

## Finding Aid to the Erling N. Rolfsrud Papers

### **Rolfsrud, Erling N., 1912-1994**

Erling N. Rolfsrud Papers, 1939-1993

12 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 194

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### **OVERVIEW**

**Links:** Finding aid to earlier accession (Mss 64) of [Erling N. Rolfsrud Papers](#)  
Finding aid to the [Erling N. Rolfsrud Photograph Collection](#).

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

**Provenance:** Donated by Erling Rolfsrud, 1985, 1990, and Beverly Rolfsrud 1995 (Accessions 2123, 2124, 2258, 2424).

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

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**Citation:** [Identification of item]. Erling N. Rolfsrud Papers, MS 194, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

### **BIOGRAPHY**

Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud was born September 3, 1912, near Keene, North Dakota on the farm of his parents Nils and Rebecca (Heide) Rolfsrud. He attended Watford City High School and graduated from there in 1930. He briefly attended Minot State College, then taught rural schools for three years in

McKenzie County. He attended Concordia College at Moorhead, Minnesota and received a Bachelor's degree in 1936. Mr. Rolfsrud was on the staff of the North Dakota Education Association for several years, and in 1939 he began writing a column titled "Top Drawer" for its journal *North Dakota Teacher*, which he continued writing for 22 years. In 1941 he married Beverly Brown of Hettinger, N.D. That same year, he began teaching typing and shorthand classes at Concordia College, and headed the Department of Business Education at Concordia until 1946. After his tenure at Concordia, Mr. Rolfsrud spent eleven years as a freelance writer and produced over ten books. During this period, he lived near Deerwood and Alexandria, Minnesota, where he continued to reside until the time of his death. In 1952, he was a lyceum lecturer for one year in North Dakota schools, and spoke about North Dakota history, and "Extraordinary North Dakotans". In 1957, he began teaching English at Evansville High School, transferred to Alexandria High School, which he continued to teach until 1978. Mr. Rolfsrud also taught an Adult Education Creative Writing course in Alexandria.

Mr. Rolfsrud was a prolific writer who wrote articles and short stories, as well as newspaper columns for several North Dakota and Minnesota newspapers. He is an author who published 31 books from 1949-1993, many of which are about North Dakota and have North Dakota settings. He may best be remembered for his books on North Dakota. Some of his better known books include: *Lanterns Over the Prairies*, Book I (1949), *Lanterns Over the Prairies*, Book II (1950), *Gopher Tails for Papa* (1951), *White Angakok* (1952), *Brother to the Eagle* (1952) *Extraordinary North Dakotans* (1954), *Boy from Johnny Butte*, (1954) *Cobber Chronicle* (1966), *Story of Red River Land* (1967), *Flickertail Stories*(1989), and *Petticoat Pioneer* (1993).

In addition to his writing, Mr. Rolfsrud traveled the state of North Dakota giving speeches and lectures on his writing and the state's history. Mr. Rolfsrud also taught a Bethel Bible class, and was a church organist for forty years. In 1965, Mr. Rolfsrud was selected as one of the 75 "Heroes" in North Dakota's history, and in 1989, he was inducted into North Dakota's Scandinavian-American Hall of Fame. Mr. Rolfsrud died August 21, 1994 at Alexandria, Minnesota. He was survived by his wife and six children.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Erling N. Rolfsrud Papers consist primarily of his correspondence, manuscripts, and research material related to his published works. In addition there are copies of his final publications, numerous articles published in newspapers and magazines, and some personal family papers. The Rolfsrud Papers have been arranged into seven series: Topical, Correspondence, Professional files, Manuscripts, Articles, Biographical files, Published books supporting material, and Published works. An earlier donation of papers was processed in 1983. Consult the finding aid to that collection (Mss 64) for the scope and content of those papers.

The [Topical Series](#) (1946-1991) is general research files developed by Mr. Rolfsrud. They are maintained in his original arrangement which is alphabetical by topic. They were used by him in his writing and cover a wide variety of subjects. The contents of each are quite varied and may include newspaper clippings, articles, booklets, etc. which Rolfsrud found in other sources. These files do not contain

original writings by him. Most of them deal with North Dakota, although there are some which are Minnesota related. Consult the box listing for the specific topics covered.

The [Correspondence Series](#) (1935-1994) is a mixture of personal correspondence, fan mail, thank you letters, book orders, and research requests. It is arranged alphabetically by the correspondent, following Rolfsrud's original order. It covers a vast array of topics documenting Rolfsrud's writing career.

