

South Shaftsbury Vermont  
December 24 1931

Dear Miss Suckow:

Instead of sending you a Christmas card why don't I write a small letter to you in your small mid-western town by the big river where we like to think of you and your husband after your long tolerant visit in a small New England town, and tell you what I think of your big books? I don't know why but my mind was all set for it to be for or against something, the small town, marriage, sterility, Puritanism, nationalism, Americanism, or dignity. And it isn't: it proves to be without guile or thesis. It is just stories

On this and the opposite page is an unpublished letter written by Robert Frost to Ruth Suckow on December 24, 1931. By permission of Lesley Frost Ballantine.

of life vividly restored, each one satisfied if it is true to its inward self. That is the way like stories and should wish my own always to be. Never mind whom you resemble and excel: you are a full fledged importance uncomparatively. Your first discoverer must be proud of you. Elmer and I, later discoverers, are even gladder to know you than we have been. How you can write and remember. Your story about the little girl who sent herself valentines almost makes me want to tell one about a little boy who went to a birthday party he hadn't been invited to. Talk about anguish. — Over but to you both  
Sincerely yours Robert Frost

## *Ruth Suckow: a Calendar of Letters*

FRANK PALUKA

Ruth Suckow's novels and stories about her native state have placed her among the authentic regional writers of the Middle West. Her first stories about Iowa appeared in the early 1920's in *The Midland*, edited by John T. Frederick, and in *The Smart Set*, edited by George Jean Nathan and H. L. Mencken. By 1960, the year of her death, she had published twelve books, including *Country People*, *Iowa Interiors*, *The Bonney Family*, *Children and Older People*, *The Folks*, and *New Hope*.

Among the Suckow papers at Iowa, which include early notebooks, later manuscripts, and a holograph version of *The Bonney Family*, are more than two hundred letters. Arranged in historical sequence, this correspondence reveals not only details of Miss Suckow's environment and associates, but something also of the general outline of her career, and perhaps a hint or two of the relationships between her life and her writings.

The letters here catalogued span forty-two years. Part of their interest arises from the variety of viewpoints and concerns they express. H. L. Mencken writes encouragingly to the young author; fellow writers such as Floyd Dell and Dorothy Canfield Fisher offer opinions about books and writers; editors such as Blanche Knopf, John Farrar and Pascal Covici give constructive criticism; readers proffer their opinions and objections; and friends, some of them childhood companions, write about personal matters and current news. Having read Miss Suckow's *Children and Older People*, Robert Frost is pleased to find her collection of stories ". . . without guile or thesis. It is just stories of life vividly restored, each one satisfied if it is true to its inward self. That is the way I like stories and should wish my own always to be." (Robert Frost's letter is reproduced in full on pages 20 and 21.

The present list omits a quantity of publisher's correspondence relating mostly to reprint permissions and copyright assignments. For brevity, Ruth Suckow is referred to in the following descriptions by the initials R.S.

1918

H. S. Watson to R. S. New York, 14 October 1918. Concerning a story submitted to *Field and Stream*; though she shoots no game and catches no fish, the editor will accept the story if she shortens it. T. L. S. 1 p.

1920

John T. Frederick to R. S. Glennie, Michigan, 27 April 1920. Concerning two stories submitted to *The Midland*; comments on their excellence and vitality. A. L. S. 5 pp.

1921

H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 26 July [1921]. Accepting three stories; remarks that they are the best stories a new author has submitted to *The Smart Set* in five years. T. L. S. 1 p.

George Jean Nathan to R. S. New York, 28 July 1921. Confirming the acceptance of three stories. T. L. S. 1 p.

H. L. Mencken to R. S. New York, 9 August 1921. Suggesting that her first book should be a novel rather than a collection of short stories; offers to advise her regarding the manuscript and asks about her ancestry and training. T. L. S. 2 pp.

R. S. to Franklin Spier. Earlville, Iowa, 15 August 1921. Agreeing to show him her novel as soon as the manuscript is completed. T. L. S. 1 p.

H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 16 August [1921]. Remarking on Miss Suckow's ancestry; advises her against living in New York and disparages Greenwich Village; suggests that she submit some stories to *McCall's*. T. L. S. 2 pp.

