

FELLOWSHIPS

March 17, 1942

Dear Mr. Aswell: Thanks for your note of March 8 and the enclosed recommendation. Every morning for several months I have wondered who was helping Sgt. York in his literary phase, and so it is interesting to be in the know.

Thank you again for the recommendation, which came in plenty of time, and I assume was speeded forward by the mumbled spells.

Sincerely yours,

WILLIAM C. HAYGOOD

WCH:McK

Mr. James R. Aswell
1301 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee

FISK
UNIVERSITY

FELLOWSHIPS

James R. Aswell,
1301 Newman Ave.,
Nashville, Tenn.
March 8, 1942.

	WCH	3/10	WCH	17

Mr. Wm. C. Haygood,
Director for Fellowships,
Julius Rosenwald Fund,
4901 Ellis Avenue,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

On my return from my last trip, my wife gave me the enclosed report blank which I have hastened to fill out. The first was mailed a couple of months ago and I'm distressed that you did not receive it.

For several months now I have been with the CHICAGO SUN, traveling with Sgt. Alvin York and helping him prepare his daily column for the SUN. The first report blank was filled out up in the Wolf River Valley. I gave it to a passing farmer who said he was bound for Jamestown and promised to mail it the first thing. My faith in red, honest-looking faces is sadly shaken. However, I'm keeping my fingers crossed and mumbling suitable spells, hoping that this copy reaches you before the gate comes down.

Sincerely

James R. Aswell

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FELLOWSHIPS

James R. Aswell
 1301 Newman Ave.,
 Nashville, Tenn.
 Dec. 14, 1941.

Mr. Wm. C. Haygood,
 Julius Rosenwald Fund,
 4901 Ellis Ave.,
 Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Haygood:

This is a belated reply to your note of November 17th. I have been pushed to the limit in defense-morale work and have not, until now, had the least chance to reply. Please pardon the delay.

I have in mind three persons who have promising plans for 1942 fellowships:

John Lipscomb, c/o The Nashville Tennessean, has in mind a study of the poll tax evil in the South. John is assistant-city-editor of The Tennessean. He has specialized for several years in investigating the poll tax in this state.

E.E. Miller, Greyllyn Apts., Nashville, has planned a biography of his father, E.E. Miller, Sr., for many years editor of The Southern Agriculturist and founder of The Progressive Farmer. Mr. Miller was one of the pioneer advocates of conservation and diversified cropping in the South. Young Miller is at present State Editor of the Tennessee Writers' Project. In my opinion, he is one of the most promising writers in the section.

Mrs. Sue McDaniel, 2008 15th Ave., S., is working on a survey of insurance rackets that have been victimizing Southern Negroes for ~~some~~ years. Mrs. McDaniel has been a social worker. She is qualified to deal with the subject.

Sincerely

James R. Aswell

sent 12/15
 has asked for
 sent 12/15-



July 1941
7440

PROGRESS REPORT - JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND FELLOWS

Name James Robert Aswell

Present position Free-lance writer.

Address 1301 Newman Avenue,
Nashville, Tennessee.

Since your fellowship was awarded have you received

(a) a salary increase? _____

(b) a promotion in rank? If so, please describe --If selling to the Saturday Evening Post and Collier's can be called a promotion. Income increase it certainly is.

Degree received during award, or since, or progress made toward degree: Novel approximately two-thirds completed at this writing.

Title of dissertation _____

Publications, if any. (Please give titles, date, and place of publication.)
My estimation of a year as sufficient time for completion of my novel was over-optimistic. Another year of work, at the very least, is before me.

Special honors or activities _____

General remarks The Rosenwald grant has been of inestimable benefit to me. I have learned and accomplished more in this year than during any preceding five. I shall never cease being grateful.

Incidentally, I am pleased to learn that Miss Moore received a grant. She deserves it, if anyone ever did.



Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To

Mr. James R. Aswell

1501 Newman Avenue

Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No. 2628

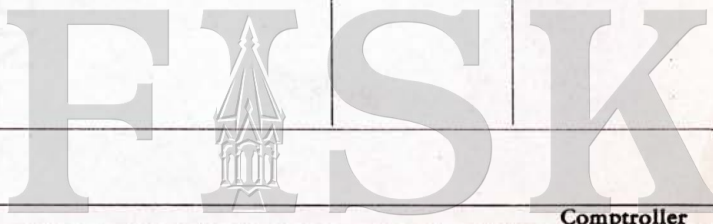
Date March 31, 1941

2

Final payment on fellowship granted 4/18/40 - - - - \$140.00

Ck. #34666

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	59-7A	\$140.00	

Prepared by AM	Checked by	Posted by	
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Comptroller

UNIVERSITY

Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To

Mr. James R. Aswell

1301 Newman Avenue

Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No. 2422

Date February 28, 1941

Eleventh installment on fellowship grant - - - - - \$140.00

Ck.#24414

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	39-7A	\$140.00	
Prepared by AM	Checked by	Posted by	Comptroller

FISK UNIVERSITY

Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To

Mr. James R. Aswell
1301 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No.

2385

Date

January 31, 1941

Tenth installment on fellowship grant - - - - - \$140.00

Ck.#24302

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	39-7A	\$140.00	

Prepared by

AM

Checked by

Posted by



Comptroller

Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To

Mr. James R. Aswell

1501 Newman Avenue

Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No. 2189

Date December 31, 1940

Ninth payment on fellowship - - - - - \$140.00

Ch.#24150

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	39-7A	\$140.00	

Prepared by

AM

Checked by

Posted by



Comptroller

UNIVERSITY

Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To

Mr. James R. Aswell
1301 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No. 2033

Date November 29, 1940

Eighth payment on fellowship grant - - - - - \$140.00

Ck.#23950

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	59-7A	\$140.00	

Prepared by	Checked by	Posted by
AM		



Comptroller

Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To Mr. James R. Aswell
1501 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee


Payment Voucher No. 1835

Date October 31, 1940

Seventh payment on fellowship grant - - - - - \$140.00

Ck.#23745

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	59-7A	\$140.00	

Prepared by AM	Checked by	Posted by	 Comptroller
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FISK UNIVERSITY

Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To Mr. James R. Aswell
1801 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee


Payment Voucher No. 1750

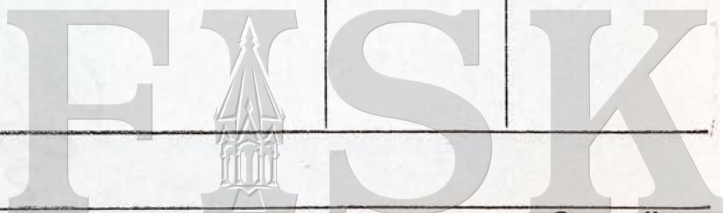
Date September 30, 1940

Sixth payment on fellowship grant - - - - - \$140.00

Ch.#25658

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships Neg	39-7A	\$140.00	

Prepared by AM	Checked by	Posted by	 Comptroller
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UNIVERSITY

Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To

Mr. James R. Aswall

1301 Newman Avenue

Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No. 1612

Date August 30, 1940

Fifth payment on fellowship granted 4/18/40 - - - - - \$140.00

Ck. #23475

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	39-7A	\$140.00	

Prepared by	Checked by	Posted by	Comptroller
McK			



Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To James R. Aswell
1301 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No. 1484

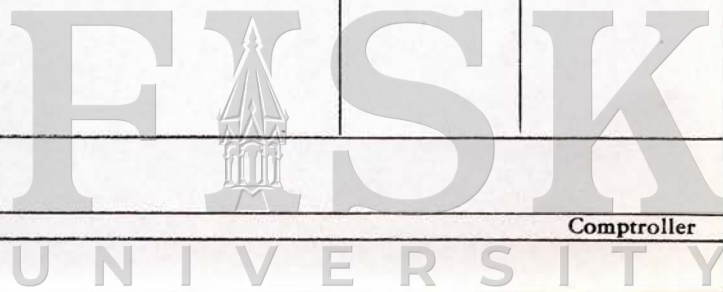
Date July 31, 1940

Fourth payment on fellowship granted 4/18/40 - - - - - \$140.00

Ck. #23303

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	39-7A	\$140.00	

Prepared by McK	Checked by	Posted by	Comptroller
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Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To

Mr. James R. Aswell

1301 Newman Avenue

Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No. 1508

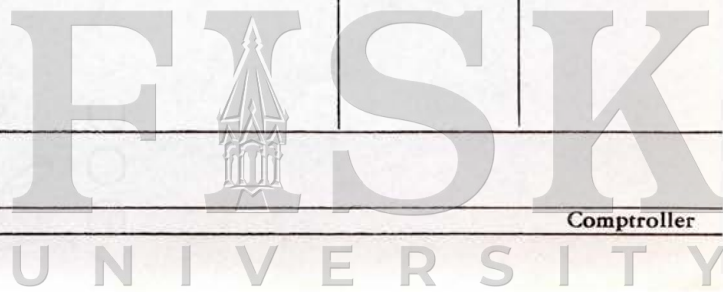
Date July 1, 1940

Third payment on fellowship grant - - - - - \$140.00

Ck.#23327

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	39-7A	\$140.00	

Prepared by AM	Checked by	Posted by	Comptroller
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Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To Mr. James R. Aswell
1501 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No. 1516

Date May 31, 1940

Second installment on fellowship granted 4/18/40 - - - - - \$140.00

Ck.#23114

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	39-7A	\$140.00	

Prepared by AM	Checked by	Posted by	Comptroller
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Julius Rosenwald Fund

4901 Ellis Avenue
CHICAGO

FELLOWSHIPS

To

Mr. James R. Aswell

1801 Newman Avenue

Nashville, Tennessee

Payment Voucher No. 1251

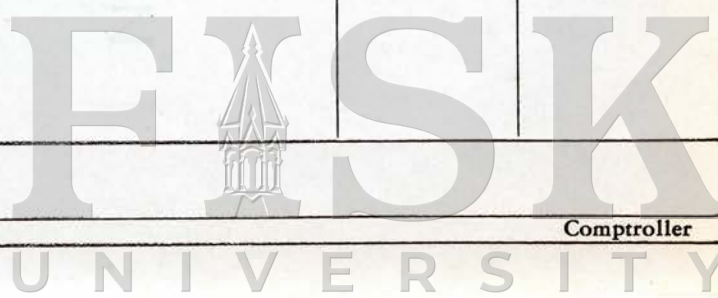
Date May 14, 1940

First payment on fellowship grant - - - - - \$160.00

Ck.#28051

Accounts	Appropriation No.	Debit	Credit
White Southern Fellowships	39-7A	\$160.00	

Prepared by AM	Checked by	Posted by	Comptroller
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FELLOWSHIPS

May 8, 1940

Dear Mr. Aswell: I am returning to you the exhibit material which you sent with your application for a fellowship. This includes sections of GOD BLESS THE DEVIL, Story and Harpers, and TENNESSEE.

We also received a copy of THESE ARE OUR LIVES from the publisher, and I do not know whether this was sent at your request or by one of the others in the Writers' Project. Will you please let me know whether or not it is yours?

Very truly yours,

GEORGE M. REYNOLDS
mu

GMR*MLU

Mr. James R. Aswell
1301 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee

FISK
UNIVERSITY

FELLOWSHIPS

May 2, 1940

Dear Mr. Aswell: Your recent letter to
 Mr. Reynolds has been re-
ferred to me. For convenience I have set up a
payment plan of \$160 payable to you on May 15, and
monthly installments of \$140 each beginning June 1,
1940 and ending with the payment due on April 1, 1941.

We do not require progress
reports from our Fellows. Toward the end of your period
of study we shall get in touch with you in connection
with a report on how the work has gone during the past
year.

Very truly yours,

DOROTHY A. ELVIDGE

DAE:AM

Mr. James R. Aswell
1301 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee

FISK
UNIVERSITY

FELLOWSHIPS

April 30, 1940

Dear Mr. Aswell: Thank you for your note of
the 29th. Your former let-
ter was safely received.

In a few days Miss Elvidge
will write you regarding a payment plan under
the fellowship.

Very truly yours,

GMR*MLU

GEORGE M. REYNOLDS
me

Mr. James R. Aswell
1301 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee

FISK
UNIVERSITY

FELLOWSHIPS

	30	4/29	30

James R. Aswell,
1301 Newman Ave.,
Nashville, Tenn.,
April 29, 1940.

Mr. George M. Reynolds,
Director for Fellowships,
Julius Rosenwald Fund,
4901 Ellis Avenue,

Dear Mr. Reynolds:

A few days ago I mailed a letter of acceptance. I am already uneasy for fear that the letter may have miscarried in the mails. If this should have happened, please consider this note as very positive acceptance of the grant.

Sincerely,

James R. Aswell

JRA:ww

FELLOWSHIPS

GWR	53	RE	o

James R. Aswell,
1301 Newman Ave.,
Nashville, Tenn.,
April 22, 1940.

Mr. George M. Reynolds,
Director of Fellowships,
Julius Rosenwald Fund,
4901 Ellis Avenue,
Chicago, Illinois.

Dear Mr. Reynolds:-

Just to make it official, I do indeed accept the grant. If possible, I should like to have it in monthly installments, beginning May 15, 1940.

One thing I forgot to ask you--Am I supposed to make progress reports on the novel? If so, to whom and how often?

I enjoyed meeting you people and again want to thank you for your kindness. I shall do my best to justify it.

Sincerely,

James R. Aswell

FISK
UNIVERSITY
5715

FELLOWSHIPS

75 1110

James R. Aswell
1301 Newman Ave.,
Nashville, Tenn.
March 23, 1940.

