

## Preface

### *Objective of this Bibliography*

I intend this bibliography as a guide, in the broadest sense, to the writings of John Sanford. The primary goal, of course, is to describe Sanford's publications physically. A secondary goal, however, is to describe these publications' place in the scope of Sanford's career.

For Sanford, perhaps more so than most writers, there is a story that goes with each book. I have recounted those stories—often ones more of travail than of triumph—as a way of charting Sanford's development into the unique writer he became. My annotations address style and content of the works described as well as the often winding road these works took toward publication.

This bibliography also includes three appendices that I hope will be of use to scholars. Appendix A indexes, by subject, book appearances of Sanford's historical pieces. These include pieces in Sanford's non-fiction books as well as pieces in his novels that are typographically distinct from the narrative. Appendix B indexes pieces about family members and acquaintances from Sanford's historical books. Scenes from his autobiography are not included.

Appendix C presents a description of "The Master's" Circle: Sanford's friend and mentor George Brounoff's knot of intellectuals in the late 1920s and early 1930s, which included Nathanael West, whom Sanford brought in.

### *A Note on Sources*

This book is the product of over twelve years of association with John Sanford, including several hundred hours of conversation with him. I have also drawn from his files of correspondence with his publishers, which are now housed in his archive at the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, the copyright registration materials for his books, and his autobiography, *Scenes from the Life of an American Jew*.

Physical descriptions of books are based on examination of Sanford's own copies, housed at Boston, and volumes in my own collection of Sanford's work. Bonnell and Bonnell's bibliography of Conrad Aiken has been an indispensable model for this project.

### *Acknowledgments*

I thank John Martin for providing specifics about Black Sparrow Press publications and Bob Bason for his help with Capra Press items. I also thank Ralph Sipper for steering this book into print. I express boundless thanks my wife for her indulgence. And I am grateful to John Sanford, for his amused tolerance of my obsession with his work.

The following people and institutions also provided help: Tom Andrews; Barricade Books; Jim at Books Again; Maria L. Morelli at the Howard

Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University (for J. S.'s letters to Jesse Greenstein); Carroll & Graf; Noel Young at Capra Press; Chan Gordon at The Captain's Bookshelf; University of Delaware Library (for J. S.'s letters to Richard Johns); Farrar, Straus & Giroux; Dan Giancola; Willis G. Regier at University of Illinois Press; Anthony M. Tedeschi at Lilly Library, Indiana University (regarding Capra Press); Anne-Mari Karttunen at University of Joensuu; Steven G. Kellman; Susan L. Cash at The Kent State University Press; Ruth J. Hutnik at Lafayette College; Sarah Almond at Library of America; *The Literary Reveiw*; Nora Gorman at Northwestern University Press; Lin Rolens at Oyster Press; Sabrina R. Paris at Pearsons Education (regarding Prentice-Hall); Per Petterson; Pushcart Prize; Jean Rose at the Random House Group (regarding Jonathan Cape); Robert W. Smith; Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin (for J. S.'s letters to Angel Flores); The University of Wisconsin Press.

## Introduction

Had I so interfered in behalf of the rich  
. . . it would have been all right.”

—John Brown, 1859

John Sanford published in nine decades, a remarkable feat for anyone, but particularly remarkable for someone who came to his profession relatively late in life. Sanford’s first published piece appeared in the expatriate little magazine *Tambour* in 1929, when he was 25 years old, and his first book was not released until 1933, when he was 28.

### *Little Preparation for a Career in Writing*

All the more remarkable is how little formal preparation Sanford had for his career as a writer. He was a poor student in school. He did not graduate from Manhattan’s DeWitt Clinton High—where his main extracurricular activity was cutting classes—when he failed English his last semester. Sanford spent a year at Lafayette College, where he unsuccessfully attempted to write for the student newspaper. This tenure was followed by the shortest of stints at Northwestern and Lehigh, where he lasted just two weeks. Afterward, he needed a fraudulent diploma obtained by bribing a state official to gain admission to Fordham Law School, but he dropped out after less than a month. Finally, the next term, Sanford returned to Fordham, where he completed his law degree. He then joined his father’s legal practice.