John T. Frederick to R. S. Glennie, Michigan, 28 August 1921. Concerning stories submitted to *The Midland*; mentions her decision not to take work at Iowa City, refers to the encouragement she has received from Mencken, and in a postscript expresses his admiration for her story entitled "Wanderers". A. L. S. 3 pp.

Burton Rascoe to R. S. New York, 22 September 1921. Returning some stories submitted to *McCall's*; remarks that they are too devoid of glamour and plot for his magazine. T. L. S. 1 p.

H. L. Mencken to R. S. New York, 22 September 1921. Asking to see more of her stories. A. L. S. 1 p.

H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 30 September [1921]. Thanking her for submitting more stories. T.N.S. 1 p.

George Jean Nathan to R. S. 3 October 1921. Accepting the two stories "Just Him and Her" and "A Pilgrim and a Stranger"; delays decision on a third story and rejects a fourth; remarks that her work steadily improves. T. L. S. 1 p.

Alfred A. Knopf to R. S. New York, 13 October 1921. Asking for first refusal when she has a book ready for publication. Carbon typescript. 1 p.

Hartley H. Hepler to the Editors of *The Smart Set*. Shriners, Texas, 14

- November 1921. Expressing great admiration for the writings of Miss Suckow, especially her story "Mame". T. L. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 18 November [1921]. Forwarding Mr. Hepler's letter; asks for more stories. T. N. S. 1 p.
- C. T. Martin to R. S. Boston, 23 December [1921]. Objecting to the tenor of her story "Mame". A. L. S. 1 p.
- 1922
- George Jean Nathan to R. S. New York, 1 February 1922. Asking to have another reading of a story previously returned. T. L. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 6 February [1922]. Conveying congratulations from Sinclair Lewis, who praises the reality, high visibility, lucidity, and vision of Miss Suckow's writing; inquires about the progress of her novel and asks for more stories. T. L. S. 1 p.
- Alfred Harcourt to R. S. New York, 8 February 1922. Expressing interest in publishing a novel by Miss Suckow; says that Sinclair Lewis called his attention to her stories in *The Smart Set*. T. L. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, [14 February 1922]. Agreeing to read her manuscript [*Country People*]. A. Card S.
- George Jean Nathan to R. S. New York, 17 February 1922. Accepting her story "The Daughter" for *The Smart Set*. T. L. S. 1 p.
- Alfred Harcourt to R. S. New York, 18 February 1922. Acknowledging a letter and hoping to see some of her work. T. L. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 20 March [1922]. Regretting that Miss Suckow is ill and in the hospital. T. N. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 30 March [1922]. Concerning her illness; mentions that Knopf is eager to have her novel [*Country People*]. T. N. S. 1 p.
- George Jean Nathan to R. S. New York, 1 June 1922. Accepting her story "Wanderers" for *The Smart Set*. T. L. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. New York, 3 July 1922. Concerning her novelette *The Best of the Lot*. T. L. S. 1 p. with autograph postscript.
- Thyra Samter Winslow to R. S. Kew Gardens, Long Island, 24 July [1922]. Expressing pleasure with her stories. T. L. S. 2 pp.
- Father Jerome to R. S. Saint Leo, Florida, 3 August 1922. Expressing his pleasure with her story "A Rural Community". T. N. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. SS *George Washington*, 19 October [1922]. Requesting permission to include one of her stories in his collection of American short stories to be published in German translation. T. L. S. 1 p.
- Hyatt Downing to R. S. St. Paul, Minnesota, 22 November 1922. Expressing his enjoyment of *The Best of the Lot*; remarks on Hawarden, Iowa. A. L. S. 2 pp.
- George Jean Nathan to R. S. New York, 12 December 1922. Accepting the story "Other People's Ambitions" for *The Smart Set*. T. L. S. 1 p.

