



Robert S. Saunders Papers (S0087)

Collection Number: S0087

Collection Title: Robert S. Saunders Papers

Dates: 1965-1971

Creator: Saunders, Robert Stansfield, 1893-1971

Abstract: The Robert S. Saunders Papers contains the unpublished autobiography of Robert S. Saunders, chronicling his life as a migratory laborer and union organizer during the 1930s and 1940s. The autobiography includes narratives of living conditions in migrant camps, and Saunders's efforts to recruit members for the Socialist Party in the Midwest.

Collection Size: 0.25 cubic foot
(11 folders)

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-St. Louis](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at stlouis@shsmo.org. Collections may be viewed at any research center.

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Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Robert S. Saunders Papers* (S0087); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-St. Louis].

Donor Information: The papers were donated to the University of Missouri by Alice Kleyboecker, on June 25, 1973 (Accession No. SA0288). Additions to the collection were made on June 3, 1980 by William H. Kleyboecker (Accession No. SA2299); and on August, 5, 2004 by Kristine Stilwell (Accession No. SA3571).

Related Collections: Additional materials related to the Robert S. Saunders Papers can be found in the following collections:

[Camp Solidarity Inc. Records](#) (S0184)

[Socialist Party of Missouri Collection](#) (S0090)

Processed by: Processed by Rachael Heriford, May 2023

Biographical Note:

Robert Stansfield Saunders was born on October 21, 1893, in Owensboro, Kentucky, to Lydia and Robert Saunders. During his childhood, Robert moved frequently with his family due to his father's inability to find work. From 1900 to 1905, the Saunders lived in Kentucky, Indiana, Missouri, Illinois, and Mexico before settling in St. Louis, Missouri in 1905. Shortly thereafter, Robert began working as a messenger boy for the Western Union Telegraph Company and The Postal Telegraph Company to help his economically struggling family until Governor Joseph Folk pushed forth child labor laws prohibiting children entering the workforce until the age of 14.

As a result of his family's frequent moving, and early entry into the workforce, Robert had wide gaps in his education and attended dozens of schools throughout his childhood. He stopped attending school when he was 14, so he could work full-time again at The May Company department store in St. Louis. He would later work on his education after his adolescence by attending night classes at Central High School and attending courses involving topics from mechanical engineering, architecture, chemistry, and Spanish.

Upon turning 18, Robert became a migrant worker to fulfill a dream of traveling throughout the United States. On November 20, 1911, Robert started his five-year journey as a migrant worker. Robert traveled the west coast extensively, including Utah, Nevada, and California. He also traveled throughout parts of the Midwest, including Kansas and Indiana. Robert would travel via foot or train and often traveled with other migrant workers he met along the way. Like his childhood, Robert would not settle for too long in one location. He also had numerous short-term jobs, such as beating carpets, washing dishes, and working in a factory. Robert's journey as a migrant worker ended on March 10, 1916, when he returned to St. Louis.

After his journey, Robert married Mary Louise Lovshe on November 26, 1919, in Davenport, Iowa. The couple had two daughters: Mary T. Saunders Wade (1922-1958) and Alice Saunders Kleyboecker (1925-2012). The Saunders returned to St. Louis by 1921, and Robert would hold many short-term jobs, including farm hand, lumber worker, and his longest-running job as a carpenter. As a result of his work as a laborer and carpenter, he joined the Industrial Workers of the World and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters Local 1596, where he served as president and financial secretary. Robert was also a founding member of Camp Solidarity Inc., a recreational farm and retirement compound for members of labor unions and organizations, including the Socialist Party and the German Free Thinkers.

Robert joined the Socialist Party of Missouri on September 7, 1933. Robert was a very active member of the organization by promoting the party to fellow union members, teaching classes about socialism, and serving as secretary of the Second War Branch of the Socialist Party. After his retirement in 1960, Robert and his family traveled to Mexico, Hawaii, and the Grand Canyon. During this time, Robert began writing his autobiography, *A Life to Live*. Robert Saunders died on September 2, 1971, in Franklin, Missouri.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into eleven folders.

Scope and Content Note:

The Robert S. Saunders Papers contains the unpublished manuscript *A Life to Live*. The manuscript is part autobiography, and part diary transcriptions chronicling Saunders life from 1893 to 1971. The manuscript has been divided into three sections. Section one contains Part I and is dedicated to the Mississippi, Section two contains Part 2 and discusses his childhood and journey as a migrant worker. Finally, the third part contains Part 3 through Part 11, and chronicles Robert Saunders work as a union organizer and member of the Socialist Party until his retirement in 1960. The collection has been arranged into eleven folders and the materials have been kept in their original order.

Container List:

- f. 1 *A Life to Live*, Part 1, A Montage of the River, 1965-1971
- f. 2 *A Life to Live*, Part 2, The Road, 1965-1971
- f. 3 *A Life to Live*, Part 3, Home Again, 1965-1971
- f. 4 *A Life to Live*, Part 4, Our Big Trip, 1965-1971
- f. 5 *A Life to Live*, Part 5, Depression, 1965-1971
- f. 6 *A Life to Live*, Part 6, Trade Union Official--More of the Ozarks, 1965-1971
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- f. 10 *A Life to Live*, Part 10, Retiree, 1965-1971
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