Dear Mr. Reynolds:

Since mailing you the Tennessee Guide last week I have been haunted with a fear that, in my rush to mark the sections which I did, I may have placed the wrong symbols beside a couple of the titles in the Table of Contents. The Memphis City section should have been marked with an "X", indicating collaboration. I did the historical part of this paper and Jack Boone, now with the University of Iowa, did the contemporary scene and points of interest. The essay on Negroes should be marked "O", indicating rewriting and editing. It may be that this is the way they are marked. However, please check them if it is not too much trouble.

James R. Aswell

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UNIVERSITY

FELLOWSHIPS ASWELL JAMES

EXCERPT FROM LETTER FROM HERSCHEL BRICKELL

3-1 8-40

"Mr. Aswell's stories are really anecdotes and as such well enough written, although neither they nor the sketches in "These are our lives" form any very sound basis for a judgment of the writer's ability to handle long fiction. About all that can be said is that Mr. Aswell and Miss Moore are both perfectly competent at their jobs - both show a thorough grasp of the principles of writing and also an understanding of their material, in other words. They would be plain gambles without more fiction upon which to judge their possibilities."

FELLOWSHIPS

March 15, 1940

Dear Mr. Brickell: I am enclosing some short
stories by James R. Aswell
which are soon to be published by the University
of North Carolina Press. What do you think of
them? They are his own, from research to final
writing.

Sincerely yours,

GMR*MLU

GEORGE M. REYNOLDS

Mr. Herschel Brickell
Care of Mrs. W. R. Wade
Clifton Heights
Natchez, Mississippi

*Double Trouble
Mammy Wise
Something -- Tee
Cumb Ain Wet or Dry*

FISK
UNIVERSITY

FELLOWSHIPS

March 4, 1940

Dear Mr. Aswell: We should like some exhibit material for our Committee, and will appreciate your sending it just as soon as possible. We have a copy of These Are Our Lives, and have marked your stories in that volume. In addition, can you send us a reprint of some of your stories in Story, and the one that appeared in Harper's for March, 1938? Anything else that you would like to send will, of course, be useful, and everything will be returned to you later in the spring.

Very truly yours,

GMR:MLJ

GEORGE M. REYNOLDS

Mr. James Robert Aswell
Tennessee Writers' Project
George Peabody College
Nashville, Tennessee

February 22, 1940

Dear Mr. Botkin: Some weeks ago we sent you
a plan of work submitted by
Mr. James R. Aswell, asking for a statement
regarding him and his work. All of Mr. Aswell's
references are in but this one, and I wonder if
you can send your recommendation along in the
very near future.

Very truly yours,

GMR*MLU

Mr. B. A. Botkin
Department of English
University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma

FISK
UNIVERSITY

FELLOWSHIPS

December 29, 1939

Dear Mr. Burnett: Thank you very much for
your statement regarding
Mr. James R. Aswell. I shall be glad to pre-
sent this additional word to the Committee on
Fellowships.

Very truly yours,

GMR*MLU

GREGORY M. REYNOLDS

MLU

Mr. Whit Burnett
Story and the Story Press
432 Fourth Avenue
New York, N. Y.

FISK
UNIVERSITY

FELLOWSHIPS

December 14, 1939

Dear Mr. Burnett: Mr. James R. Aswell of Nashville, Tennessee, is applying to us for a fellowship. I am enclosing a copy of his plan of work.

Although Mr. Aswell does not list you among his references, he indicates that he has had various contacts with you, and that your magazine published one of his stories. We shall be very grateful indeed for anything that you can tell us about Mr. Aswell and about his ability to write. Whatever you say will, of course, be held in strict confidence.

Very truly yours,
GEORGE M. REYNOLDS

GM

GMR*MLU

Mr. Whit Burnett
Story Magazine
432 Fourth Avenue
New York, N. Y.

FISK
UNIVERSITY

FELLOWSHIPS

James R. Aswell

1321 Mc Chesney Ave.,
Nashville, Tenn.

August 28, 1939.

	GMR	30	30 31

Secretary,
Julius Rosenwald Fund,
4901 Ellis Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:

At the suggestion of W. T. Couch I
requesting an application form for a
Rosenwald fellowship. I have always been
under the impression that Rosenwald
Awards were given solely for racial or
social studies. If this is so, please
let me know. My project is the comple-
tion of a long novel, Wayfaring Stranger,
for which I am under contract to Harper's.
Also I would like to know if the Awards
are given all during the year or, in toto,
on a fixed date.

Sincerely

James R. Aswell

JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND

4901 ELLIS AVENUE

CHICAGO

Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship

Name of Candidate Mr. James R. Aswell

Report Requested of Mr. W. T. Couch

University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill

The above-named candidate has applied to this Fund for a fellowship and has given your name as a reference. The candidate's plan of work is attached. Please return it with your statement.

We shall appreciate your frank opinion of this applicant's personal characteristics and qualifications, and an appraisal of his plan of work and of his ability to make a noteworthy contribution in the field of study proposed. *An early reply to this inquiry will be of great assistance in allowing the Fellowship Committee sufficient time for adequate consideration of the large number of candidates who apply for grants.*

Your reply will be held in strictest confidence.

George M. Reynolds

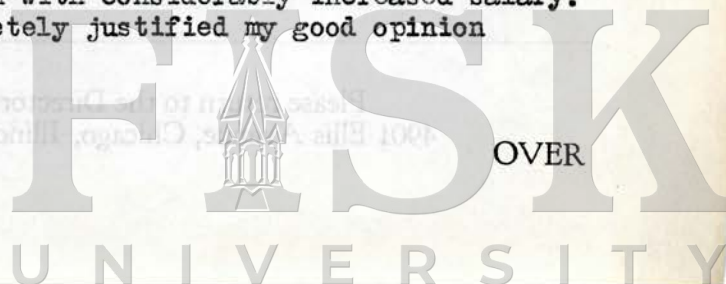
Director for Fellowships

REPORT

I have known Mr. James Aswell for a little over a year. I became acquainted with him through my work as Regional Director of the Federal Writers' Project.

Mr. Aswell did a large amount of work on the volume These Are Our Lives. He edited all the stories from Tennessee and wrote one story himself. Since I did the final editing, I am in a position to have an opinion on the quality of Mr. Aswell's work. All the manuscripts he submitted were in excellent condition and needed no further work on my part.

I first became aware of Mr. Aswell's ability through reading a story of his in Harper's. Shortly after I read this story, he was dropped from the Tennessee staff for reasons which I considered unjustified. I went to Tennessee especially to investigate and decided that he should be put back on the staff and the man then in charge removed. After much difficulty with WPA officials in Tennessee, my recommendations were carried out, and Mr. Aswell was restored to the staff and given a responsible position with considerably increased salary. Since that time, Mr. Aswell's work has completely justified my good opinion of him.



Only a few days ago, we received a manuscript of tall tales, God Bless the Devil, from Tennessee. I read this manuscript Sunday a week ago, and in my opinion the tall tales in the volume are as good as any material of that kind ever published. A few days later, Mrs. Paine of the Press editorial department gave me a report on the manuscript which I was glad to discover was in accord with my own opinion. We will publish the manuscript either this spring or next fall, 1940.

Mr. Aswell edited all of this volume and wrote a considerable number of the stories.

I consider Mr. Aswell the most promising young writer I have met in the South. He has excellent command of short story and novel techniques and can give form to materials which appear to be hopeless. He can find good stories where other people would not imagine their existence, and he has an unerring dramatic sense. In my opinion, his judgment is thoroughly sound.

I have no hesitation in recommending Mr. Aswell without qualification. I believe he will do honor to any fellowship that can be given to him involving literary work. In my opinion, it would be a terrible mistake not to give him time to do the work that he can do.

It happens that only a few days ago, without being requested by anyone to do so, I wrote a letter to Mr. Moe of the Guggenheim Foundation recommending Aswell. I had heard he intended to apply for a Guggenheim, and I hope very much that he gets either a Rosenwald or Guggenheim. He would profit by having first a Rosenwald and later a Guggenheim; and I think the development of the arts in this area will also profit tremendously by this.

Is the candidate free from personality handicaps which would make it difficult to obtain and hold a position giving him opportunity to utilize his abilities?

Signed

W. T. Couch

W. T. Couch

Position or Title

Director of The University of North Carolina Press

Address

Chapel Hill, N. C.

Date December 11, 1939

Please return to the Director for Fellowships, Julius Rosenwald Fund, 4901 Ellis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed.

FISK
UNIVERSITY

A

JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND

4901 ELLIS AVENUE

CHICAGO

Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship

Name of Candidate Mr. James R. Aswell

Report Requested of Mr. Jack H. Boone

University of Iowa, Iowa City

The above-named candidate has applied to this Fund for a fellowship and has given your name as a reference. The candidate's plan of work is attached. Please return it with your statement.

We shall appreciate your frank opinion of this applicant's personal characteristics and qualifications, and an appraisal of his plan of work and of his ability to make a noteworthy contribution in the field of study proposed. *An early reply to this inquiry will be of great assistance in allowing the Fellowship Committee sufficient time for adequate consideration of the large number of candidates who apply for grants.*

Your reply will be held in strictest confidence.

George M. Reynolds

Director for Fellowships

REPORT

I have known the applicant, Mr. James R. Aswell, for over four years and was for a time associated with him on the Federal Writers' Project in Tennessee. He is deeply interested in the problems of the South. He is hardworking, conscientious, and worthy; and in his writing as well as in his life he is strictly honest and tolerant. I have had the pleasure of reading published short stories of Mr. Aswell's in STORY and HARPER'S and one which is to be published in HOUSEHOLD. In addition I have read many of his unpublished stories and a chapter or so of WAYFARING STRANGER, the proposed work. He shows great talent and originality; and, I honestly believe, promises to become an outstanding Southern literary figure. Only a hard struggle economically has so far retarded him.

Mr. Aswell's plan of work seems very sound. In so far as I know few novels of this kind have ever been attempted by writers in the South -- a treatment of the large urban middle class. Certainly, as outlined, it will be worthwhile both as a novel and a social study.

Nashville, a town of the Old South which has slowly felt the encroachment of industrialism, is an ideal setting for a novel. Born and bred here, Mr. Aswell knows the town thoroughly. The young

OVER



man is self-educated and has had a hard struggle. Only his grim determination to succeed as a writer has kept him at his study despite financial after financial set-back. While unemployed he had the courage to support his family through hackwork rather than to go on relief. He is well read and knows the State of Tennessee as well as anyone writing there today. I know of no other young Southern author who writes with the same ease, smoothness, beauty, and versatility.

Unfortunately his present work on the Federal Writers Project is a decided hold up to his creative energies, for it is necessary that he be editor-in-chief, re-write man, proof reader, and research-man glibrolled into one. If he is given the chance to finish WAYFARING STRANGER, I am certain he will produce an excellent piece of work, one that will stand up with the best in present-day Southern writing.

Is the candidate free from personality handicaps which would make it difficult to obtain and hold a position giving him opportunity to utilize his abilities?

Yes

Signed

Jack H. Boony

Position or Title

Instructor in Fiction

Address

Department of English, University of Iowa, Iowa City

Date

December 11, 1939

Please return to the Director for Fellowships, Julius Rosenwald Fund, 4901 Ellis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed.

FISK
UNIVERSITY

FELLOWSHIPS

STORY and THE STORY PRESS

432 FOURTH AVENUE · NEW YORK · MURRAY HILL 4 - 7530

Editors: WHIT BURNETT · MARTHA FOLEY Associate: BERNARDINE KIELTY



December 27, 1939

Mr. George M. Reynolds
Julius Rosenwald Fund
4901 Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

	OWB	29	Mu	29

Dear Mr. Reynolds:

I printed James R. Aswell in STORY and I think his writing is excellent.

I do not know him personally but have recommended him for work which he handled, I understand, very satisfactorily.

Sincerely yours

WB:RD
Enc. 1

Whit Burnett
FISK
UNIVERSITY

JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND

4901 ELLIS AVENUE

CHICAGO

Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship

Name of Candidate Mr. James R. Aswell

Report Requested of Dr. John T. Frederick

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

The above-named candidate has applied to this Fund for a fellowship and has given your name as a reference. The candidate's plan of work is attached. Please return it with your statement.

We shall appreciate your frank opinion of this applicant's personal characteristics and qualifications, and an appraisal of his plan of work and of his ability to make a noteworthy contribution in the field of study proposed. *An early reply to this inquiry will be of great assistance in allowing the Fellowship Committee sufficient time for adequate consideration of the large number of candidates who apply for grants.*

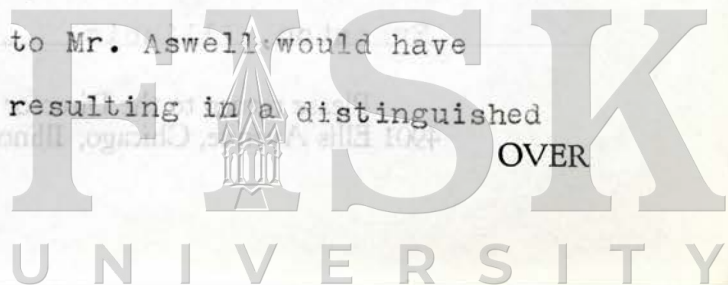
Your reply will be held in strictest confidence.

George M. Reynolds
Director for Fellowships

REPORT

I have examined with much interest the application statement accompanying this report form.