The [Professional Files Series](#) (1936-1992) is papers which relate to the business aspect of Rolfsrud's writing, such as book store listings, copyright information, and correspondence with publishers. In addition, this series also contains some of Mr. Rolfsrud's teaching materials and assignments, speaking notes, and concert programs from Mr. and Mrs. Rolfsrud's concerts and recitals.

The [Manuscripts Series](#) (1936-1958) is a collection of old manuscripts, articles, short stories and poems, along with the manuscripts for his unpublished books *Pipes for Praise*, *Shattered Shackles*, and *This is the Day*. Some poems and manuscripts credit the author as "Eric Bard", which is a pseudonym occasionally used by Erling Rolfsrud between 1947 and 1952.

The [Article Series](#) (1945-1994) is a collection of published magazine articles and newspaper columns which appeared in several regional newspapers and magazines. There is an initial series of such articles organized alphabetically by title. Following are articles found in a wide variety of magazines. He also had a syndicated column which was published in various North Dakota and Minnesota newspapers. These are organized by newspaper and then chronological.

The [Biographical Files Series](#) (1895-1988) is a collection of biographical research on people who are almost exclusively from North Dakota. There is an emphasis on people who are either noteworthy or heroic. This research is primarily correspondence either from the person directly, or from relatives of the person. The files also include draft sketches done by Mr. Rolfsrud. The series is arranged alphabetically by name. Consult the box listing for specific names.

The [Published Books Supporting Material Series](#) (1945-1993) consists of all material related to Rolfsrud's published works, arranged alphabetically by book title. Included are manuscripts, research, book publicity and reviews, publishing and printing agreements, and correspondence.

The [Published Works Series](#) includes final published copies (one each) for fifteen of Rolfsrud's books. Most of them are later reprints of his works and not original editions.

## BOX AND FOLDER LIST

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- 2/2 McKenzie County memoirs and Correspondence, 1948-1949
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 19/16 Play, 1992  
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- 21/6 Mss., 1957
- 21/7 Publicity/Reviews, 1958-1961
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- 21/8 Research, 1936, 1989
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- 21/12 Mss.
- 21/13 Mss., 1956
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- 21/15 “Girl in the Popple,” in *Our Young People*, October 25-December 27, 1959
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- 22/11 “A Grandpa for Sonja,” in *Children’s Friend*, December 2-December 30, 1956
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- 23/2 Volume 1, Printing Agreements, 1950-1953
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- 23/6 Volume 2, Research/Correspondence, October 11, 1949-February 21, 1951
- 23/7 May 19, 1948-October 12, 1951
- Notable North Dakotans—*
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- 24/13 Research on river ferries
- 24/14 Research on *Plains Folk: North Dakota's Ethnic History*
- 24/15 Publicity/Correspondence, May 21, 1993-February 14, 1994
- 24/16 Mss., 1993
- 24/17 Chapters 1-14, 1993
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- 25/2 Mss., 1986
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- 25/2b Mss., p. 51-101
- 25/3 Publicity/Reviews, November 25, 1983-June 17, 1984
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- 25/5 Correspondence/letters of appreciation, 1983

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- 25/7 *Story of North Dakota*—  
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- 25/8 Publishing/Printing Agreements, 1959-1963
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- 25/12 Mss., 1990, chapters 1-4
- 25/13 Chapters 5-8
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- 26/2 Station KFME, Publicity, 1966-1969, 1977
- 26/3 Letters of Support/Appreciation, 1967-1968
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- 26/5 TV transcript, lessons 1-4, 1967
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- 26/9 Project Bridge Complaints, 1973-1974
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- 28/1 *Boy from Johnny Butte*
- 28/2 *Church Etiquette for the Layman*
- 28/3 *Cutbank Girl*
- 28/4 *Flickertail Stories*
- 28/5 *Girl of the Tumbleweeds*
- 28/6 *Gopher Tails for Papa*
- 28/7 *Indians of the Upper Midwest*
- 28/8 *Notable North Dakotans*
- 28/9 *Out of the Top Drawer*
- 28/10 *Petticoat Pioneer*
- 28/11 *Scandinavian Moses*
- 28/12 *Stone Johnny School*
- 28/13 *Story of the Peace Garden State*
- 28/14 *The Tiger-Lily Years*
- 28/15 *With the Wind at My Back: Recollections and Reflections*