



# The Iowa Authors Collection

ROBERT A. McCOWN

The Iowa Authors Collection is a large gathering of books in the Special Collections Department of the University of Iowa Libraries consisting of almost 13,000 printed volumes by over 2000 authors as well as related manuscript material. An Iowa author (for the purpose of this collection) is defined as someone who has had at least one book published and includes (1) writers born in Iowa who lived their lives here; (2) writers born in Iowa who moved away; (3) writers born outside Iowa who moved here and stayed for twenty years. The collection is made up of the writing of Iowans and is not necessarily a collection about Iowa. The book collection thus covers a wide range of subjects and forms and includes fiction, poetry, drama, biography, history, science, mysteries, children's books, autobiography, cookbooks, and family histories. There is no "yardstick of quality" for admission of a book to the collection; the collection, in fact, serves as a "mirror" of the output of Iowa's writers.

The collection was started after World War II in order to preserve the record of Iowa writers for the benefit of present and future generations of Iowans. Another hope was that such an impressive publishing history might also stimulate students interested in writing. Most importantly, the books and manuscripts would be available for reference and research.

Each book in the Iowa Authors Collection has a special bookplate and volumes are shelved alphabetically by author rather than by classification number in the Special Collections Department. The collection comprises not just first editions, but attempts to represent subsequent editions as well, including translations, paperbacks, large-print editions, and limited

editions. The book jackets are left on the books and these jackets are covered with mylar to preserve them.

Books in the collection are obtained in a variety of ways. Many books have been donated by their authors, their relatives, or friends. Every month a list of known Iowa authors is checked against a record of new books published. Out-of-print books are sometimes difficult to obtain, but catalogs of antiquarian dealers are searched for hard-to-locate volumes. In addition to printed books, the collection contains such manuscript material as correspondence, reminiscences, diaries, photographs, and similar papers. These manuscripts come as gifts from the authors or their families.

The books and manuscripts have been used by researchers for a variety of projects. Inquiries have come from as far away as the University of Paris. Master's theses, doctoral dissertations, books and articles have been written using the collection. Biographical information has been collected for as many of the authors as possible and is maintained in alphabetical file folders. Newspaper clippings concerning an author, for instance, can often answer a reference question. Material from the collection has been used in countless exhibitions over the years. The Library has been visited by authors who can see their books being preserved here as part of Iowa's heritage. Often, visitors are able to suggest names of authors to add to the growing list of Iowa authors.

Who are some of these writers? Perhaps the first author was the Sauk warrior Black Hawk. His autobiography was published in 1833. While he spent most of his life in Illinois, he also lived on the western side of the Mississippi. Another early writer was Buffalo Bill Cody, born in Le Claire, Iowa. Life in Nineteenth Century Iowa was chronicled by Hamlin Garland in such books as *Boy Life on the Prairie*, by Herbert Quick in his Iowa trilogy, the first volume of which is *Vandemark's Folly*, and by Harriet Connor Brown in *Grandmother Brown's Hundred Years, 1827-1927*.

The Twentieth Century has seen a bumper crop of Iowa writers. Poets by the bushel: Paul Engle, James Hearst, Joseph

Langland, Raymond Roseliep, Marvin Bell, Frederick Bock, Jay Sigmund, Arthur Davison Ficke, Robert Dana, and more recently Sister Mary Thomas Eulberg, Mary Swander, Amy Clampitt, and former Poet Laureate of the United States Mona Van Duyn. There is a smaller yield of playwrights, such as David Rabe and Susan Glaspell, both prize winners. The field of science fiction has been cultivated by Thomas Disch, R.A. Lafferty, Lloyd Biggle, and John Sladek. There is also a harvest of romance writers including Dorothy Garlock, Leigh Michaels, and most spectacularly, perhaps, Janet Dailey. Mystery stories are produced by such successful current practitioners as Max Allan Collins and Stephen Greenleaf. Many varieties of books for children and young adults have been produced. Three outstanding writers of young adult books are Jeannette Hyde Eyerly, Lynn Hall, and Mildred Wirt Benson. Mrs. Benson, a graduate of the University of Iowa, wrote many of the early Nancy Drew mysteries. Writing about the out-of-doors has been done by such practitioners as Aldo Leopold in *Sand County Almanac* and Norman Maclean in *A River Runs Through It*. As might be expected, novelists have sprung up in abundance: Bess Streeter Aldrich, Richard Bissell, Robert Coover, Paul Corey, Tom Duncan, James Norman Hall, Josephine Herbst, Emerson Hough, MacKinlay Kantor, Frederick Manfred, Jane Smiley, Wallace Stegner, Phil Stong, Ruth Suckow, and Robert Waller, to mention only a few.

What can be concluded about the Iowa Authors Collection? Years ago the staff decided that Iowa Authors were important and they set up a well-defined plan to acquire books and manuscripts by Iowans. Were they always able to achieve their goals? Probably not. Not every Iowa author has been identified nor has every book by an Iowan been acquired. However, the Iowa Authors Collection does not stand here in isolation. In other collections, the staff also acquires and preserves manuscripts of historical interest concerning Iowa people and organizations; the Iowa Women's Archives has begun to gather material on Iowa's women; and the Government Publications Department of the University Libraries acquires Iowa govern-

ment publications. While some of the books in the Iowa Authors Collection can be found in other libraries, the collection is unusual. Not only has the Iowa Authors Collection a statewide significance, but one could also argue for regional, national, and perhaps international importance. Without this resource, the future understanding of Iowa would be greatly diminished.