I do not know Mr. Aswell personally, but have been very definitely interested in his work, which I have known of in several ways, through friends and through my own reading experience. I regard him as a truly promising young writer, and his proposal for work seems to me well considered, mature in conception, feasible and eminently worth while. I believe that the extension of a fellowship to Mr. Aswell would have more than the usual probability of resulting in a distinguished



JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND

4901 ELLIS AVENUE

and valuable contribution. I take pleasure, therefore, in recommending its favorable consideration.

Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship

Name of Candidate

Report Requested of

The above named candidate has applied to this Fund for a fellowship and has given your name as reference. The candidate's plan of work is attached. Please return it with your statement.

We shall appreciate your frank opinion of this applicant's personal characteristics and qualifications and an appraisal of his plan of work and of his ability to make a noteworthy contribution in the field of study proposed. An early reply to this inquiry will be of great assistance in allowing the Fellowship Committee sufficient time for adequate consideration of the large number of candidates who apply for grants.

Your reply will be held in strictest confidence.

Director for Fellowships

REPORT

Is the candidate free from personality handicaps which would make it difficult to obtain and hold a position giving him opportunity to utilize his abilities?

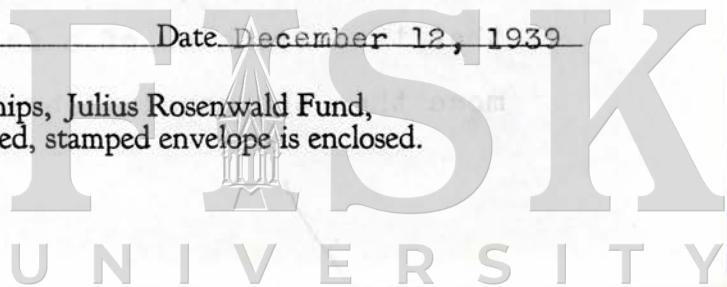
Signed _____

Position or Title Professor of Modern Life and Letters,

Address Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University,

Evanston, Illinois. Date December 12, 1939

Please return to the Director for Fellowships, Julius Rosenwald Fund, 4901 Ellis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed.



OVER

A

JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND

4901 ELLIS AVENUE

CHICAGO

Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship

Name of Candidate Mr. James R. Aswell

Report Requested of Mr. E. C. Aswell

Harper & Brothers, 49 East 33rd Street, New York City

The above-named candidate has applied to this Fund for a fellowship and has given your name as a reference. The candidate's plan of work is attached. Please return it with your statement.

We shall appreciate your frank opinion of this applicant's personal characteristics and qualifications, and an appraisal of his plan of work and of his ability to make a noteworthy contribution in the field of study proposed. *An early reply to this inquiry will be of great assistance in allowing the Fellowship Committee sufficient time for adequate consideration of the large number of candidates who apply for grants.*

Your reply will be held in strictest confidence.

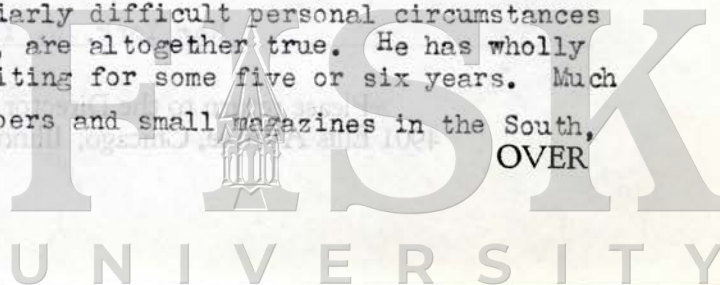
George M. Reynolds
Director for Fellowships

REPORT

The applicant is my brother. Consequently I know him very well and have a very high regard for his abilities as a writer, but in spite of our relationship, I do not believe I am unduly lenient or prejudiced in his behalf.

As an editor of Harper & Brothers, I have read the completed chapters of the novel which the applicant has outlined, and I and my colleagues were so greatly impressed by the quality of the writing, the excellence of the characterization, and the whole feeling which the chapters conveyed of a certain type of middle class life in an industrial Southern town, that we gave him a contract for the publication of the book, and made him an advance of \$250 to help him towards its completion. Since others besides myself were involved in the awarding of this contract and in the editorial judgment on which it was based, I can assure you, if assurance is needed, that the decision was arrived at in the usual hard-boiled manner by which publishers make up their minds, and that mere sentiment did not enter into it.

The facts which the applicant has outlined about himself, his training, the work he has done and is doing, and the peculiarly difficult personal circumstances that have attended him in the last few years, are altogether true. He has wholly supported himself, his wife, and child by writing for some five or six years. Much of this writing has been published in newspapers and small magazines in the South,



although his work has also appeared in Harper's Magazine and in Story. He has also contributed to a volume published by the North Carolina Press entitled These Are Our Lives.

I believe I have never known a writer who worked harder at his writing than my brother, unless it was Thomas Wolfe. But so much of his time has necessarily had to be taken up in the writing by which he has earned his living that he has not had either the time or the energy left over for the creative work which he wants most to do and which he thought he would be able to do on a part time basis when he signed the contract with Harper & Brothers.

There has been, within the last decade, something approaching a renaissance of literary effort in the South, and many of the literary figures that come instantly to mind as among the best or more significant American writers have belonged to this movement. People like Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Roark Bradford, Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wright, Paul Green, Jonathan Daniels, Erskine Caldwell, and in the more popular field, of course, Margaret Mitchell. As a Southerner, I believe it is no accident that literary activity has been greater in the South than in any other section of the country. The difference between life as it is lived in the South and any image of the good life as it might be lived is undoubtedly greater there than elsewhere, and the consciousness of this difference has certainly been one of the great urges prompting Southerners to write, just as it has always been one of the great urges to writers everywhere. The book which my brother proposes to complete if he should be fortunate enough to obtain a Julius Rosenwald fellowship, stems from this source. When it is written and published, as it surely will be some day, if not by one means, then by another, I am confident that it will be recognized as an important, perhaps brilliant, contribution to Southern literature.

Is the candidate free from personality handicaps which would make it difficult to obtain and hold a position giving him opportunity to utilize his abilities?

No personal handicaps that I know of.

Signed

Edward C. Aswell

Position or Title

Editor of Harper & Brothers

Address

49 East 33rd Street

New York, N. Y.

Date December 16, 1939

Please return to the Director for Fellowships, Julius Rosenwald Fund,
4901 Ellis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed.

F A S K
UNIVERSITY

JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND

4901 ELLIS AVENUE

CHICAGO

Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship

Name of Candidate Mr. James R. Aswell

Report Requested of Mr. C. Brooks

The Southern Review, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

The above-named candidate has applied to this Fund for a fellowship and has given your name as a reference. The candidate's plan of work is attached. Please return it with your statement.

We shall appreciate your frank opinion of this applicant's personal characteristics and qualifications, and an appraisal of his plan of work and of his ability to make a noteworthy contribution in the field of study proposed. *An early reply to this inquiry will be of great assistance in allowing the Fellowship Committee sufficient time for adequate consideration of the large number of candidates who apply for grants.*

Your reply will be held in strictest confidence.

George M. Reynolds

Director for Fellowships

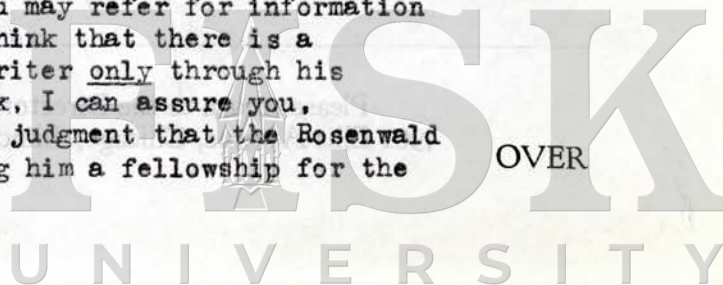
REPORT

Dear Mr. Reynolds:

I have read a number of Mr. Aswell's stories and think that he has a very rich material from which to work. THE SOUTHERN REVIEW has been very much interested in him, and all of us here have considered his work filled with a great deal of vitality and promise.

It is almost idle to predict how a first novel will turn out. But I have read the description of Mr. Aswell's project very carefully, and I am certain that his novel will have a great deal of force and power. His stories have indicated that he has a rich background of material and real talent with words.

I do not know Mr. Aswell personally, and there will doubtless be other people to whom you may refer for information concerning his personality. Yet I think that there is a positive advantage in appraising a writer only through his work, and I have considered that work, I can assure you, most carefully. It is my considered judgment that the Rosenwald Fund will make no mistake in granting him a fellowship for the



I have read portions of Wayfaring Stranger in manuscript and almost everything else that Mr. Aswell has written. The scope of his projected novel is as broad as his grasp of his material is firm. On the basis of my thorough familiarity with his work and our recent but fairly intensive acquaintance, I have no hesitation in recommending him as one of the most talented and versatile of the younger Southern writers.

Writing of what he calls the "large urban middle class," he nevertheless knows the rural as well as the industrial South, both white and black, and can represent with equal authority and skill workingman, farmer, professional and business types. Underlying his varied knowledge and experience of the South is his background in folk life and tradition. This folk basis makes his work rich not only in character but in speech and, above all, in humor. His mastery of yarns and "rough horseplay" is seen in his contributions to the forthcoming volume of Tennessee tall tales, God Bless the Devil: (University of North Carolina Press).

Through his work on the Tennessee Writers' Project as well as on the Tennessee newspapers, he has had ample opportunity to observe and study the political and economic conditions of the South, past and present. (See his contributions to These Are Our Lives, University of North Carolina Press). He is a serious and conscientious craftsman and a sensitive and intelligent interpreter. I have great faith in his literary promise and in his regional significance.

Burton



Natchez, Thursday.

Dear Mr. Reynolds:

I like both the Aswell stories in Story and Harpers, and especially the one in Harpers. They seem to me the strongest evidence yet submitted that Mr. Aswell is qualified to tackle longer fiction. The running rythm of his colloquial conversation is excellent and there is every reason to believe that he understands the people he is writing about. It seems to me on the basis of these stories-- and all the rest of this author's work of various kinds I have seen-- that he ought to be an excellent prospect for your novel list.

The magazines are being returned under separate cover.

Sincerely,

Herbert Bruce

FISK
UNIVERSITY

JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND

4901 ELLIS AVENUE

CHICAGO

Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship

Name of Candidate Mr. James R. Aswell

Report Requested of Dr. B. A. Botkin

University of Oklahoma, Norman

The above-named candidate has applied to this Fund for a fellowship and has given your name as a reference. The candidate's plan of work is attached. Please return it with your statement.

We shall appreciate your frank opinion of this applicant's personal characteristics and qualifications, and an appraisal of his plan of work and of his ability to make a noteworthy contribution in the field of study proposed. *An early reply to this inquiry will be of great assistance in allowing the Fellowship Committee sufficient time for adequate consideration of the large number of candidates who apply for grants.*

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George M. Reynolds
Director for Fellowships

REPORT

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OVER

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Is the candidate free from personality handicaps which would make it difficult to obtain and hold a position giving him opportunity to utilize his abilities?

Signed B. B. Bohlen
Position or Title Acting Chief Editor, Writers' Unit, Library of Congress
Address Library of Congress Annex 249
Washington, D. C. Date 2/20/40 Project

Please return to the Director for Fellowships, Julius Rosenwald Fund, 4901 Ellis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed.

F. S. K.
UNIVERSITY

Name

James Robert Aswell

Field: Creative Writing

State Editor, Tennessee Writers' Project
George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville

Plan of Work

The writing of a novel called Wayfaring Stranger, to treat of the childhood, adolescence and young manhood of David Sevier; through him is told the story of a middle class southern family in its relation to a time, a people, and a town. Period: From the close of the World War to the mid-depression years.

Seeks no degree. Probable duration of work eight to twelve months beginning as soon after April 1940 as possible.

Personal Data

Born Nashville, Tennessee, March, 1911. Married,
one child.

Age: 29

Undergraduate Work

Graduate Work

Experience

Reporter, Nashville Banner, 1928-29; free lance writer,
1929-38; State Editor, Tennessee Writers' Project, 1938 -,
\$2100.

Accomplishments

Publications:

More than 1600 short stories, serials, and articles for small magazines; short stories in Story, September, 1936, and Harper's, March, 1938; several sections of the Tennessee Guide; short stories in These Are Our Lives and in God Bless the Devil (to be published by the University of North Carolina Press).

References

W. T. Couch, Director, University of North Carolina Press
B. A. Botkin, Department of English, University of Oklahoma
E. C. Aswell, Book Editor, Harper & Brothers
C. Brooks, Associate Editor, The Southern Review, Baton Rouge
John T. Frederick, Department of English, Northwestern University
Jack H. Boone, Department of English, University of Iowa

Budget Summary

Total Amount Needed	\$2200.00
From Applicant	500.00 *
From Fund	\$1700.00
* to come from hackwork.	
AMOUNT GRANTED	

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

In 1928, when I finished high school, I went to work for the Nashville Banner as cub reporter on the police round. After a few months of this I was transferred to general assignments. In addition, I substituted for the music and drama critics when need arose and was given much feature work. Late in the following year drastic salary reductions were ordered. Finding that my pay envelope now held just about enough to pay for lunches and transportation, I quit the Banner and began free-lancing.

At the time, I realized that I had too little experience to write for the better markets, but that there might be a chance at the very bottom. Therefore, I aimed at the small denominational magazines and was able to sell them short stories and fact articles--enough of them to pay for my upkeep. In the meantime I studied everything I could find on writing--text-books, dismal writers' magazines, and all. I wrote essays, sketches, and short stories for practice. I walked the streets of Nashville, roamed in the hills, attended auctions, revivals, market days on the square, court-trials, and so on and so on, filling looseleaf binders with notes. Most of it, even the Sunday School stories, was excellent practice.