1923

- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 24 February [1923]. Asking for a brief biographical sketch to go with the German book. T.N.S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 3 March [1923]. Concerning his collection of American stories to be published in Germany; mentions the death of Miss Suckow's sister. T. L. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 15 [i. e. 14] March [1923]. Suggesting that Miss Suckow put together a book of her novelettes and short stories; names the authors to be represented in his German short story collection. T. L. S. 1 p.
- Carl Van Doren to R. S. New York, 22 March 1923. Accepting her story "Renters" for *The Century Magazine*. T. N. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 23 March [1923]. Asking to see her new novelette; recommends that she choose Knopf for her publisher. T. L. S. 1 p.
- R. S. to Samuel Knopf. Forest City, Iowa, 4 April 1923. Replying to his inquiry about a volume of short stories she has nearly completed. T. L. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. New York, 11 April 1923. Commending her manuscript *Country People*; suggests that she allow Knopf to publish it as a book. T. L. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 23 April [1923]. Concerning the transfer of her manuscript to the Knopf office. T. N. S. 1 p.
- Blanche W. Knopf to R. S. New York, 24 May 1923. Expressing pleasure with *Country People* and accepting it for publication. Carbon typescript. 1 p.
- Blanche W. Knopf to R. S. [New York] 25 May 1923. Accepting her manuscript. Carbon of telegram. 1 p.
- Blanche W. Knopf to R. S. [New York] 28 May 1923. Expressing her enthusiasm for *Country People*. Carbon typescript. 1 p.
- George Jean Nathan to R. S. New York, 29 May 1923. Accepting her story "A Part of the Institution" despite its exceptional length. T. L. S. 1 p.
- R. S. to Blanche W. Knopf. Earlville, Iowa, 31 May 1923. Returning the contract for *Country People*; suggests that they might meet in Chicago. T. L. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. New York, 24 July 1923. Asking permission to hold her story "Four Generations" for use in the first number of a new magazine that he and Mr. Nathan are planning to issue. T. L. S. 1 p.
- R. S. to Alfred A. Knopf. Earlville, Iowa, 10 September 1923. Offering to send the first half of a long novel for his consideration. T. L. S. 1 p. with carbon of reply.
- Milton MacKaye to R. S. Washington, D. C., 17 September 1923. Ex-

- pressing his pleasure with her story: "A Part of the Institution". T. L. S. 2 pp.
- Blanche W. Knopf to R. S. New York, 1 October 1923. Concerning the sale of rights of *Country People* to *The Century Magazine*. Carbon typescript. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 31 October [1923]. Concerning her story which is to appear in the first issue of *The American Mercury*. T. L. S. 1 p.
- Floyd Dell to R. S. Croton-on-Hudson, New York, 5 November 1923. Concerning the naming of fictional characters; mentions his card catalogue of names. A. L. S. 6 pp.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. Baltimore, 8 November [1923]. Concerning her manuscript which Mrs. Knopf is sending him to read. T. L. S. 1 p.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. New York, 26 November [1923]. Praising the manuscript of her incomplete novel; says hers in the only short story in the first issue of *The American Mercury*. T. L. S. 1 p.
- R. S. to Blanche W. Knopf. Des Moines, Iowa, 2 December 1923. Concerning the novel she expects to complete in February. A. L. S. 1 p. with reply.
- Dorothy Dunbar Bromley to R. S. New York, 3 December 1923. Asking whether she would care to submit a long work for publication by Henry Holt and Co. T. L. S. 1 p.
- A. Page Cooper to R. S. Garden City, New York, 4 December 1923. Asking that Doubleday, Page & Co. be allowed to read her first novel. T. L. S. 1 p.
- Paul Green to R. S. Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 4 December 1923. Offering his congratulations on her story "Renters" which he has just read in *The Century Magazine*. A. L. S. 2 pp.
- 1924
- Jay G. Sigmund to Mary Dennen Hanlon. [n.p.] 3 January 1924. Commending the accuracy of Miss Suckow's descriptions of midwestern people and places in *Country People*. Typed copy. 2 pp.
- H. L. Mencken to R. S. New York [i.e. Baltimore] 26 January [1924]. Concerning the success of *The American Mercury*; mentions an inquiry from Grant Richards about English rights to *Country People*. T. L. S. 1 p.
- R. S. to Caroline Woodhams. Des Moines, Iowa, 16 February [1924]. Recalling some of their activities as children. A. L. S. 2 pp.
- Blanche W. Knopf to R. S. New York, 25 January 1924. Acknowledging receipt of a photograph. T. N. S. 1 p.
- R. S. to R. S. Josephy. New York, 4 March 1924. Asking to omit sending page proofs of *Country People* so that copies of the book can be ready for presentation at an annual booksellers convention in May. T. L. S. 1 p.

