

Collection #  
M 0107

## HILDEGARDE FLANNER PAPERS, 1920–1977

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### COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF  
COLLECTION: 1 document case, 1 photograph folder

COLLECTION 1920–1977

## DATES:

PROVENANCE: 1978.0003: Mrs. Olin D. Norman (Martha Hawkins), 4545 Marcy Lane, Indianapolis, Indiana (folder 1); 1976.0910: Mrs. Ralph Vonnegut (Eleanor Goodall Vonnegut), 22 East 54<sup>th</sup> Street, Indianapolis, Indiana (folders 2–6).

RESTRICTIONS: None

## COPYRIGHT:

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## ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Elisabeth Haerle Papers, 1921–1927 (SC2425)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1976.0910, 1978.0003

## NOTES:

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

June Hildegarde Flanner (1899–1987) was born in Indianapolis, Ind., the youngest of three daughters of Quaker parents, Frank B. Flanner, a businessman, and Mary Ellen Hockett Buchanan, an actress and playwright. Her father was one of the founders of the firm Flanner and Buchanan Mortuary and also the founder of Flanner House, an organization created to further education and advancement for the African American community in Indianapolis. Hildegarde and her older sisters Mary and Janet were raised in a creative and intellectual environment, and went on to flourish in their creative careers. Mary became a musician and songwriter, and Janet became a successful writer, who, under the pen name Genet, wrote “Letters from Paris,” a regular column, for the *New Yorker*.

During a visit with her mother to the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition of San Francisco, Hildegarde was exposed to the beauty and intellectual excitement of California’s bay area, and it was determined that she would attend the University of California, Berkeley. After her graduation with distinguished honors from Shortridge High School in Indianapolis in 1917, she moved to Berkeley to attend college. Hildegarde experienced early and continued success with her writing. Her play, *Mansions*, one of her early successes, was performed by the Little Theater Society in Indiana to much acclaim. At the age of 21, *Young Girl*, a volume of her poetry, was printed in San Francisco. Her mother, a widow after Frank Flanner’s suicide in 1912, sold their Indianapolis home and joined her in Berkeley in 1922. Their home was destroyed in the Berkeley Hills Fire in 1923, and they relocated to Altadena, California. She later wrote about her experience with the devastating fire in an article for the *New Yorker*.

In 1926, Hildegarde married Frederick Monhoff, an illustrator and architect she met while they were both students in college, and they continued to live in Altadena. Fred, as he was called, did illustrations for many of his wife’s poetry collections. They had one son, John. Later they moved to a home in Calistoga, in California’s Napa Valley, which had been designed by Fred.

Hildegarde Flanner was known for her insightful, descriptive, and touching imagery of the natural world in her poems. She continued to experience lengthy success as a writer throughout her life. In 1941, *New Directions* paid a tribute to her as Poet of the Month. She was also an active conservationist and gardener, activities she enjoyed sharing with her

husband. Fred died in 1977 at their home in Calistoga. Hildegarde Flanner died 27 May 1987.

#### Sources:

Bodenhamer, David J. and Robert G. Barrow. "Frank Flanner." *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Regents of the University of California. *Flanner (Hildegarde) Papers*. Berkeley, CA: Online Archive of California, 2004. <http://oac.cdlib.org> Accessed 21 October 2004.

Items in the collection.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The items in this collection have been combined from two separate accessions, both donated by childhood friends of the author, Martha Hawkins and Eleanor Goodall Vonnegut. The first folder contains seven letters from Hildegarde to her friend and former classmate, Martha Hawkins in Indianapolis. The earliest letter is from Berkeley in 1920, while Hildegarde was a student at the University of California, Berkeley. One letter, written soon after the Berkeley Hills Fire, describes their experience with the devastating fire which destroyed their house and many others in 1923. Other letters, written from New York, depict early-20<sup>th</sup>-century life in Manhattan with descriptions of street market vendors on the Lower East Side and services at St. Marks Church. In the last letter of this folder, dated 14 June 1942, Hildegarde rapturously describes her love and pride of being a new mother.

Folder 2 contains letters written from Hildegarde to her friend and classmate from Tudor Hall, Eleanor Goodall Vonnegut in Indianapolis. These letters commence in 1961, although it is clear that the two friends have stayed in some contact after high school since Hildegarde mentions being a bridesmaid in Eleanor's wedding years before. Hildegarde writes candid, chatty letters about her natural surroundings, her plants in the garden, her and Fred's love of Napa Valley's vineyards and vistas, pets, upcoming publications of her work, Fred's work, their grandchildren, her sister Janet, and their travel adventures. Her later letters reflect the pain of Fred's death and the difficulty of coping after his loss. The last letter in this series is dated 23 December 1977.

This collection also contains clippings of her published work from magazines and newspapers, including the *New Yorker* article, "The Berkeley Fire: 1923." Issues of the following poetry journals are in the collection: *The Measure* (June 1924), *Palms* (October/November 1928, February/March 1929, December 1929), and *Poetry* (January 1934). There is also a clipping of an article about her from *The New Republic* (27 January 1937). Clippings in folder 5 are news reports of Hildegarde's early successes and a newspaper obituary for Eleanor Vonnegut. Clippings in folder 6 pertain to Hildegarde's sister Janet, who was also a successful writer.

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Letters from Hildegarde Flanner to Martha Hawkins,  
26 April 1920–14 June 1942

Letters from Hildegarde Flanner to Eleanor Goodall  
Vonnegut, 10 December 1961–23 December 1977

*Palms* (October/November 1928, February/March  
1929, December 1929); *Poetry* (January 1934)

*The Measure* (June 1924); *The New Republic* (27  
January 1937); Hildegarde Flanner, "Wildfire:  
Berkeley, 1923," *The New Yorker* (23 September

### CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 1

Box 1, Folder 2

Box 1, Folder 3

Box 1, Folder 4

1974)

Newspaper clippings, Hildegarde Flanner's calling card addressed to Eleanor	Box 1, Folder 5
Newspaper and magazine clippings about Janet Flanner	Box 1, Folder 6
Photograph of Hildegard Flanner Monhoff	Photographs: Folder 1

## CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M 0107).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.