Part of the support of my family fell to me during the hard years of the depression and it was necessary for me to grind out enormous quantities of this denominational hackwork because there was a ready market for it. One magazine, The Challenge, a weekly Baptist story paper for late teen-age

and adult readers, I was finally writing almost in its entirety except for the inspirational editorials. Under a variety of pseudonyms, I wrote each week for this magazine: (1) A short story (2) A serial chapter (3) A fact article (4) Pages on art—music—books, scientific developments or travel (5) Short filler articles. This meant approximately 30,000 words a month contributed to this one source, at from a fourth to a half-cent a word. Also I turned out shorts and articles for other denominational magazines. All told, between 1930 and 1938, I wrote and sold more than 1,600 short stories, serials, articles, and sketches to such markets.

I tried to learn something from every story and article and to do each as well as possible within the narrow editorial specifications of the magazines. Whenever I could squeeze time from the grind, I wrote short stories intended for the quality markets. As a reaction to the sweetness and light of my bread-and-butter work, these stories were brutal sledgehammer things, bristling with rapes, killings, lynchings, and general savagery. I began getting notes from editors instead of form rejection slips. Here are two that are typical, one from Henry Goddard Leach, the other from Whit Burnett: "Well written, dramatic, but too grim"—"These are both excellent stories, but my God! Such raw meat could not be sent through the mails!"

Then Story took one, Harper's another, Household a third. But it was extremely difficult to follow these leads. This everlasting hack-work had to be done before anything else because we had to eat and the stuff was certain to sell. And by the time I had done 30 or 40 thousand words of it a month, I had practically nothing left in me.

In 1937 I submitted four chapters of a novel, WAYFARING STRANGER?

to Harper's and received an advance and a contract for that and two more novels. (See Progress To Date section of the Plan of Work)

In the spring of 1938 the Washington office of the Federal Writers' Project had me appointed state editor of the Tennessee Project. My job was to prepare the Tennessee Guide for press. To give an adequate idea of the experience gained in this work, it is necessary to describe briefly the quality of the project as I found it.

The Tennessee Guide, a 265,000 word volume, had been in preparation for two-and-a-half years. None of the material had been accepted as press-copy by the Washington editors. I found that, as it stood, it was an amazing jumble of frilly-to-illiterate writing, sweeping generalizations, groundless suppositions, and doubtful blocks of figures. Also there were whole pages copied word for word and without quotes from easily available source books. Especially was this true of the essay section. Two out of three of the professional writers on the project, after trying vainly to make headway, had quit in disgust. One of the editors who preceded me had been a railway mail clerk before he had been discharged for drunkenness. The project had been a catch-all for persons too incompetent or aged to stay on other projects. The director was an ex-Cambellite preacher who could not spell three consecutive words correctly, did not know a phrase from a sentence, and yet insisted on rewriting all copy. His second-in-command was an ex-bootlegger's delivery boy and rubber prophylactic salesman. (I am aware that this sounds like wild exaggeration, but it is only a tiny fraction of the howling reality). Fortunately these two men were discharged before it was too late.

At least half of the essay section was so inaccurate that it had

to be discarded outright. Many of the essays, then, had to be started from scratch. It was up to me to do them from research to press copy, and to do it I had to acquire a comprehensive background in the more important phases of the development of Tennessee, and--incidentally--absorbed much more than could be compressed in a 90,000 word essay group. In addition to the essays, I had to rewrite most of the city and tour copy. This, too, demanded considerable research which I had to do myself.

As soon as the Guide was completed, I concentrated on life histories for the Life In The South Series, planned by the University of North Carolina Press. I wrote and collaborated on fifty of these. The first volume, These Are Our Lives, contained nine stories upon which I had worked. The others have been accepted for future publication by W. T. Couch, Director of the Press. Life histories gave me flesh-and-blood illustrations of the social and economic problems I had studied in preparing essays for the Guide.

When life history work was temporarily suspended, Washington sent me to Birmingham to rewrite the essay section of the Alabama Guide. Here, my experience with the Tennessee Guide was repeated. When reorganization of the Writers' Projects was begun in July, I returned home and began work on two books: (1) A survey of a West Tennessee farm community, employing the life history technique (2) A volume of Tennessee folk tales. Both were sponsored by the University of North Carolina Press.

The volume of folk tales, God Bless The Devil!, had just been sent to press. Of the twenty-six stories, I wrote sixteen, edited the others, and contributed an appendix of idiomatic words and expressions. At present I am working on the farm community survey, which I hope to have done by April.



SUPPLEMENTARY PUBLICATION LIST

In the TENNESSEE GUIDE (Viking Press):

Folklore: The Living Past

The Working Man

Commerce And Industry

Natural Setting

History And Government

Religion

Education

Agriculture

Music

Nashville

Note: In addition, I rewrote and reorganized the remaining essay, city, and tour copy, supplementing it with much new material from my own research. Thus, the sections which I did not write from start to finish can be counted as collaborations.

In THESE ARE OUR LIVES (University of North Carolina Press):

I'd Rather Die

COLLABORATIONS:Lived Too LongIt's A Christian FactoryOn The Road To Sheriff...And CostsThe Grand WaysEasier WaysWeary Willie

Two other stories from which I cut my by-line, rather than have it appear on all of the Tennessee stories, are:

Solid TimeTill The River Rises

Note: Collaboration in the case of these stories did not mean simple reorganization and rewriting. It was necessary to go over the brief first sketches sent in by the field workers, then send detailed questionnaire for each case. Often three and four sets of questions had to be sent before one interview was satisfactory for final writing. These questions, of course, were over and above the general questionnaire prepared by Couch's staff for all field workers. After the shorthand notes on each interview had been transcribed, I then reorganized the story, cutting repetitions and meaningless digressions, and eliminating as far as possible the mechanical question-and-answer feel, left by the questionnaires.

In GOD BLESS THE DEVIL! (to be published by University of North Carolina Press):

PrefaceYoung Melvin

A Real Hunk Of Dreaming

He-Coon

Time To Call Titus Millsaps

Fiddler's Dram

The Hag Of Red River

De Ways Of De Wimmens

Snake Country

Little Eight John

Luster An De Devil

Pompey An De Mawd

Old Horny's Own

Fool Killing Shep Goins

They Say At The Liars' Bench: A List Of
Idiomatic Expressions

COLLABORATIONS:

Even Stephen

To The Last Breath Of Fight

Six Hundred Honest Pounds

Note: This book has just been delivered to the University of North Carolina Press. It will be printed in early spring. I have a complete set of carbon copies if they are required for inspection by the Fellowship Committee.

The above statements concerning Federal Writers' Project books can be verified by:

William R. McDaniel, Director,
Tennessee Writers' Project,
George Peabody College For Teachers,
Nashville, Tennessee.

W. T. Couch
Box 510,
Chapel Hill, N. C.



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STATEMENT OF PLAN OF WORK

(1) DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

WAYFARING STRANGER (tentative title; estimated length, 150,000 words) is laid in Cardiff (Nashville in all but name), an old Southern market town in the process of industrialization. David Sevier's family might be called the Southern middle class in microcosm. His grandparents are transplanted country folk and literally represent the recent agricultural past of the family. Grandmother Fergusson's mind lives in the old days when she was a farm-wife. Grandfather Ferguson is the backwoods past of hard drinking and tall tale telling, of mighty eating, rough horse-play, of great good humor that can suddenly turn into blind furies.

The Sevier family is dominated by Hetty, a heavy positive woman of almost savage vigor who is determined to lift the family by its bootstraps. Hetty is the antithesis of imagination. Her mind cannot reach beyond things felt, seen, tasted, heard. Her devouring ambition takes the form of Managing and Perfect Motherhood. Her home must be the

cleanest, largest, and most ornately stuffed in the neighborhood. Her children, by their manners, grades in school, and so on, must always reflect glory on their mother who made them what they are. The children are extensions of herself which she industriously attempts molding to carry out the various aims which she, in her own person as a woman, is unable to accomplish. This is the central thread of Hetty's story. At first Hetty is religious in an off-hand conventional manner, but finally there is room in her for nothing but worship at her own shrine. When her wishes are crossed, Hetty sees a blasphemous revolt against divinely ordained authority. She feels sincerely justified in taking the hardest measures to crush that revolt.

Joseph Sevier, a quiet gentle little man, a skilled artisan, was swamped by the burly Scotch-Irish Fergusons after he married Hetty. He is an inarticulate figure moving in the background, a means to Hetty for begetting children and supporting them. The home is Hetty's, not his, and to all intents he is there only under sufferance.

Thomas Sevier, David's older brother, is a logical second generation development of Hetty--intelligent, methodical, matter-of-fact, ambitious. Mary Sue is Hetty's foggy ideal of Perfect Womanhood, got from cheap novels, movies, and the Methodist Church. She is pretty, mindless, prudish, babbling and exceedingly ignorant.

David Sevier is the odd one of the family and of him

Hetty is half-proud, half-resentful. Because he is not docile, he absorbs Hetty's notions unevenly and never achieves the unquestioning certainties which lead Thomas in straight lines toward the goals he has chosen.

The novel opens when the Seviere move from a crowded section of Cardiff to a subdivision on the outskirts of town where Hetty makes a down-payment on a great dilapidated old brick house, once the home of an Old Family. For a time Hetty is able to juggle finances enough to present a picture of apparent prosperity. Against this background unfold David's childhood and adolescence.

Before David's birth, Hetty has read several volumes of great orations in order to implant in him a genius for oratory. He was to be a great lawyer, as Thomas was to be a great minister of the Gospel, as Mary Sue was to marry the wealthy son of some Old Family. To Hetty's deep despair and bewilderment, David cannot be persuaded or coerced into reciting successfully in public the little speeches which she deems the first step toward his appointed career. He either bogs down completely or stops in mid-flight to make faces, jump up and down, and otherwise furnish impromptu amusement for his audience.

When David learns to read, he projects himself into a land of make-believe peopled by his fancy. For a time, he almost ceases to live in the everyday world. Until adolescence sets in, David constantly has gods and heroes

as companions.

One of David's strong traits is a passion for experiment. He pens rabbits and guinea pigs together to see if they will breed a new species. He feeds the cow all manner of weeds and leaves and the chickens strange seeds and berries, then examines the milk and eggs for some miraculous change in quality. He sets thrush eggs under flickers and watches eagerly to see how the changelings will fare. He collects all the old bottles of medicine about the house mixes their contents with the steeped juices of weeds and flowers, and sips it to see what will happen. He tries to make silver by melting leadfoil and glass together. He boils green corn in a can to discover if whiskey will result. He attempts to fly and to learn the Water Baby's secret of breathing under water. He draws a cabalistic ring in a secret clearing in the woods, recites the Lord's Prayer backward, and waits for Baalzebub to appear. He believes that some day--probably tomorrow--he will surely find a food, a fairy spring, or an incantation which instantly will make him bull-strong, all-wise, and possessed of ten dollars. He is always on the lookout for it.

After the birth of Baby George, David is freer of supervision. Spurred by intense curiosity, he wanders away from home at every opportunity. Through the uncritical eyes and mind of a child, he absorbs a vast quantity of the

living around him. He is welcomed in the Negro settlements. The shantyboat folk on the river are his friends. He spends fascinated hours with them as they run their trot-lines or operate their stills back in the canebrakes. He hovers about the chain gang while it mends the county roads, talking to prisoners and guards. He walks into the homes of the gentry, amusing them by his naive chatter and questions. These new adventures and people are as vivid as Thorfin Karlsefne, Sir Galahad, Tarzan of the Apes, Sinbad, and the rest of the bright company which he has met in books. In comparison, school--compound misery of foul air, mob-cruelty, and barely literate teachers--is almost intolerable.

David begins early to wonder about God. During endless buzzing squirmy mornings in Sunday School where he has been sent washed, combed, and warned by Hetty, he learns about the loaves and fishes, shyster Jacob and bumbling Esau, and the sweeter teachings of Christ. In Sunday School the chief emphasis is laid on the God of Love who is fond of children and makes a point of looking out for the sparrows. In church the preacher almost invariably bears down on the raging Bedouin Thunderer of the Old Testament. It seems that Christ is mostly for children and Iaveh Sabaoth for the adults. For him David develops an hysterical fear. He sees him as an immense old man with red-glittering eyes and a long white beard, tobacco-stained at the mouth. He lurks

behind a white cloud spying down to see if any little boys are disobeying their mothers. He fingers a bolt of lightning eagerly. David is extraordinarily cautious about what he does if there is the least speck of a cloud in the sky. As for Christ, David sees him in the likeness of tubercular Mr. Johnson who lives down the street. He sees a pale sickly young man who lets people slap him without striking back. David's current hero is Jess Willard; he doesn't think much of Christ. Later, when he finds that by some strange inexplicable process Jesus and the terrible old gaffer behind the clouds are one and the same, he fears Christ also. Many are the nights he wakes in a sweating cramp of fear from nightmares of being pounced upon by that terrible old man. Though he hears considerable talk about the Devil and is afraid he might be crouching in some dark corner of the cellar, David is not much concerned over him. The Devil is like Old Raw Head and Bloody Bones who can make you scuttle in out of the night when you don't believe in him at all. The old man is David's Devil. There isn't room in his pantheon for another.