However, it was during his law studies that Sanford chanced to meet a childhood friend on a New Jersey golf course; this 1925 meeting would forever change Sanford’s path in life. To Sanford’s astonishment, the friend—Nathan Weinstein, who was now going by the name of Nathanael West—announced that he was writing a book. Suddenly, the wayward and goal-less Sanford knew he wanted to write one too.

Sanford renewed his friendship with West, often accompanying him on walks through New York City and listening to West discourse on art and literature. It was West who introduced Sanford to an enduring model: an obscure short story writer named Ernest Hemingway. Sanford helped read proof on West’s first novel, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*. And, Sanford shared a hunting cabin with West one summer in the Adirondacks, where West worked on *Miss Lonelyhearts* and Sanford his first novel, *The Water Wheel*. Later, West induced Sanford to exchange his given name, Julian Shapiro, for the name of the principle character in *The Water Wheel*. That decision Sanford would come to rue.

While not as self-consciously lean as Hemingway’s or West’s writing, Sanford’s prose has an unembellished sparseness that clearly shows his friend’s influence. Early on, James Joyce’s influence could be seen

in Sanford's eschewing of apostrophes in contractions. Later, Joyce's inspiration endured in Sanford's continuing quest for arresting and unconventional expressions. Sanford rarely used simile; rather, he preferred the directness and power of metaphor. He used nouns as verbs, verbs as nouns. Often his prose has poetic elements, such as multiple interior rhymes. Sanford's work is marked by a constant striving for innovation.

#### *A Second Career at Sixty-three*

Sanford's remaining influence was William Carlos Williams, whose book of historical vignettes, *In the American Grain*, Sanford read in the mid-1920s. The concept of history as literature took root in Sanford early. From the outset of his career, Sanford salted his works of fiction with historical interludes. These episodes were often a source of contention with publishers and cost him contracts. For example, *Seventy Times Seven* did not appear in England because Sanford refused to remove historical material.

In all, Sanford published eight novels, which showed increasing strain with the bounds of fiction, as the books became more and more dominated by teachers and preachers, who delivered sermons and lectures to Sanford's readers. Finally, in 1967, with the publication of *The \$300 Man*, Sanford had exhausted the novel form as a medium. At the suggestion of his wife, screenwriter Marguerite Roberts, Sanford embarked on what would become his second career, at the age of 63.

Three years in the writing, *A More Goodly Country* established Sanford's mature narrative voice, or rather voices. Consisting entirely of vignettes about historical events and figures, this book allowed Sanford to explore history by means of fable, parable and brief dramatic monologue. Sanford brought history to life through magnificent flights of imagination. However, so unconventional was the book that it would take another three years and more than 200 rejections before Sanford could find a publisher.

With the issuing of *A More Goodly Country* in 1975, Sanford's second career, as a non-fiction writer, was underway. There would follow eighteen more volumes of history, memoir and autobiography. It is remarkable that twelve of these books were published after Sanford reached the age of 80. At an age when most writers are retired or dead, Sanford was hitting his literary stride. And he continued to write until just a month before his death, when deteriorating eyesight made writing impossible. He died in March 2003, leaving three unpublished works.

#### *The Finest Unread Author Writing in English*

Despite the beauty of Sanford's writing and the gravity and pertinence of his themes, Sanford remains mostly unknown and almost entirely unread. His books have been issued only in small editions, and only one has gone into a second printing. Early on, Sanford's work was published

by the premier houses of the day. But Sanford quarreled with editors and publishers, and he refused to compromise.

As a result of Sanford's intractability, his publishers would each decide in turn that Sanford was more trouble than he was worth: one book was enough. Thus, they had little investment in his work. They did not promote his books because Sanford would never be a member of their stable. Un-promoted, his books did not sell, and the chore of publishing Sanford would be passed on to another house. If Sanford had intentionally tried to sabotage his career, he could have done no more damage than he did by being rash and intransigent.

It was not until 1977, when Sanford had been writing for over 40 years, that the Capra Press followed *Adirondack Stories* with *View from this Wilderness*, thus becoming the first of his publishers to issue a second Sanford volume. And it was not until 1984 that Black Sparrow Press began what would be the longest run of Sanford titles from a single publisher, six in all. However, by the 1980s, Sanford was an old man, whose work was of interest only to small art-house publishers. His chances of wider success had expired.