- Blanche W. Knopf to R. S. [New York] 20 March 1924. Inquiring about the progress of her new novel. T. L. S. 1 p.
- Blanche W. Knopf to R. S. [New York] 22 April 1924. Suggesting that she cut the manuscript of her novel from 220,000 words to about 90,000. Carbon typescript. 2 pp.
- R. S. to Blanche W. Knopf. Forest City, Iowa, 26 April 1924. Concerning the possible reorganization of her novel. A. L. S. 1 p.
- Blanche W. Knopf to R. S. [New York] 30 April 1924. Concerning the manuscript of Miss Suckow's novel; reaffirms her previous strictures and enthusiasms regarding it. Carbon typescript. 1 p.
- Wade C. Rimmer to R. S. Statesville, North Carolina, 30 September 1924. Asking about her beekeeping. T. L. S. 2 pp.
- 1926
- Alfred A. Knopf to R. S. New York, 6 October 1926. Assigning to Miss Suckow the copyright of her work in *The American Mercury* entitled "Iowa". L. S. 1 p. with printed form.
- 1929
- Helen LeCron to R. S. San Diego, California, 13 March 1929. Sending wedding congratulations. Telegram.
- R. S. to Caroline Woodhams. Santa Fe, New Mexico, 3 May [1929]. Concerning her move to Santa Fe for the summer; references to her living in California, Des Moines, and Algona, Iowa. A. L. S. 4 pp.
- 1930
- Sigrid Undset to Mrs. Knopf. Lillehammer, 10 March 1930. Suggesting that *The Bonney Family* be translated into Norwegian; mentions her admiration for Miss Suckow's work. Typescript copy. 1 p.
- 1931
- Mildred Cook to R. S. Cincinnati, Ohio, 17 May 1931. Concerning her reactions to *The Odyssey of a Nice Girl*. A. L. S. 4 pp.
- H. G. Leach to R. S. New York, 9 July 1931. Asking for a story for publication in *The Forum*. T. L. S. 1 p.
- Otha D. Wearin to R. S. Hastings, Iowa, 8 August 1931. Criticizing a story about Grinnell; asks for a manuscript for his Iowa history collection. T. L. S. 1 p.
- Zephine [Humphrey] to R. S. and Ferner Nuhn. Dorset, Vermont, 22 August [1931]. Concerning news in Dorset; expresses thanks for *Children and Older People*. T. L. S. 3 pp.
- Grace [Tomkinson?] to R. S. Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, 15 September [1931]. Sending news of people in Yarmouth; mentions Canadian folk songs. A. L. S. 4 pp.
- Dorothy Canfield Fisher to R. S. Arlington, Vermont, 8 October [1931]. Concerning her reactions to new books by Sigrid Undset and Willa Cather; mentions John Farrar, Norman Foerster, and Robert Frost. T. L. S. 2 pp.



Robert Frost to R. S. South Shaftsbury, Vermont, 24 December 1931.

Expressing his pleasure with her stories. A. L. S. 2 pp.

[Editor's note. The remainder of Mr. Paluka's article will appear in the March issue of *Books At Iowa*.]

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CLARENCE A. ANDREWS, Assistant Professor of English and Journalism, recently completed a doctoral dissertation on Baron Corvo.

JOHN C. GERBER, Chairman of the Department of English, is a past president of the National Council of Teachers of English. During part of the academic year 1964-1965 he will be in Washington, D.C. to serve as Program Director of Project English for the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

FRANK S. HANLIN, Head of the Acquisitions Department, described The Leigh Hunt Collection in an article for the *Keats-Shelley Journal* in 1959.

HARRY OSTER, Associate Professor of English, has traveled extensively in Europe and America collecting ballads and folksongs. His recordings of Iowa folksongs soon will be released.

FRANK PALUKA, Head of the Special Collections Department, is compiling a selective bibliography of Iowa authors.

STOW PERSONS, Professor of History, has edited *Evolutionary Thought in America* and *American Minds: A History of Ideas*.