When David is twelve he comes into violent conflict with the mores of the family over the subject of Evolution. Evolution has enthralled him, he has read everything he could get on it. He has talked Evolution pretty freely with other boys. He has built up an amazing knack for twisting his features apishly, for swinging through the

trees, for chipping flint. Through the altruistic agency of the neighbors and the pastor of the East Cardiff Methodist Church the family hears about it. Unfortunately for David, the news comes just after the Scopes Trial and the death of William Jennings Bryan. David is hauled on the carpet before the assembled family, lectured, and exhorted to recant. He tries to explain his belief, taking care to point out that he doesn't think Grandfather Furguson is a monkey, which seems to be the family's conception of it. This is rank impudence and beatings follow. David gives in. He abjures. The stuff of the martyrs is not in him.

The experience is a powerful force in David Sevier's life. Jarring him out of his world of fantasy, it crashes him headlong into the world of things as they are. He has been used like a malefactor for holding an honest belief. Moreover, lacking the courage to stand firm, he has fallen diamally in his own eyes.

The trying period of David's adolescence comes when Hetty's plans are beginning the crumble and she is frantically devising schemes to prevent total collapse. Though outwardly the family maintains its front, it becomes in reality a festering pocket of mutual distrust and hate. Hetty will hear of no retreat from her untenable position; a smaller house in a more modest neighborhood is out of the question. No member of the family is quite sane during this time.

No more gods and heroes for David. He finds himself faced with a world where nothing goes according to the rules he has learned. He is entirely unfitted to live with his family or, for that matter, with any family. A period of inward turning and biting self-criticism follows. He magnifies his crimes and shortcomings until, in his own estimation, he becomes a monster of foul and slobbering aspect. His mind is a roaring maelstrom of fantasy, superstition, partially digested philosophy, mysticism, ideals, directionless ambition, shame bewilderment, convictions of superiority side by side with convictions of inferiority. He comes to think that every word he utters will be weighed scornfully and found idiotic. The upshot of it is that he can scarcely talk at all to his elders or strangers without stuttering and pawing the air. He is convinced that never since the day of the Neanderthal Man has such an ungainly, toad-mouthed, repulsive creature been born-- he thinks that people shudder in passing him on the street. As much as possible, he avoids people and is stiffly distant when he cannot escape them. He is often aggressively rude, attacking as his best defence.

He is disillusioned not only with himself but with others. Until now he has felt that adults lived in a state approaching perfection and infallibility. With a sense of the world having been jerked from under him, he begins to see their mistakes, pettinesses, cruelties, and ignorance.

He sees himself fumbling into an adult world where there seems to be nothing but uncertainties. One after another his idols have toppled. There is no longer anything in which he can put his faith. As his bewilderment grows, he finds himself less and less able to retreat to and lose himself in his old books. There is no truth or beauty or shining deed anywhere. All is confusion, pain, and dingy pretense.

His first reaction, after a time of blind chaos, is an effort to be exactly like his associates. He studies the sport pages of the newspapers until he has the accomplishments and histories of the current crop of lantern-jawed athletes at his tongue's-tip and has become proficient in the sports vernacular. He masters the wierdest twists of the local profanity and a whole oral literature of smut. He practices shadow boxing and the lifting of weights. He learns and uses the clichés of his age group and studiously conforms to all its conventions. He out-guffaws, out-leers, out-swaggers, out-nastées, out-lies them all. He attaches himself to a gang of the tougher boys of the neighborhood. Once he accompanies them when they go "egging niggers." This consists in a raid on Niggertown. Rocks are thrown through windows, outhouses pushed over, a Negro boy who shows fight is badly beaten and left an unconscious pulp beside the road. In the beating David takes no actual part. He is simply along. Later

the memory of this lynching-in-embryo is one of the secret shames which come on sleepless nights to squat on his chest and gibber at him. But the day after the egg-raid he is one of the loudest to boast and magnify the exploit.

Conditions in the Sevier home grow steadily worse. As indicated before, Hetty has trained the children toward their appointed places in life. Thomas was to be a minister of the Gospel; he has been the quiet, studious one. Mary Sue was to catch a wealthy husband. David, the talkative one, was to be a lawyer, and George a doctor. But Thomas has escaped into the North where he has soon abandoned his strivings toward sanctity. Mary Sue has married an out-at-elbows, smirking Baptist drug clerk. David appears to be headed nowhere in particular, but certainly not backward. George, at this stage, seems bound for the prize-ring.

Hetty's extravagance grows wilder as the means for feeding it diminish. There is a monotonous procession of rate collectors hammering at the door. The lights, gas, water are cut off regularly and David has to sneak out after dark and turn them on again. David works in the afternoon taking a paper route and, later, as a soda-jerker at the corner drugstore. Hetty gets what little he makes, even his school carfare and lunch money. Joseph Sevier's wages are cut sharply. But Hetty's extravagance continues unabated.

School is a major abrasive in these years. Cardiff High School runs along lines discarded in more enlightened parts of the country thirty or forty years before. The method of teaching is as dull as ditch-water and gauged to the abilities of morons. The main object of the system is to pound all students indiscriminately into one shape... to pour into each little human-can so many measures of a kind of dry, lifeless substance called Education and to seal it in hermetically with a bit of sheepskin. It is a prison for the human spirit, a prison given over to severe mechanical drills and a Prussian coercion. It is a factory where the young are plated with a grey alloy of ignorance and insularity; and in the plating-process, for neatness' sake, every knob of curiosity and wonder and originality is painstakingly scraped off. History, taught without any conception of its significance, is a droned succession of dates. History is a drear desert of drear print and drear halftone cuts on drear paper on the margins of which depressed students had squiggled curlicues, Jews' faces, daggers, and bawdy. So it goes with other subjects. David is unable to see that many of the teachers are caught in the web of circumstances as completely as he, that they are often poor, inept, harried creatures who have taken refuge in teaching because it required small preparation and was considered genteel.

In revolting against too-strict authority, David

characteristically goes too far. He makes it a point of honor to talk when silence is the law, and a necessary one, to skip R.O.T.C. drill, to study what interests him and neglect what doesn't, to go against the one-way traffic system on the stairs, to wave the red flag in a dozen ways in the stern faces of the disciplinarians. He is constantly shuttling between class and office with damning notes of accusation. He is finally expelled and doesn't go back to school.

What has gone before may have given the impression that David is a dark, too-sensitive young genius who undergoes one persecution after another. If so, it was unintentional. I see David as an active and inquiring youngster, by turns lusty romancer, bully, bullied, saint, and pure devil. The childhood section of the novel, while indicating the beginnings of the family's trouble and forecasting its eventual break-up, portrays what to the child is a timeless and complete world. The picture of the family is more pleasant than it later becomes. Hetty's delusion of godhead has not grown to its later overtopping proportions. Nor is the section dealing with adolescence a picture of unrelieved blackness. David's confusion and the deepening maze of difficulties into which Hetty has led the family are interspersed with material that is by no means grim and tortured.

The final section of *WAYFARING STRANGER* deals with the young manhood of David Sevier, the disintegration of the

Sevier family as a unit during the black years of the depression, and David's finding himself--at least, to some degree, though there is no pat solution to all his problems.

The first half of this section is concerned with the bitter years 1931-33, when David, like hundreds of thousands of young men with no specialized training, drifts from one odd job to another, living from hand-to-mouth, finding no place for himself and little hope that a place can ever be found. It is a time of raging bewilderment, when he is beset by a sense of worthlessness and indefinable guilt. The death of Joseph Sevier and the collapse of Hetty's little home empire occupy a prominent position.

David has a disastrous^e love affair from which he recovers slowly. As times begin to pick up, he gets a job as salesman for a little fly-by-night neon sign shop--the first in Cardiff. When the company fails, he and several technicians open another on a shoestring. Neon catches on and the plant does fairly well. David marries and begins paying installments on a small home. The novel closes with the birth of his child. He is last seen rather content and wholly busy and possessed of a few certainties. However, he can never free himself of a gnawing fear that poverty, hunger, and helplessness may again swoop down. He now knows that life is neither as good nor as bad as he has expected, but that at least it's damned interesting and he, for one, is glad to have an active bit part in it.

I believe that WAYFARING STRANGER will be worthwhile both as a novel and as a social study. With the exception of Wolfe's LOOK HOMEWARD ANGEL, I have seen no other novel which treats the large urban middle class of the South. It seems to me that problems of this middle class are no less important--if less dramatic--than those of sharecropper and industrial worker.

(2) PROGRESS TO DATE OF PROJECT

WAYFARING STRANGER was begun in January, 1937. Four chapters and an outline were submitted to Harper's in April. On May 24 I received a contract for this and two additional novels and a \$250 advance. The advance made possible six weeks of freedom from hackwork, a period spent in organizing a mass of material I had been collecting during several years for the novel. In July I had to begin grinding out hackwork again.

Severe family illnesses and the birth of our baby greatly increased my obligations. I had no choice but to shelve the novel and devote myself wholly to hackwork. The pressure continued and, aside from adding to my notes, I was unable to carry the book farther.

In June, 1938, when I went on as state editor of the Tennessee Writers' Project, I thought that I would have my evenings and weekends free for the novel. But it was soon clear that the new work demanded as much time and energy as free-lancing. I found that mine was not merely an editing job. I was a general salvager--researcher, writer, and editor--and constantly under driving pressure because, after two-and-a-half years of leisurely piddling, the affairs of the project had reached a critical stage. Under

these circumstances it was impossible to find time for more than brief snatches of work on WAYFARING STRANGER.

Now I know that I shan't be able to finish the book as long as I do work that uses me up as thoroughly as either my present job or free-lancing. A large canvas such as I have chosen for my novel requires absolute and continuous concentration over a period of months.

At present I have approximately 40,000 words ready for final rewriting and as many more in fragmentary passages to be pieced into the narrative. Also I have a bale of notes ready for expansion.

I estimate that it will take me at least eight or nine months to complete the novel. My contract with Harper's is still in force. The novel should be published soon after its completion.

(3) PLANS FOR CAREER

I have two more novels with Tennessee backgrounds in the stage of planning and note-making. One is a novel of a pioneer family, covering the seventy-odd years from the settlement of Watauga to the eve of the Civil War. It traces the evolution of a family of illiterate Scotch-Irish squatters to ante-bellum gentle-folk, and the parallel development of an interesting legend of Cavalier descent. The central character is the hardy old grandmother who, through it all, remains the same shrewd pipe-smoking, hard-talking, and essentially honest person she had been as a young woman.

The other novel is laid in the Cedar Barrens and will be built around the founder of one of the small religious sects which spring up perennially throughout the back country.

Also I am planning a survey of a once-prosperous farm community which has been ruined by erosion and leaching. DEATH OF THE SOIL is the title and the slow death of the people who live on that soil is the theme. Springvale, the community, was settled in 1820 by fifteen rather prosperous families from North Carolina, some of whom had

college educations. The descendants of these families are still on the original land grants. They have become an appalling set of degenerates--illiterate, syphilitic, incestuous, with a high percentage of crime and insanity.

In addition, I plan to do short stories and articles bearing on the problems I have encountered in my section of the South.

LETTERS OF REFERENCE

James R. Aswell

Mr. W. T. Couch, Director, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill

I have known Mr. James Aswell for a little over a year. I became acquainted with him through my work as Regional Director of the Federal Writers' Project.

Mr. Aswell did a large amount of work on the volume These Are Our Lives. He edited all the stories from Tennessee and wrote one story himself. Since I did the final editing, I am in a position to have an opinion on the quality of Mr. Aswell's work. All the manuscripts he submitted were in excellent condition and needed no further work on my part.

I first became aware of Mr. Aswell's ability through reading a story of his in Harper's. Shortly after I read this story, he was dropped from the Tennessee staff for reasons which I considered unjustified. I went to Tennessee especially to investigate and decided that he should be put back on the staff and the man then in charge removed. After much difficulty with WPA officials in Tennessee, my recommendations were carried out, and Mr. Aswell was restored to the staff and given a responsible position with considerably increased salary. Since that time, Mr. Aswell's work has completely justified my good opinion of him.

Only a few days ago, we received a manuscript of tall tales, God Bless the Devil, from Tennessee. I read this manuscript Sunday a week ago, and in my opinion the tall tales in the volume are as good as any material of that kind ever published. A few days later, Mrs. Paine of the Press editorial department gave me a report on the manuscript which I was glad to discover was in accord with my own opinion. We will publish the manuscript either this spring or next fall, 1940.

Mr. Aswell edited all of this volume and wrote a considerable number of the stories.

I consider Mr. Aswell the most promising young writer I have met in the South. He has excellent command of short story and novel techniques and can give form to materials which appear to be hopeless. He can find good stories where other people would not imagine their existence, and he has an unerring dramatic sense. In my opinion, his judgment is thoroughly sound.

I have no hesitation in recommending Mr. Aswell without qualification. I believe he will do honor to any fellowship that can be given to him involving literary work. In my opinion, it would be a terrible mistake not to give him time to do the work that he can do.

It happens that only a few days ago, without being requested by anyone to do so, I wrote a letter to Mr. Moe of the Guggenheim Foundation recommending Aswell. I had heard he intended to apply for a Guggenheim, and I hope very much that he gets either a Rosenwald or Guggenheim. He would profit by having first a Rosenwald and later a Guggenheim; and I think the development of the arts in this area will also profit tremendously by this.

