



Stepenoff Research Papers (CG0076)

Collection Number: CG0076

Collection Title: Stepenoff Research Papers

Dates: 1895-2012, bulk 1988-2011

Creator: Dr. Bonnie Stepenoff

Abstract: This collection contains Dr. Bonnie Stepenoff's research, most notably on Thad Snow, Fannie Cook, Owen Whitfield, Alfonso "Al" Murphy, labor, conservation, flooding, inequality, and agriculture in Southeast Missouri.

Collection Size: 1 cubic foot
(123 folders, 44 negatives, 41 photos, 1 floppy disc, 3 CD-ROMs)

Language: Collection materials are in English.

Repository: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Restrictions on Access: Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri, Research Center-Cape Girardeau](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at research@shsmo.org. Collections may be viewed at any research center.

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Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Stepenoff Research Papers* (CG0076); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Cape Girardeau [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Cape Girardeau].

Donor Information: The papers were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Dr. Bonnie Stepenoff on April 1, 2025 (Accession No. CGA0071).

Related Materials: Additional materials related to the Stepenoff Research Collection can be found in the following collections:
Thad Snow Papers (CG0027)

Processed by: Processed by Curtis Khanh Anderson, August 2025

Content Note: This collection contains materials that use language that is no longer appropriate or correct, when referring to Black Americans. These materials were created in the Twentieth century, during a period when these terms were used to describe Black Americans both by themselves and white Americans. In the interests of historical integrity, these materials have not been removed from the archival collection and their titles have not been altered.

Biographical Note:

Bonnie Stepenoff: Born in 1949 and a native of rural Pennsylvania, Bonnie received a Ph.D. in history from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1992, having also received a master's degree in Library Science in 1981. She began her career as acquisitions librarians at the State Historical Society of Missouri, followed by several years as a cultural resource preservationist for the Missouri Division of State Parks. From 1993 through 2011, she taught history at Southeast Missouri State University, becoming professor emeritus upon her retirement in 2012. She is the author of six books, more than forty-five articles, and many published poems. Her books include *Working the Mississippi: Two Centuries of Life on the River* (University of Missouri Press, 2015) and *Thad Snow: A Life of Social Reform in the Missouri Bootheel* (University of Missouri Press, 2003). Her articles have appeared in many anthologies and journals, including *Women in Missouri History*, *Labor History*, and *Missouri Conservationist*. She has received the following awards for publications: 2007 Book Award from the Missouri Conference on History, 1991 Bryant Spann Memorial Prize from the Eugene V. Debs Foundation, and the 1991 Best Article award from the *Missouri Historical Review*. In 2019, her poem "Eve" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Thad Snow: Thad Snow was born on November 1, 1881, to Henry and Frances Snow in Greenfield, Indiana. During his childhood, Snow spent time with the famous Indiana poet James Whitcomb Riley. In 1910, the "pioneer urge" took him and his family to Southeast Missouri. Snow coined the phrase "Swampeast Missouri" to describe the fertile area which, after draining and clearing, yielded bumper crops of corn, alfalfa, wheat, soybeans and cotton. His farm eventually included 1,000 acres and 20 sharecropper families to the land. In 1937, Snow's wife, Lila, died after a long illness. Her death brought on a physical breakdown which left him nearly paralyzed for two years. Tragedy struck again in 1948 when Thad's son-in-law, John Hartwell Thompson committed suicide after killing his wife Priscilla, their nine-year-old daughter Ann, and Thad's youngest daughter, Emily. Snow was concerned about tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and day laborers. During the 1939 Sharecroppers' five-day roadside sit-down demonstration, he wrote sympathetically about the demonstrators and provided aid to them. Snow is best remembered for his writing, and frequently contributed pieces to the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* "Letters from the People" column beginning in the early 1930s. Over the years, he wrote about politics, foreign affairs, farming, his family, economics and human nature. Snow's autobiography *From Missouri* was published in November 1954, two months before his death from pneumonia on January 15, 1955.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into the following 4 series

Bonnie Stepenoff
Thad Snow

Photos and Negatives
Digital Materials

Scope and Content Note:

The Stepenoff Research Papers are arranged into four series: Bonnie Stepenoff Research Files, 1890s–2010s; Thad Snow Files, 1930s–1950s; Physical Media; and Digital Media. Materials include correspondence, research notes, oral history interviews, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, maps, photographs, negatives, and original writings.

Topics covered include agriculture and cotton culture in Southeast Missouri, the 1939 Sharecroppers' Strike, land use and development, forestry, flooding and flood control, African American experiences, racial inequality, and labor issues. The majority of the locations represented are in Southeast Missouri, with additional references to the Ozark region and the St. Louis area. Other states mentioned include Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Mississippi.

Bonnie Stepenoff Files

This series contains materials related to Bonnie Stepenoff's research regarding important historical figures in Southeast Missouri's history, such as Thad Snow, Fannie Cook, Owen Whitfield, and Marcus Alfonso "Al" Murphy. Her research also includes topics such as cotton culture, labor issues, flooding, local land use, and forests and forestry. Furthermore, this collection contains Stepenoff's correspondence with individuals related to her research, including orally conducted interviews, most notably with sharecroppers and individuals who knew Thad Snow or Owen Whitfield, including surviving family members. This series is arranged alphabetically by topic, and the materials range from 1894-2011.

Thad Snow Files

This series consists of materials centered on Thad Snow's writings and correspondence. Included are articles and letters he wrote concerning agriculture, the Sharecroppers' Strike of 1939, labor issues, land use in "Swampeast" Missouri, flooding, and pacifism. The series reflects Snow's role as a farmer, writer, and social commentator who was deeply engaged with the political and economic issues of his time. This series is arranged alphabetically by topic, and the materials range from 1934-1954.

Photographs and Negatives

This series contains original physical materials created during Bonnie Stepenoff's research into Cropperville and Thad Snow. Items include photos of Cropperville and Snow's Corner. These materials supplement the research found in Series 1, offering visual representation of the places and events included in this collection. This collection is arranged chronologically and the materials range from 2002-2005.

Digital Materials

This series contains digital materials created by Bonnie Stepenoff, and include a floppy disk of her work *Snow's Corner*, a CD-ROM containing a Powerpoint presentation on Thad Snow, and two CD-ROMs containing images of Thad Snow. These items provide additional context into

Stepenoff's research process, and is useful in visualizing. This collection is arranged chronologically and the materials range from 2003-2011.

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