavilion Hotel in Montpelier, painted in 1971 by Mrs. Sylvia Wright, may be found in the museum collection (VHS-A 147, gift of the artist, 1972).

1971 Festival of the Arts, Southern Vermont Art Center, Manchester, Vermont, containing information on an exhibition of Norman Wright's paintings and his obituary, may be found in the collection at 708.143 So88 1971.

A number of materials have been separated from the collection including several photographs, broadsides, and printed materials. Of special interest are:

A proclamation of Governor Mortimer G. Proctor for special session of legislature on September 26, 1946, was removed to Small Bside, Proclamations, 1946.

A photograph, black and white, 5" x 7", of Sylvia Wright with Bill Schwarz, Norton Barber, Mortimer Proctor, and Walter Hard singing around a piano, ca.1946, was removed to F-PO-G, Legislature, ca 1946.

"A Republican's Speech: Patriotic and Partisan: Speeches of Hon. Charles A. Plumley of Vermont in the House of Representatives Thursday, September 21, 1944" was removed to catalogued collections.

Inventory

I. Political Career

- MSA 431:1 Papers, 1944-1946, and undated. Included are Rupert Republican primary documents, town checklist, and joint resolution re: seating practices in legislature.
 :2 Correspondence, 1943-1947.
 :3 News articles, 1944-1947 and undated.
 :4 Papers, 1944-1947, on the Vermont political landscape.
 :5 _____, 1945-1946, regarding Rupert Town Meeting.
 :6 _____, 1944 and undated, miscellaneous.

II. Legislative Career

- :7 Papers, 1945-1946, Governor's Advisory Art Committee.
 :8 Correspondence, 1945-1946, Governor's Advisory Art Committee.
 :9 Papers, 1945-1946, House Committee on Institutions.
 :10 News articles, 1944-1946, House Committee on Institutions.
 :11 Papers, 1942-1945, on education transportation.
 MSA 432:1 _____, 1942-1947, on education agenda.
 :2 Correspondence, 1944-1949, on education agenda.
 :3 News articles, 1946-1947, on education agenda.
 :4 _____, 1945-1947, "News from the Vermont Legislature", written by Mrs. Wright for the Granville (New York) *Sentinel*.

III. Related organizations

- :5 Papers, 1944-1946, Vermont Women's Joint Legislative Council.
 :6 _____, 1944-1946, National Council on State Legislation.
 :7 _____, 1944-1947, Vermont League of Women Voters.
 :8 _____, 1945-1947, Vermont Congress of Parents and Teachers.
 MSA 433:1 _____, 1945-1947, Vermont Federation of Women's Clubs.
 :2 _____, 1945-1947, Organized Women Legislators.
 :3 _____, 1945-1947, Vermont Conference on Social Welfare.

IV. Personal information

- :4 _____, 1934-1980.
 :5 _____, 1948-1954, CIA personnel file.

Marge Garfield
May 2007
wrights.doc