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Mr. Jack H. Boone, Instructor in Fiction, University of Iowa, Iowa City

I have known the applicant, Mr. James R. Aswell, for over four years and was for a time associated with him on the Federal Writers' Project in Tennessee. He is deeply interested in the problems of the South. He is hardworking, conscientious, and worthy; and in his writing as well as in his life he is strictly honest and tolerant. I have had the pleasure of reading published short stories of Mr. Aswell's in Story and Harper's and one which is to be published in Household. In addition, I have read many of his unpublished stories and a chapter or so of Wayfaring Stranger, the proposed book. He shows great talent and originality; and, I honestly believe,

promises to become an outstanding Southern literary figure. Only a hard struggle economically has so far retarded him.

Mr. Aswell's plan of work seems very sound. In so far as I know, few novels of this kind have ever been attempted by writers in the South - a treatment of the large urban middle class. Certainly, as outlined, it will be worth while both as a novel and a social study.

Nashville, a town of the Old South which has slowly felt the encroachment of industrialism, is an ideal setting for a novel. Born and bred here, Mr. Aswell knows the town thoroughly. The young man is self-educated and has had a hard struggle. Only his grim determination to succeed as a writer has kept him at his study despite financial after financial set-back. While unemployed he had the courage to support his family through hackwork rather than to go on relief. He is well read and knows the State of Tennessee as well as anyone writing there today. I know of no other young Southern author who writes with the same ease, smoothness, beauty, and versatility.

Unfortunately his present work on the Federal Writers' Project is a decided hold up to his creative energies, for it is necessary that he be editor-in-chief, re-write man, proof reader, and research man all rolled into one. If he is given the chance to finish Wayfaring Stranger, I am certain he will produce an excellent piece of work, one that will stand up with the best in present-day Southern writing.

Mr. Cleanth Brooks, Jr., Associate Professor of English, Louisiana State University, and Managing Editor of The Southern Review

I have read a number of Mr. Aswell's stories and think that he has a very rich material from which to work. The Southern Review has been very much interested in him, and all of us here have considered his work

filled with a great deal of vitality and promise.

It is almost idle to predict how a first novel will turn out. But I have read the description of Mr. Aswell's project very carefully, and I am certain that his novel will have a great deal of force and power. His stories have indicated that he has a rich background of material and real talent with words.

I do not know Mr. Aswell personally, and there will doubtless be other people to whom you may refer for information concerning his personality. Yet I think that there is a positive advantage in appraising a writer only through his work, and I have considered that work, I can assure you, most carefully. It is my considered judgment that the Rosenwald Fund will make no mistake in granting him a fellowship for the project he has in mind.

Mr. E. C. Aswell, Editor of Harper & Brothers, New York City

The applicant is my brother. Consequently I know him very well and have a very high regard for his abilities as a writer, but in spite of our relationship, I do not believe I am unduly lenient or prejudiced in his behalf.

As an editor of Harper & Brothers, I have read the completed chapters of the novel which the applicant has outlined, and I and my colleagues were so greatly impressed by the quality of the writing, the excellence of the characterization, and the whole feeling which the chapters conveyed of a certain type of middle class life in an industrial Southern town, that we gave him a contract for the publication of the book, and made him an advance of \$250 to help him towards its completion. Since others besides myself were involved in the awarding of this contract and in the editorial judgment on which it was based, I can assure you, if assurance is needed, that the decision was arrived

at in the usual hard-boiled manner by which publishers make up their minds, and that mere sentiment did not enter into it.

The facts which the applicant has outlined about himself, his training, the work he has done and is doing, and the peculiarly difficult personal circumstances that have attended him in the last few years, are altogether true. He has wholly supported himself, his wife, and child by writing for some five or six years. Much of this writing has been published in newspapers and small magazines in the South, although his work has also appeared in Harper's Magazine and in Story. He has also contributed to a volume published by the North Carolina Press entitled These Are Our Lives.

I believe I have never known a writer who worked harder at his writing than my brother, unless it was Thomas Wolfe. But so much of his time has necessarily had to be taken up in the writing by which he has earned his living that he has not had either the time or the energy left over for the creative work which he wants most to do and which he thought he would be able to do on a part time basis when he signed the contract with Harper & Brothers.

There has been, within the last decade, something approaching a renaissance of literary effort in the South, and many of the literary figures that come instantly to mind as among the best or more significant American writers have belonged to this movement. People like Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Roark Bradford, Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wright, Paul Green, Jonathan Daniels, Erskine Caldwell, and in the more popular field, of course, Margaret Mitchell. As a Southerner, I believe it is no accident that literary activity has been greater in the South than in any other section of the country. The difference between life as it is lived in the South and any image of the good life as it might be lived, is undoubtedly greater there than elsewhere, and the consciousness of this difference has certainly been one of the great urges prompting Southerners to write, just as it

has always been one of the great urges to writers everywhere. The book which my brother proposes to complete if he should be fortunate enough to obtain a Julius Rosenwald fellowship, stems from this source. When it is written and published, as it surely will be some day, if not by one means, then by another, I am confident that it will be recognized as an important, perhaps brilliant, contribution to Southern literature.

Dr. John T. Frederick, Professor of Modern Life and Letters, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

I have examined with much interest the application statement accompanying this report form.

I do not know Mr. Aswell personally, but have been very definitely interested in his work, which I have known of in several ways, through friends and through my own reading experience. I regard him as a truly promising young writer, and his proposal for work seems to me well considered, mature in conception, feasible and eminently worth while. I believe that the extension of a fellowship to Mr. Aswell would have more than the usual probability of resulting in a distinguished and valuable contribution. I take pleasure, therefore, in recommending its favorable consideration.

Mr. Whit Burnett, Editor, Story and The Story Press, New York City

I printed James R. Aswell in Story and I think his writing is excellent.

I do not know him personally but have recommended him for work which he handled, I understand, very satisfactorily.

Name

James Robert Aswell

Field: Creative Writing

State Editor, Tennessee Writers' Project
George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville

Plan of Work

The writing of a novel called Wayfaring Stranger, to treat of the childhood, adolescence and young manhood of David Sevier; through him is told the story of a middle class southern family in its relation to a time, a people, and a town. Period: From the close of the World War to the mid-depression years.

Seeks no degree. Probable duration of work eight to twelve months beginning as soon after April 1940 as possible.

Personal Data

Born Nashville, Tennessee, March, 1911. Married,
one child.

Age: 29

Undergraduate Work

Graduate Work

Experience

Reporter, Nashville Banner, 1928-29, free-lance writer,
1929-38; 1938 - , State Editor, Tennessee Writers' Project,
\$2100.

Accomplishments

Publications: More than 1600 short stories, serials, and articles for small magazines; short stories in Story, September, 1936, and Harper's, March, 1938; several sections of the Tennessee Guide; short stories in These Are Our Lives and in God Bless The Devil (to be published by the University of North Carolina Press).

References

W. T. Couch, Director, University of North Carolina Press
B. A. Botkin, Department of English, University of Oklahoma
E. C. Aswell, Book Editor, Harper & Brothers
C. Brooks, Associate Editor, The Southern Review, Baton Rouge
John T. Frederick, Department of English, Northwestern University
Jack H. Boone, Department of English, University of Iowa

Budget Summary

Total Amount Needed	\$2200.00
From Applicant	500.00 *
From Fund	\$1700.00

* to come from hackwork.

AMOUNT GRANTED

PLEASE RETURN
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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

In 1928, when I finished high school, I went to work for the Nashville Banner as sub reporter on the police round. After a few months of this I was transferred to general assignments. In addition, I substituted for the music and drama critics when need arose and was given much feature work. Late in the following year drastic salary reductions were ordered. Finding that my pay envelope now held just about enough to pay for lunches and transportation, I quit the Banner and began free-lancing.

At the time, I realized that I had too little experience to write for the better markets, but that there might be a chance at the very bottom. Therefore, I aimed at the small denominational magazines and was able to sell them short stories and fact articles—enough of them to pay for my upkeep. In the meantime I studied everything I could find on writing—text-books, dismal writers' magazines, and all. I wrote essays, sketches, and short stories for practice. I walked the streets of Nashville, roamed in the hills, attended auctions, revivals, market days on the square, court-trials, and so on and so on, filling looseleaf binders with notes. Most of it, even the Sunday School stories, was excellent practice.

Part of the support of my family fell to me during the hard years of the depression and it was necessary for me to grind out enormous quantities of this denominational hackwork because there was a ready market for it. One magazine, The Challenge, a weekly Baptist story paper for late teen-age

and adult readers, I was finally writing almost in its entirety except for the inspirational editorials. Under a variety of pseudonyms, I wrote each week for this magazine: (1) A short story (2) A serial chapter (3) A fact article (4) Pages on art--music--books, scientific developments or travel (5) Short filler articles. This meant approximately 30,000 words a month contributed to this one source, at from a fourth to a half-cent a word. Also I turned out shorts and articles for other denominational magazines. All told, between 1930 and 1938, I wrote and sold more than 1,600 short stories, serials, articles, and sketches to such markets.

I tried to learn something from every story and article and to do each as well as possible within the narrow editorial specifications of the magazines. Whenever I could squeeze time from the grind, I wrote short stories intended for the quality markets. As a reaction to the sweetness and light of my bread-and-butter work, these stories were brutal sledgehammer things, bristling with rapes, killings, lynchings, and general savagery. I began getting notes from editors instead of form rejection slips. Here are two that are typical, one from Henry Goddard Leach, the other from Whit Burnett: "Well written, dramatic, but too grim"---"These are both excellent stories, but my God! Such raw meat could not be sent through the mails!"

Then Story took one, Harper's another, Household a third. But it was extremely difficult to follow these leads. This everlasting hack-work had to be done before anything else because we had to eat and the stuff was certain to sell. And by the time I had done 30 or 40 thousand words of it a month, I had practically nothing left in me.

In 1937 I submitted four chapters of a novel, WAYFARING STRANGER?

to Harper's and received an advance and a contract for that and two more novels. (See Progress To Date section of the Plan of Work)

In the spring of 1938 the Washington office of the Federal Writers' Project had me appointed state editor of the Tennessee Project. My job was to prepare the Tennessee Guide for press. To give an adequate idea of the experience gained in this work, it is necessary to describe briefly the quality of the project as I found it.

The Tennessee Guide, a 265,000 word volume, had been in preparation for two-and-a-half years. None of the material had been accepted as press-copy by the Washington editors. I found that, as it stood, it was an amazing jumble of frilly-to-illiterate writing, sweeping generalizations, groundless suppositions, and doubtful blocks of figures. Also there were whole pages copied word for word and without quotes from easily available source books. Especially was this true of the essay section. Two out of three of the professional writers on the project, after trying vainly to make headway, had quit in disgust. One of the editors who preceeded me had been a railway mail clerk before he had been discharged for drunkenness. The project had been a catch-all for persons too incompetent or aged to stay on other projects. The director was an ex-Cambellite preacher who could not spell three consecutive words correctly, did not know a phrase from a sentence, and yet insisted on rewriting all copy. His second-in-command was an ex-bootlegger's delivery boy and rubber prophylactic salesman. (I am aware that this sounds like wild exaggeration, but it is only a tiny fraction of the howling reality). Fortunately these two men were discharged before it was too late.

At least half of the essay section was so inaccurate that it had

to be discarded outright. Many of the essays, then, had to be started from scratch. It was up to me to do them from research to press copy, and to do it I had to acquire a comprehensive background in the more important phases of the development of Tennessee, and--incidentally--absorbed much more than could be compressed in a 90,000 word essay group. In addition to the essays, I had to rewrite most of the city and tour copy. This, too, demanded considerable research which I had to do myself.

As soon as the Guide was completed, I concentrated on life histories for the Life In The South Series, planned by the University of North Carolina Press. I wrote and collaborated on fifty of these. The first volume, These Are Our Lives, contained nine stories upon which I had worked. The others have been accepted for future publication by W. T. Couch, Director of the Press. Life histories gave me flesh-and-blood illustrations of the social and economic problems I had studied in preparing essays for the Guide.

When life history work was temporarily suspended, Washington sent me to Birmingham to rewrite the essay section of the Alabama Guide. Here, my experience with the Tennessee Guide was repeated. When reorganization of the Writers' Projects was begun in July, I returned home and began work on two books: (1) A survey of a West Tennessee farm community, employing the life history technique (2) A volume of Tennessee folk tales. Both were sponsored by the University of North Carolina Press.

The volume of folk tales, God Bless The Devill, had just been sent to press. Of the twenty-six stories, I wrote sixteen, edited the others, and contributed an appendix of idiomatic words and expressions. At present I am working on the farm community survey, which I hope to have done by April.



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STATEMENT OF PLAN OF WORK

(1) DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

WAYFARING STRANGER (tentative title; estimated length, 150,000 words) is laid in Cardiff (Nashville in all but name), an old Southern market town in the process of industrialization. David Sevier's family might be called the Southern middle class in microcosm. His grandparents are transplanted country folk and literally represent the recent agricultural past of the family. Grandmother Ferguson's mind lives in the old days when she was a farm-wife. Grandfather Ferguson is the backwoods past of hard drinking and tall tale telling, of mighty eating, rough horse-play, of great good humor that can suddenly turn into blind furies.

The Sevier family is dominated by Hetty, a heavy positive woman of almost savage vigor who is determined to lift the family by its bootstraps. Hetty is the antithesis of imagination. Her mind cannot reach beyond things felt, seen, tasted, heard. Her devouring ambition takes the form of Managing and Perfect Motherhood. Her home must be the

cleanest, largest, and most ornately stuffed in the neighborhood. Her children, by their manners, grades in school, and so on, must always reflect glory on their mother who made them what they are. The children are extensions of herself which she industriously attempts molding to carry out the various aims which she, in her own person as a woman, is unable to accomplish. This is the central thread of Hetty's story. At first Hetty is religious in an off-hand conventional manner, but finally there is room in her for nothing but worship at her own shrine. When her wishes are crossed, Hetty sees a blasphemous revolt against divinely ordained authority. She feels sincerely justified in taking the harshest measures to crush that revolt.

