

Finding Aid to the Rodney Nelson Papers (1971-1990)

Nelson, Rodney, 1941-

Rodney Nelson papers, 1971-1990

.6 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 229

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

Links: [Finding aid to later accession of Rodney Nelson Papers](#)

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

Provenance: Donated by Rodney Nelson, 2000 (acc. 2578).

Property rights: The Institute for Regional Studies owns the property rights to this collection.

Copyrights: Copyrights to this collection remain with Mr. Rodney Nelson.

Citation: [Identification of item]. Rodney Nelson Papers (1971-1990), MS 229, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

BIOGRAPHY

Rodney Allen Nelson was born on November 13, 1941, to Rudolph A. Nelson and Eva L. (Gunderson) Nelson in Fargo, North Dakota. His mother's parents were longtime residents of Christine, North Dakota.

Nelson grew up in Fargo and Christine. After graduating from Fargo Central High he attended several colleges without taking a degree. He served in the U.S. Navy in the early sixties as a musician. After his military service he lived in San Francisco, where he was involved in Vietnam War protests. Nelson

traveled extensively over the next few years, stopping in Germany, Mexico, Seattle, and the Twin Cities. He began having poetry, articles, plays, and fiction published in 1970. He received the Georgia Prize in poetry in 1973. He lived in Sonoma County, California, in 1975–1978 and received an A.A. degree in psychiatric technology from Santa Rosa Junior College in 1977. In 1978 he moved back to Fargo and became managing editor of the literary journal, *Free Passage*. Nelson served as editor of another journal, the *Dakota Arts Quarterly*, during 1979–1984. His novel *Villy Sadness* was published in 1987. This received the Lake Agassiz Publication Award of the Red River Valley Heritage Society in 1989. After living in northern Arizona during the years 1985–1987, he returned to North Dakota to become editor of Lone Butte Press. He lived again in Arizona 1988–1999, working at Northern Arizona University as a copy editor. Nelson was listed in the fifty-fourth edition of *Who's Who in America*.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection of Rodney Nelson's papers includes correspondence, reviews and articles, published prose and poetry, editorials, and translations. The collection also includes original transcripts of *Villy Sadness*, *Skogmann: A Play in Five Acts*, and *The Nature Society*. It contains a manuscript of the novel *Home River*, which was published in 1984 by the North Dakota Institute For Regional Studies, as well as a handwritten outline titled *Red River*. Nelson's interest in the Norwegian-American writer and editor Simon Johnson accounts for certain photographs, articles, and music in his papers. An incomplete list of publishing credits can be found at the end of folder eight.

The [Correspondence Series](#) contains correspondence, both incoming and outgoing. The correspondence covers from 1971 to 1990 and is arranged chronologically. The collection includes correspondence with publishers, editors, other writers, friends, and fans.

The [Articles Series](#) contains articles written about Nelson. These articles are, for the most part, newspaper stories from local and regional newspapers spanning 1975 through 1987. They look at his work as an editor and writer. This series also contains a folder of reviews and articles written about *Villy Sadness*. A third folder contains reviews of and articles about *The Boots Brevik Saga*, *Oregon Scroll*, *Vigil*, and *Home River*.

The [Published Works Series](#) consists of some of Nelson's published writings organized by type of writing, with folders containing reviews, poetry, prose, undated prose, editorials, and translations. He wrote reviews, poetry, fiction, and miscellaneous nonfiction. The poetry in this collection was published in newspapers, journals, and magazines. There is a partial list of publishing credits at the end of the folder eight, the published poetry folder. The prose in this collection includes essays, short stories, and a travelogue. The folder containing editorials includes writing about maintenance of Island Park, a piece of sculpture that was placed on the former Fargo Public Library site, and a controversy about using taste aversion to keep wolves from eating livestock. This series also contains translations of Wilhelm Lehmann, Oscar Loerke, and Simon Johnson.

The [Manuscript Series](#) contains both typescripts and manuscripts. These include *Villy Sadness*, *Skogmann: A Play In Five Acts*, and *The Nature Society*. There also is a handwritten outline titled *Red*

River that appears to have been the early working title for *Home River*. The manuscript for *Early North* is 134 leaves and contains six stories including “Karl Iversen,” “The Junipers,” “Immediate Earth,” “When Bjornson Came to La Crosse,” “The Devil and the Hedins,” and “Mita Hoda.”

The [Subject File Series](#) consists of pictures of Simon Johnson, his family, and his home. S.A. Gunderson of Portland, North Dakota, Nelson’s cousin, took these pictures. It also contains articles about Simon Johnson and music with lyrics by Johnson. This folder also contains an application for grant money to translate Simon Johnson’s writing.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

1/1 Finding aid

Correspondence Series

1/2 1971–1984

1/3 1985–1990

Articles Series

1/4 Articles about Rodney Nelson, 1975–1987

1/5 Articles and reviews about Villy Sadness, 1987–1989

1/6 Articles and reviews about other work, 1977–1985

Published Works Series

1/7 Reviews by Rodney Nelson, 1974–1987

1/8 Published poetry, 1974–1981

1/9 Published prose, 1971–1989

1/10 Published prose, undated

1/11 Published editorials, 1975–1987

1/12 Translations by Rodney Nelson, 1980–1981

Manuscript Series

2/4 *Early North* (six narratives, one translated)

1/13 *Villy Sadness*, undated

1/14 *Red River*, undated

1/15 *Home River*, undated

2/1 *Skogmann: A Play In Five Acts*, 1973

2/2 *The Nature Society*, 1986

Subject File Series

2/3

Simon Johnson, 1979–1981