In addition to his quarrelsome ways with publishers, Sanford's lack of success must necessarily also be traced to the content of his books. From the start, one can see Sanford's obsession with the darker side of American history. In *The Water Wheel*, there is an episode musing on Philip Nolan, the Man without a Country. In *Seventy Times Seven*, there is a historical poetic interlude depicting man's inhumanity since America's earliest days. From that book onward, the harshness of Sanford's examination of the inequities in American history would only become more strident.

#### *Literature as a Weapon*

In 1936, Paramount had hired Sanford as a screenwriter. In late 1939, he joined the Hollywood cell of the Communist Party. The works that followed Sanford's political awakening became progressively more leftist. In a period when many American communists were reassessing their party membership, any doubts Sanford may have had only served to increase the fervor of his dedication to the cause. Even the Communists condemned 1943's *The People from Heaven* as too radical. The following *A Man Without Shoes* and *The Land that Touches Mine* were even more deeply political works, which criticized the American social and economic system as fundamentally unfair. This hard-line stance would eventually force Sanford to self-publish *A Man Without Shoes*.

Even in his later non-fiction historical books, Sanford's devotion to progressive causes remained intense. To read *The Winters of that Country*, a blistering indictment of America, is to find oneself denounced for having profited from centuries of injustice; the book is an accusation aimed at all Americans. Even Sanford's peerless prose could induce few readers to endure such a withering rebuke of the values in which they

were raised to believe. Sanford must have known that these works would find little acceptance with the general reading public, who seek diversion, not chastisement. But he could not dim his ire, or the fire of his dream.

One historical figure to whom Sanford repeatedly returned is John Brown, the abolitionist whose assault on the armory at Harper's Ferry led to his execution. Sanford oft repeated Brown's statement: "Had I so interfered in behalf of the rich . . . it would have been all right." One could also apply that idea to Sanford's work: had he so written in behalf of the rich, he might have sold well and perhaps been a household name. Instead, Sanford chose to risk all in a quixotic attempt to right the wrongs of society. He sacrificed potential success to his cause. He wrote not to entertain the public, but to condemn it. He wrote to goad Americans to abandon complacency and to right society's wrongs.

### *The Luxury to Write What He Pleased*

Soon after arriving in Los Angeles, John Sanford met fellow screenwriter Marguerite Roberts at Paramount Studios. The couple would wed two years later, and Roberts would go on to become one of the most successful and highest-paid screenwriters in Hollywood, including twelve straight years under contract at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. After Sanford's year-long tenure at Paramount was up, he had a brief stint at M-G-M. Following that, he would be gainfully employed only once more, when he co-wrote Clark Gable and Carol Lombard's *Honky-Tonk* with Roberts. For the rest of his life, Sanford would be supported by his wife's earnings.

Thus, Sanford experienced a rare luxury among professional writers: the luxury to write what he pleased, without consideration of economic consequences. Sanford was not compelled to sell books to put food on the table. He did not have to seek out other writing assignments to pay the bills. Sanford did not do book tours, did not attend signings, did not make public appearances or give lectures. He left the selling of his works to others, as if he believed that to curry the favor of readers would taint his work.

Unlike many writers of his stature, Sanford did not review books, did not write articles for magazines, did not have to interrupt the process of writing books that did not sell so that he could make a living. In fact, aside from several pieces in literary little magazines at the outset of his career, and during a brief editorship of *Black & White/The Clipper* in 1940–41, Sanford hardly published in periodicals at all.

On the one hand, this lack of economic necessity freed Sanford to pursue his art wherever the muse took him. Without this freedom, his life's work would not exist in its current form. On the other hand, one wonders what Sanford would have produced, if he had been forced by economics to temper his indignation and recast his reforming vision, so that his books would sell.

If he had needed to write to make money, would Sanford have been capable of writing for the popular audience, and what would have been

the result? Would his missteps have been fewer? Would he have muted the excesses of politics that flawed his later fiction? Would he still have achieved the high splendor of his style under these mundane constraints? Certainly, he would have had to write more and differently to earn a living. But, could he have achieved the mass appeal that always eluded him? One wonders whether economic necessity would have improved Sanford's art, or merely blunted his talent.

Nonetheless, despite its excesses and imperfections, John Sanford's writing has achieved a sustained beauty and passion that is rarely seen. Even his less fully realized works have passages of brilliance that commend them. And, in those works where style and content felicitously meet, Sanford is revealed as a master of his craft; his writing sparkles with the clean lines of a gem.