Joseph Sevier, a quiet gentle little man, a skilled artisan, was swamped by the burly Scotch-Irish Fergusons after he married Hetty. He is an inarticulate figure moving in the background, a means to Hetty for begetting children and supporting them. The home is Hetty's, not his, and to all intents he is there only under sufferance.

Thomas Sevier, David's older brother, is a logical second generation development of Hetty--intelligent, methodical, matter-of-fact, ambitious. Mary Sue is Hetty's foggy ideal of Perfect Womanhood, got from cheap novels, movies, and the Methodist Church. She is pretty, mindless, prudish, babbling and exceedingly ignorant.

David Sevier is the odd one of the family and of him

Hetty is half-proud, half-resentful. Because he is not docile, he absorbs Hetty's notions unevenly and never achieves the unquestioning certainties which lead Thomas in straight lines toward the goals he has chosen.

The novel opens when the Seviars move from a crowded section of Cardiff to a subdivision on the outskirts of town where Hetty makes a down-payment on a great dilapidated old brick house, once the home of an Old Family. For a time Hetty is able to juggle finances enough to present a picture of apparent prosperity. Against this background unfold David's childhood and adolescence.

Before David's birth, Hetty has read several volumes of great orations in order to implant in him a genius for oratory. He was to be a great lawyer, as Thomas was to be a great minister of the Gospel, as Mary Sue was to marry the wealthy son of some Old Family. To Hetty's deep despair and bewilderment, David cannot be persuaded or coerced into reciting successfully in public the little speeches which she deems the first step toward his appointed career. He either bogs down completely or stops in mid-flight to make faces, jump up and down, and otherwise furnish impromptu amusement for his audience.

When David learns to read, he projects himself into a land of make-believe peopled by his fancy. For a time, he almost ceases to live in the everyday world. Until adolescence sets in, David constantly has gods and heroes

as companions.

One of David's strong traits is a passion for experiment. He pens rabbits and guinea pigs together to see if they will breed a new species. He feeds the cow all manner of weeds and leaves and the chickens strange seeds and berries, then examines the milk and eggs for some miraculous change in quality. He sets thrush eggs under flickers and watches eagerly to see how the changelings will fare. He collects all the old bottles of medicine about the house, mixes their contents with the steeped juices of weeds and flowers, and sips it to see what will happen. He tries to make silver by melting leadfoil and glass together. He boils green corn in a can to discover if whiskey will result. He attempts to fly and to learn the Water Baby's secret of breathing under water. He draws a cabalistic ring in a secret clearing in the woods, recites the Lord's Prayer backward, and waits for Baalzebub to appear. He believes that some day--probably tomorrow--he will surely find a food, a fairy spring, or an incantation which instantly will make him bull-strong, all-wise, and possessed of ten dollars. He is always on the lookout for it.

After the birth of Baby George, David is freer of supervision. Spurred by intense curiosity, he wanders away from home at every opportunity. Through the uncritical eyes and mind of a child, he absorbs a vast quantity of the

living around him. He is welcomed in the Negro settlements. The shantyboat folk on the river are his friends. He spends fascinated hours with them as they run their trotlines or operate their stills back in the canebrakes. He hovers about the chain gang while it mends the county roads, talking to prisoners and guards. He walks into the homes of the gentry, amusing them by his naive chatter and questions. These new adventures and people are as vivid as Thorfin Karlsefne, Sir Galahad, Tarzan of the Apes, Sinbad, and the rest of the bright company which he has met in books. In comparison, school--compound misery of foul air, mob-cruelty, and barely literate teachers--is almost intolerable.

David begins early to wonder about God. During endless buzzing squirmy mornings in Sunday School where he has been sent washed, combed, and warned by Hetty, he learns about the loaves and fishes, shyster Jacob and bumbling Esau, and the sweeter teachings of Christ. In Sunday School the chief emphasis is laid on the God of Love who is fond of children and makes a point of looking out for the sparrows. In church the preacher almost invariably bears down on the raging Bedouin Thunderer of the Old Testament. It seems that Christ is mostly for children and Iaveh Sabaoth for the adults. For him David develops an hysterical fear. He sees him as an immense old man with red-glittering eyes and a long white beard, tobacco-stained at the mouth. He lurks

behind a white cloud spying down to see if any little boys are disobeying their mothers. He fingers a bolt of lightning eagerly. David is extraordinarily cautious about what he does if there is the least speck of a cloud in the sky. As for Christ, David sees him in the likeness of tubercular Mr. Johnson who lives down the street. He sees a pale sickly young man who lets people slap him without striking back. David's current hero is Jess Willard; he doesn't think much of Christ. Later, when he finds that by some strange inexplicable process Jesus and the terrible old gaffer behind the clouds are one and the same, he fears Christ also. Many are the nights he wakes in a sweating cramp of fear from nightmares of being pounced upon by that terrible old man. Though he hears considerable talk about the Devil and is afraid he might be crouching in some dark corner of the cellar, David is not much concerned over him. The Devil is like Old Raw Head and Bloody Bones who can make you scuttle in out of the night when you don't believe in him at all. The old man is David's Devil. There isn't room in his pantheon for another.

When David is twelve he comes into violent conflict with the mores of the family over the subject of Evolution. Evolution has enthralled him, he has read everything he could get on it. He has talked Evolution pretty freely with other boys. He has built up an amazing knack for twisting his features apishly, for swinging through the

trees, for chipping flint. Through the altruistic agency of the neighbors and the pastor of the East Cardiff Methodist Church the family hears about it. Unfortunately for David, the news comes just after the Scopes Trial and the death of William Jennings Bryan. David is hauled on the carpet before the assembled family, lectured, and exhorted to recant. He tries to explain his belief, taking care to point out that he doesn't think Grandfather Ferguson is a monkey, which seems to be the family's conception of it. This is rank impudence and beatings follow. David gives in. He abjures. The stuff of the martyrs is not in him.

The experience is a powerful force in David Sevier's life. Jarring him out of his world of fantasy, it crashes him headlong into the world of things as they are. He has been used like a malefactor for holding an honest belief. Moreover, lacking the courage to stand firm, he has fallen dismally in his own eyes.

The trying period of David's adolescence comes when Hetty's plans are beginning to crumble and she is frantically devising schemes to prevent total collapse. Though outwardly the family maintains its front, it becomes in reality a festering pocket of mutual distrust and hate. Hetty will hear of no retreat from her untenable position; a smaller house in a more modest neighborhood is out of the question. No member of the family is quite sane during this time.

No more gods and heroes for David. He finds himself faced with a world where nothing goes according to the rules he has learned. He is entirely unfitted to live with his family or, for that matter, with any family. A period of inward turning and biting self-criticism follows. He magnifies his crimes and shortcomings until, in his own estimation, he becomes a monster of foul and slobbering aspect. His mind is a roaring maelstrom of fantasy, superstition, partially digested philosophy, mysticism, ideals, directionless ambition, shame, bewilderment, convictions of superiority side by side with convictions of inferiority. He comes to think that every word he utters will be weighed scornfully and found idiotic. The upshot of it is that he can scarcely talk at all to his elders or strangers without stuttering and pawing the air. He is convinced that never since the day of the Neanderthal Man has such an ungainly, toad-mouthed, repulsive creature been born-- he thinks that people shudder in passing him on the street. As much as possible, he avoids people and is stiffly distant when he cannot escape them. He is often aggressively rude, attacking as his best defence.

He is disillusioned not only with himself but with others. Until now he has felt that adults lived in a state approaching perfection and infallibility. With a sense of the world having been jerked from under him, he begins to see their mistakes, pettinesses, cruelties, and ignorance.

He sees himself fumbling into an adult world where there seems to be nothing but uncertainties. One after another his idols have toppled. There is no longer anything in which he can put his faith. As his bewilderment grows, he finds himself less and less able to retreat to and lose himself in his old books. There is no truth or beauty or shining deed anywhere. All is confusion, pain, and dingy pretense.

His first reaction, after a time of blind chaos, is an effort to be exactly like his associates. He studies the sport pages of the newspapers until he has the accomplishments and histories of the current crop of lantern-jawed athletes at his tongue's-tip and has become proficient in the sports vernacular. He masters the wierdest twists of the local profanity and a whole oral literature of smut. He practices shadow boxing and the lifting of weights. He learns and uses the clichés of his age group and studiously conforms to all its conventions. He out-guffaws, out-leers, out-swaggers, out-nasties, out-lies them all. He attaches himself to a gang of the tougher boys of the neighborhood. Once he accompanies them when they go "egging niggers." This consists in a raid on Niggertown. Rocks are thrown through windows, outhouses pushed over, a Negro boy who shows fight is badly beaten and left an unconscious pulp beside the road. In the beating David takes no actual part. He is simply along. Later

the memory of this lynching-in-embryo is one of the secret shames which come on sleepless nights to squat on his chest and gibber at him. But the day after the egging-raid he is one of the loudest to boast and magnify the exploit.

Conditions in the Sevier home grow steadily worse. As indicated before, Hetty has trained the children toward their appointed places in life. Thomas was to be a minister of the Gospel; he has been the quiet, studious one. Mary Sue was to catch a wealthy husband. David, the talkative one, was to be a lawyer, and George a doctor. But Thomas has escaped into the North where he has soon abandoned his strivings toward sanctity. Mary Sue has married an out-at-elbows, smirking Baptist drug clerk. David appears to be headed nowhere in particular, but certainly not backward. George, at this stage, seems bound for the prize-ring.

Hetty's extravagance grows wilder as the means for feeding it diminish. There is a monotonous procession of ibate collectors hammering at the door. The lights, gas, water are cut off regularly and David has to sneak out after dark and turn them on again. David works in the afternoon taking a paper route and, later, as a soda-jerker at the corner drugstore. Hetty gets what little he makes, even his school carfare and lunch money. Joseph Sevier's wages are cut sharply. But Hetty's extravagance continues unabated.

School is a major abrasive in these years. Cardiff High School runs along lines discarded in more enlightened parts of the country thirty or forty years before. The method of teaching is as dull as ditch-water and gauged to the abilities of morons. The main object of the system is to pound all students indiscriminately into one shape... to pour into each little human-can so many measures of a kind of dry, lifeless substance called Education and to seal it in hermetically with a bit of sheepskin. It is a prison for the human spirit, a prison given over to severe mechanical drills and a Prussian coercion. It is a factory where the young are plated with a grey alloy of ignorance and insularity; and in the plating-process, for neatness' sake, every knob of curiosity and wonder and originality is painstakingly scraped off. History, taught without any conception of its significance, is a droned succession of dates. History is a drear desert of drear print and drear halftone cuts on drear paper on the margins of which depressed students had squiggled curlicues, Jews' faces, daggers, and bawdy. So it goes with other subjects. David is unable to see that many of the teachers are caught in the web of circumstances as completely as he, that they are often poor, inept, harried creatures who have taken refuge in teaching because it required small preparation and was considered genteel.

In revolting against too-strict authority, David

characteristically goes too far. He makes it a point of honor to talk when silence is the law, and a necessary one, to skip R.O.T.C. drill, to study what interests him and neglect what doesn't, to go against the one-way traffic system on the stairs, to wave the red flag in a dozen ways in the stern faces of the disciplinarians. He is constantly shuttling between class and office with damning notes of accusation. He is finally expelled and doesn't go back to school.

What has gone before may have given the impression that David is a dark, too-sensitive young genius who undergoes one persecution after another. If so, it was unintentional. I see David as an active and inquiring youngster, by turns lusty romancer, bully, bullied, saint, and pure devil. The childhood section of the novel, while indicating the beginnings of the family's trouble and forecasting its eventual break-up, portrays what to the child is a timeless and complete world. The picture of the family is more pleasant than it later becomes. Hetty's delusion of godhead has not grown to its later overtopping proportions. Nor is the section dealing with adolescence a picture of unrelieved blackness. David's confusion and the deepening maze of difficulties into which Hetty has led the family are interspersed with material that is by no means grim and tortured.

The final section of WAYFARING STRANGER deals with the young manhood of David Sevier, the disintegration of the

Sevier family as a unit during the black years of the depression, and David's finding himself--at least, to some degree, though there is no pat solution to all his problems.

The first half of this section is concerned with the bitter years 1931-33, when David, like hundreds of thousands of young men with no specialized training, drifts from one odd job to another, living from hand-to-mouth, finding no place for himself and little hope that a place can ever be found. It is a time of raging bewilderment, when he is beset by a sense of worthlessness and indefinable guilt. The death of Joseph Sevier and the collapse of Hetty's little home empire occupy a prominent position.

David has a disastrous love affair from which he recovers slowly. As times begin to pick up, he gets a job as salesman for a little fly-by-night neon sign shop--the first in Cardiff. When the company fails, he and several technicians open another on a shoestring. Neon catches on and the plant does fairly well. David marries and begins paying installments on a small home. The novel closes with the birth of his child. He is last seen rather content and wholly busy and possessed of a few certainties. However, he can never free himself of a gnawing fear that poverty, hunger, and helplessness may again swoop down. He now knows that life is neither as good nor as bad as he has expected, but that at least it's damned interesting and he, for one, is glad to have an active bit part in it.

