

Helen Sonthoff fonds

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University of British Columbia Archives



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Fonds Description

Helen Sonthoff fonds. – 1944-2000.

18 cm of textual records.

Biographical Sketch

Helen Hubbard Wolfe Sonthoff was born in Rochester, New York, on September 11, 1916. She was educated at Smith College (AB 1937), and Radcliffe College. She taught for some years in Massachusetts and Washington, D.C. before coming to the University of British Columbia in 1958 as a Teaching Assistant. Sonthoff, a teacher and scholar of Canadian literature back in the days when Canadian literature was still struggling to establish itself as a field worthy of study, gained a tenured appointment as an Assistant Professor of English at U.B.C. in 1968. Her own writing was on the fiction and poetry of such contemporary figures as Phyllis Webb, Milton Acorn, Eli Mandel and Leonard Cohen, and from time to time, she promoted their work on the CBC as a reader and critic. Sonthoff served on numerous departmental and faculty committees, and in 1972 she was elected to a three-year term on the University Senate as a representative of the Faculty of Arts. As a member of the fledgling Women's Action Group she contributed to the first *Report on the Status of Women at U.B.C.* in 1973. Sonthoff was also an early supporter of aboriginal education at the post-secondary level, and worked with colleagues in Arts and Education to give special help to aboriginal students. Upon her retirement from the English Department in 1976, Sonthoff and her long-time partner, writer Jane Rule, moved permanently to Galiano Island. Sonthoff passed away in Victoria, B.C. on January 3, 2000.

Scope and Content

Fonds consists of personal correspondence, newspaper clippings, and manuscripts, as well as memorial tributes, cards and letters of sympathy pertaining to the passing of Sonthoff. One file contains some of Jane Rule's correspondence – it is kept here as it was donated together with some of Sonthoff's letters. The fonds is arranged in the following series: Correspondence, Essays and Criticisms and Memorial Tributes.

Notes

File list available.

The bulk of the fonds was donated to the University Archives by Jane Rule in 2000. Files 1-11 and 1-12 were donated to the University Archives in February 2025 by Clair Duff, partner of Catherine (Cathy) Shepard, a friend of Helen Sonthoff and Jane Rule.

Access to these materials remained restricted until Jane Rule's death in 2007

Related records may be found in the [Jane Rule fonds](#).

Series Descriptions

Correspondence series. – 1944-1988.

6 cm of textual records.

Series consists primarily of the personal correspondence of Helen Sonthoff. File 1-12 consists of correspondence between Jane Rule and Catherine Shepard, which was included with the Sonthoff/Shepard correspondence donated by Clair Duff in 2025.

The date range of the contents of File 1-11 is estimated based on postmarks on envelopes and the text of the letters, as Sonthoff would date her correspondence by the day and month but not the year.

Essays and Criticisms series. – 1973.

0.5 cm [1 file folder] of textual records.

Series consists of one critical essay written by Helen Sonthoff in 1973.

Memorial Tributes series. – 2000.

11.5 cm of textual records.

Series consists of letters, cards, newspaper clippings and tributes in memory of the life and accomplishments of Helen Sonthoff.

File List

CORRESPONDENCE SERIES

- 1-1 "Letters from Other People: [W.H.] Auden & Shelagh Day", 1944-1966.
- 1-2 Correspondence with Mary Meigs, 1978-1998 [A].
- 1-3 Correspondence with Mary Meigs, 1978-1998 [B].

(continued)

ESSAYS AND CRITICISM SERIES

- 1-4 "The Long Will to Be In Canada", May 1973.

MEMORIAL TRIBUTES SERIES

- 1-5 "In Memory of Helen Sonthoff, January 9, 2000" [bound register].
- 1-6 Memorial Tributes to Helen Sonthoff, January-May 2000.
- 1-7 Cards and Letters of Sympathy to Jane Rule [A].
- 1-8 Cards and Letters of Sympathy to Jane Rule [B].
- 1-9 Cards and Letters of Sympathy to Jane Rule [C].
- 1-10 Cards and Letters of Sympathy to Jane Rule [D].

CORRESPONDENCE SERIES (cont.)

- 1-11 Helen's correspondence with Catherine Shepard [1984-88]
- 1-12 Jane Rule's correspondence with Catherine Shepard 1980-84