Although nearly unknown to the wider reading public, Sanford's work evokes fervor in critics and academics, as well as an almost fanatical devotion from a small cadre of collectors. It is, in particular, for these people this bibliography is written.

# A Books, Pamphlets and Broadsides

## A1 THE WATER WHEEL

1933

*First edition:*

THE WATER WHEEL | *Julian L. Shapiro* | [Dragon Press ornament 2.7 x 1.3 cm.] | THE DRAGON PRESS | *Duffield and Green*

19 x 12.2 cm. 1–20<sup>8</sup> 21<sup>2</sup>. Pp.1–10, 11–26, 27–28, 29–86, 87–88, 89–125, 126–128, 129–157, 158–160, 161–204, 205–206, 207–281, 282–284, 285–324.

P.1 half title: [ . . . ] *The Dragon Series* | *Edited by Angel Flores*; p.2 blank; p.3 title; p.4 copyright: [ . . . ] *First Edition* | *Designed by* | M. A. FRIEDMAN [J. S.'s cousin Melvin] | *Printed at the Plant of* | THE HADDON CRAFTSMEN, INC.; p.5 disclaimer; p.6 blank; p.7 dedication: *This book is for* | O. B. [Olga Brounoff]; p.8 blank; p.9 section title; p.10 blank; pp.11–26 text; p.27 section title; p.28 blank; pp.29–86 text; p.87 section title; p.88 blank; pp.89–125 text; p.126 blank; p.127 section title; p.128 blank; pp.129–157 text; p.158 blank; p.159 section title; p.160 blank; pp.161–204 text; p.205 section title; p.206 blank; pp.207–281 text; p.282 blank; p.283 section title; p.284 blank; pp.285–324 text.

Dark green cloth boards; lettered in gold across the spine: THE | WATER | WHEEL | SHAPIRO, and at the foot: DRAGON | PRESS. Top edges cut; fore edges roughly cut; bottom edges roughly trimmed; endpapers. Bright yellow dust jacket printed in green, gray and black, in swirling rings of water surrounding a black vortex, designed by J. S.'s friend Lester Rondell; back quotes praise from Samuel Putnam, William Carlos Williams and Manuel Komroff. Yellowish-white wove paper.

Published 27 March 1933 at \$2.50; number of copies uncertain [500–1,500].

Note: Portions of *The Water Wheel* were revised from pieces published in *The New Review* as “Prose” (C7) and “The First Chapter of a Novel” (C11), and in *Contempo* as “The Dime: A Cruel Story” (C15).

*The Water Wheel* was originally accepted by Mohawk Press but then subsequently rejected. It was finally published in the Dragon Press Series by Angel Flores, a professor at Cornell University. J. S. had been introduced to Flores by Nathanael West, who also was expected to be a Dragon Press author. An early working title was *Among the Rocks*, but Flores felt this contained too much “Eliotite symbolism.” Later in



life, J. S. claimed he remained unsure of the meaning of “The Water Wheel”—which had been suggested by West—guessing the title might have represented the protagonist’s being swirled by forces over which he does not have control. J. S. worked on this book in the summer of 1931, when he and West rented a hunting cabin together in the Adirondacks at Viele Pond.

Dragon Press Series books typically were printed in editions of 500 copies. However, in a letter to *Pagany* editor, Richard Johns (1/10/33), J. S. wrote that Duffield and Green, the distributor for the book, “made Flores triple the print order.” And in an undated letter to Angel Flores, J. S. wrote, “Haddon [Craftsmen, the book’s binder] is waiting for your O.K. in order to proceed. In addition, would you specify to them whether you want all 1500 copies printed and bound, or whether you want only 500 bound and the rest set up to wait for further orders.” J. S. later recalled that, when the Dragon Press went out of business in 1933, the Haddon Craftsmen came after him for unpaid bills. Whether all ordered copies were bound, and whether all bound but unsold copies survived remains unclear. By any standard, *The Water Wheel* is a scarce book.

Stylistically, *The Water Wheel* owes much to Joyce. The content is highly autobiographical, including an episode with a character based on Olga Brounoff, sister of J. S.’s friend George Brounoff and dedicatee of the book. Its protagonist is named John Sanford. There is little similarity of *The Water Wheel* to J. S.’s later writing, although the author’s preoccupation with history is evident even here, as seen in the protagonist’s musings on the Man without a Country, Philip Nolan. Also, quotations from Robert Juet’s *The Discovery of the Hudson River* would return much later to form the titles of J. S.’s autobiography.

## A2 THE OLD MAN’S PLACE

1935

### a. First edition:

[in orangish red:] *The | Old Man’s Place |* [in black:] by JOHN B. SANFORD ~ *published by* | ALBERT and CHARLES BONI, INC. | [in orangish red:] NEW YORK | [oval ornament of Pan 1.3 x 1 cm.]

18.6 x 12 cm. 1<sup>4</sup> 2–17<sup>8</sup>. Pp.1–8, 9–101, 102, 103–167, 168, 169–209, 210, 211–255, 256, 257–263, 264.

P.1 half title; p.2 blank; p.3 title; p.4 copyright: [ . . . ] | [rule] | PRINTED IN U. S. A. BY HADDON CRAFTSMEN INC. | TYPOGRAPHY BY M. A. FRIEDMAN [J. S.’s cousin Melvin]; p.5 dedication: *This book is for* | ‘THE GOVERNOR’ [Philip D. Shapiro, J. S.’s father]; p.6 blank; p.7 fly title; p.8 blank; pp.9–101 text; p.102 blank; pp.103–167 text; p.168 blank;

pp.169–209 text; p.210 blank; pp.211–255 text; p.256 blank; pp.257–263 text; p.264 blank.

Light gray cloth boards; printed in orangish red across the spine, in a dark navy blue panel, 2.2 x 18.8 cm.: THE | OLD | MAN'S | PLACE | [small ornament] | JOHN B. | SANFORD | [large blue floral ornament in red box] | [in red box near the foot in blue:] ALBERT | AND | CHARLES | BONI. Top edges stained black; fore edges roughly cut; bottom edges cut; endpapers. Cream colored paper jacket printed vividly in black and bluish green, with three menacing, dark figures looming over a tiny farmhouse in the background; designed by Worch; back presents a staged letter "FROM THE AUTHOR TO THE PUBLISHER" from Warrensburg, New York, and dated 1 August 1935. Yellowish-white wove paper.

Published October 1935 at \$2.50; 2,346 copies.

Note: J. S.'s archive contains an advance proof copy of *The Old Man's Place*, which consists of tall galleys bound in plain tan boards, with black fabric tape on the spine. The front panel of the dust jacket is glued to the upper cover; the jacket's spine is glued to the lower cover. This is the only copy I am aware of, although Boni reported that 154 copies were bound in paper and distributed to the book trade.

*The Old Man's Place* was based on stories about a group of poachers who terrorized the Warrensburg area one summer. These were told to J. S. by Harry Reoux, the owner of Viele Pond. The first draft was written in two months in the fall of 1931 on the roof of the Sutton Hotel, which was managed by Nathanael West, and in whose unoccupied rooms West allowed fellow writers to stay for free. The book was placed at Boni by J. S.'s cousin Melvin Friedman, who designed the typography. It was the first book Boni had published in three years. J. S. revised the manuscript during the summer of 1935. The original title in the contract with Boni was *The Trampled Vineyard* (a misquote from Julia Ward Howe), although an author's note in *Contact* said J. S. "is almost finished with a book to be called 'Adirondack Novel.'"

Under the influence of West, and hoping to boost sales by avoiding an anti-Semitic reaction to his name, J. S. published this book under a pseudonym, taking the name of his *Water Wheel* protagonist. (J. S. would later legally change his name to John Sanford in 1941.) The back of the jacket furthers this transformation with its swaggering letter from "Jack" Sanford, which mixes fact and fiction in describing his Jack London-esque adventures. *The Water Wheel* is not listed as a previous book, and thus *The Old Man's Place* is sometimes erroneously described as J. S.'s first book.

J. S. had already received his law degree in 1927, passed the bar, and joined his father's law practice. But after the Crash of 1929, the practice dwindled, and J. S. devoted himself full time to writing. Early in 1935, J. S.'s father had a heart attack and was no longer able to maintain what remained of his practice. J. S.'s aunt prevailed upon her nephew to give up writing and return to the law. J. S. refused. This refusal was pivotal, in that *The Old Man's Place* brought J. S. to the attention of a Hollywood