I believe that WAYFARING STRANGER will be worthwhile both as a novel and as a social study. With the exception of Wolfe's LOOK HOMEWARD ANGEL, I have seen no other novel which treats the large urban middle class of the South. It seems to me that problems of this middle class are no less important--if less dramatic--than those of sharecropper and industrial worker.

(2) PROGRESS TO DATE OF PROJECT

WAYFARING STRANGER was begun in January, 1937. Four chapters and an outline were submitted to Harper's in April. On May 24 I received a contract for this and two additional novels and a \$250 advance. The advance made possible six weeks of freedom from hackwork, a period spent in organizing a mass of material I had been collecting during several years for the novel. In July I had to begin grinding out hackwork again.

Severe family illnesses and the birth of our baby greatly increased my obligations. I had no choice but to shelve the novel and devote myself wholly to hackwork. The pressure continued and, aside from adding to my notes, I was unable to carry the book farther.

In June, 1938, when I went on as state editor of the Tennessee Writers' Project, I thought that I would have my evenings and weekends free for the novel. But it was soon clear that the new work demanded as much time and energy as free-lancing. I found that mine was not merely an editing job. I was a general salvager--researcher, writer, and editor--and constantly under driving pressure because, after two-and-a-half years of leisurely piddling, the affairs of the project had reached a critical stage. Under

these circumstances it was impossible to find time for more than brief snatches of work on WAYFARING STRANGER.

Now I know that I shan't be able to finish the book as long as I do work that uses me up as thoroughly as either my present job or free-lancing. A large canvas such as I have chosen for my novel requires absolute and continuous concentration over a period of months.

At present I have approximately 40,000 words ready for final rewriting and as many more in fragmentary passages to be pieced into the narrative. Also I have a bale of notes ready for expansion.

I estimate that it will take me at least eight or nine months to complete the novel. My contract with Harper's is still in force. The novel should be published soon after its completion.

(3) PLANS FOR CAREER

I have two more novels with Tennessee backgrounds in the stage of planning and note-making. One is a novel of a pioneer family, covering the seventy-odd years from the settlement of Watauga to the eve of the Civil War. It traces the evolution of a family of illiterate Scotch-Irish squatters to ante-bellum gentle-folk, and the parallel development of an interesting legend of Cavalier descent. The central character is the hardy old grandmother who, through it all, remains the same shrewd pipe-smoking, hard-talking, and essentially honest person she had been as a young woman.

The other novel is laid in the Cedar Barrens and will be built around the founder of one of the small religious sects which spring up perennially throughout the back country.

Also I am planning a survey of a once-prosperous farm community which has been ruined by erosion and leaching. DEATH OF THE SOIL is the title and the slow death of the people who live on that soil is the theme. Springvale, the community, was settled in 1820 by fifteen rather prosperous families from North Carolina, some of whom had

college educations. The descendants of these families are still on the original land grants. They have become an appalling set of degenerates--illiterate, syphilitic, incestuous, with a high percentage of crime and insanity.

In addition, I plan to do short stories and articles bearing on the problems I have encountered in my section of the South.

LETTERS OF REFERENCE

James R. Aswell

Mr. W. T. Couch, Director, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill

I have known Mr. James Aswell for a little over a year. I became acquainted with him through my work as Regional Director of the Federal Writers' Project.

Mr. Aswell did a large amount of work on the volume These Are Our Lives. He edited all the stories from Tennessee and wrote one story himself. Since I did the final editing, I am in a position to have an opinion on the quality of Mr. Aswell's work. All the manuscripts he submitted were in excellent condition and needed no further work on my part.

I first became aware of Mr. Aswell's ability through reading a story of his in Harper's. Shortly after I read this story, he was dropped from the Tennessee staff for reasons which I considered unjustified. I went to Tennessee especially to investigate and decided that he should be put back on the staff and the man then in charge removed. After much difficulty with EPA officials in Tennessee, my recommendations were carried out, and Mr. Aswell was restored to the staff and given a responsible position with considerably increased salary. Since that time, Mr. Aswell's work has completely justified my good opinion of him.

Only a few days ago, we received a manuscript of tall tales, God Bless the Devil, from Tennessee. I read this manuscript Sunday a week ago, and in my opinion the tall tales in the volume are as good as any material of that kind ever published. A few days later, Mrs. Paine of the Press editorial department gave me a report on the manuscript which I was glad to discover was in accord with my own opinion. We will publish the manuscript either this spring or next fall, 1940.



Mr. Aswell edited all of this volume and wrote a considerable number of the stories.

I consider Mr. Aswell the most promising young writer I have met in the South. He has excellent command of short story and novel techniques and can give form to materials which appear to be hopeless. He can find good stories where other people would not imagine their existence, and he has an unerring dramatic sense. In my opinion, his judgment is thoroughly sound.

I have no hesitation in recommending Mr. Aswell without qualification. I believe he will do honor to any fellowship that can be given to him involving literary work. In my opinion, it would be a terrible mistake not to give him time to do the work that he can do.

It happens that only a few days ago, without being requested by anyone to do so, I wrote a letter to Mr. Moe of the Guggenheim Foundation recommending Aswell. I had heard he intended to apply for a Guggenheim, and I hope very much that he gets either a Rosenwald or Guggenheim. He would profit by having first a Rosenwald and later a Guggenheim; and I think the development of the arts in this area will also profit tremendously by this.

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Mr. Jack H. Boone, Instructor in Fiction, University of Iowa, Iowa City

I have known the applicant, Mr. James R. Aswell, for over four years and was for a time associated with him on the Federal Writers' Project in Tennessee. He is deeply interested in the problems of the South. He is hardworking, conscientious, and worthy; and in his writing as well as in his life he is strictly honest and tolerant. I have had the pleasure of reading published short stories of Mr. Aswell's in Story and Harper's and one which is to be published in Household. In addition, I have read many of his unpublished stories and a chapter or so of Wayfaring Stranger, the proposed book. He shows great talent and originality; and, I honestly believe,

promises to become an outstanding Southern literary figure. Only a hard struggle economically has so far retarded him.

Mr. Aswell's plan of work seems very sound. In so far as I know, few novels of this kind have ever been attempted by writers in the South - a treatment of the large urban middle class. Certainly, as outlined, it will be worth while both as a novel and a social study.

Nashville, a town of the Old South which has slowly felt the encroachment of industrialism, is an ideal setting for a novel. Born and bred here, Mr. Aswell knows the town thoroughly. The young man is self-educated and has had a hard struggle. Only his grim determination to succeed as a writer has kept him at his study despite financial after financial set-back. While unemployed he had the courage to support his family through hackwork rather than to go on relief. He is well read and knows the State of Tennessee as well as anyone writing there today. I know of no other young Southern author who writes with the same ease, smoothness, beauty, and versatility.

Unfortunately his present work on the Federal Writers' Project is a decided hold up to his creative energies, for it is necessary that he be editor-in-chief, re-write man, proof reader, and research man all rolled into one. If he is given the chance to finish Wayfaring Stranger, I am certain he will produce an excellent piece of work, one that will stand up with the best in present-day Southern writing.

Mr. Cleanth Brooks, Jr., Associate Professor of English, Louisiana State University, and Managing Editor of The Southern Review

I have read a number of Mr. Aswell's stories and think that he has a very rich material from which to work. The Southern Review has been very much interested in him, and all of us here have considered his work

filled with a great deal of vitality and promise.

It is almost idle to predict how a first novel will turn out. But I have read the description of Mr. Aswell's project very carefully, and I am certain that his novel will have a great deal of force and power. His stories have indicated that he has a rich background of material and real talent with words.

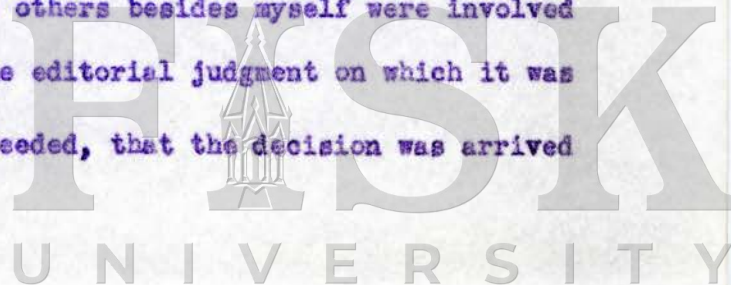
I do not know Mr. Aswell personally, and there will doubtless be other people to whom you may refer for information concerning his personality. Yet I think that there is a positive advantage in appraising a writer only through his work, and I have considered that work, I can assure you, most carefully. It is my considered judgment that the Rosenwald Fund will make no mistake in granting him a fellowship for the project he has in mind.

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Mr. E. C. Aswell, Editor of Harper & Brothers, New York City

The applicant is my brother. Consequently I know him very well and have a very high regard for his abilities as a writer, but in spite of our relationship, I do not believe I am unduly lenient or prejudiced in his behalf.

As an editor of Harper & Brothers, I have read the completed chapters of the novel which the applicant has outlined, and I and my colleagues were so greatly impressed by the quality of the writing, the excellence of the characterization, and the whole feeling which the chapters conveyed of a certain type of middle class life in an industrial Southern town, that we gave him a contract for the publication of the book, and made him an advance of \$250 to help him towards its completion. Since others besides myself were involved in the awarding of this contract and in the editorial judgment on which it was based, I can assure you, if assurance is needed, that the decision was arrived



at in the usual hard-boiled manner by which publishers make up their minds, and that mere sentiment did not enter into it.

The facts which the applicant has outlined about himself, his training, the work he has done and is doing, and the peculiarly difficult personal circumstances that have attended him in the last few years, are altogether true. He has wholly supported himself, his wife, and child by writing for some five or six years. Much of this writing has been published in newspapers and small magazines in the South, although his work has also appeared in Harper's Magazine and in Story. He has also contributed to a volume published by the North Carolina Press entitled These Are Our Lives.

I believe I have never known a writer who worked harder at his writing than my brother, unless it was Thomas Wolfe. But so much of his time has necessarily had to be taken up in the writing by which he has earned his living that he has not had either the time or the energy left over for the creative work which he wants most to do and which he thought he would be able to do on a part time basis when he signed the contract with Harper & Brothers.

There has been, within the last decade, something approaching a renaissance of literary effort in the South, and many of the literary figures that come instantly to mind as among the best or more significant American writers have belonged to this movement. People like Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Roark Bradford, Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wright, Paul Green, Jonathan Daniels, Erskine Caldwell, and in the more popular field, of course, Margaret Mitchell. As a Southerner, I believe it is no accident that literary activity has been greater in the South than in any other section of the country. The difference between life as it is lived in the South and any image of the good life as it might be lived, is undoubtedly greater there than elsewhere, and the consciousness of this difference has certainly been one of the great urges prompting Southerners to write, just as it

has always been one of the great urges to writers everywhere. The book which my brother proposes to complete if he should be fortunate enough to obtain a Julius Rosenwald fellowship, stems from this source. When it is written and published, as it surely will be some day, if not by one means, then by another, I am confident that it will be recognized as an important, perhaps brilliant, contribution to Southern literature.

Dr. John T. Frederick, Professor of Modern Life and Letters, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

I have examined with much interest the application statement accompanying this report form.

I do not know Mr. Aswell personally, but have been very definitely interested in his work, which I have known of in several ways, through friends and through my own reading experience. I regard him as a truly promising young writer, and his proposal for work seems to me well considered, mature in conception, feasible and eminently worth while. I believe that the extension of a fellowship to Mr. Aswell would have more than the usual probability of resulting in a distinguished and valuable contribution. I take pleasure, therefore, in recommending its favorable consideration.

Mr. Whit Burnett, Editor, Story and The Story Press, New York City

I printed James R. Aswell in Story and I think his writing is excellent.

I do not know him personally but have recommended him for work which he handled, I understand, very satisfactorily.

Name

James Robert Aswell

Field: Creative Writing

State Editor, Tennessee Writers' Project
George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville

Plan of Work

The writing of a novel called Wayfaring Stranger, to treat of the childhood, adolescence and young manhood of David Sevier; through him is told the story of a middle class southern family in its relation to a time, a people, and a town. Period: From the close of the World War to the mid-depression years.

Seeks no degree. Probable duration of work eight to twelve months beginning as soon after April 1940 as possible.

Personal Data

Born Nashville, Tennessee, March, 1911. Married,
one child.

Age: 29**Undergraduate Work****Graduate Work****Experience**

Reporter, Nashville Banner, 1928-29; free lance writer, 1929-38; State Editor, Tennessee Writers' Project, 1938 -, \$2100.

Accomplishments

Publications: More than 1600 short stories, serials, and articles for small magazines; short stories in Story, September, 1936, and Harper's, March, 1938; several sections of the Tennessee Guide; short stories in These Are Our Lives and in God Bless the Devil (to be published by the University of North Carolina Press).

References

W. T. Couch, Director, University of North Carolina Press
B. A. Botkin, Department of English, University of Oklahoma
E. C. Aswell, Book Editor, Harper & Brothers
C. Brooks, Associate Editor, The Southern Review, Baton Rouge
John T. Frederick, Department of English, Northwestern University
Jack H. Boone, Department of English, University of Iowa

Budget Summary

Total Amount Needed	\$2200.00
From Applicant	500.00 *
From Fund	\$1700.00

* to come from hackwork.

AMOUNT GRANTED

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

In 1928, when I finished high school, I went to work for the Nashville Banner as cub reporter on the police round. After a few months of this I was transferred to general assignments. In addition, I substituted for the music and drama critics when need arose and was given much feature work. Late in the following year drastic salary reductions were ordered. Finding that my pay envelope now held just about enough to pay for lunches and transportation, I quit the Banner and began free-lancing.

At the time, I realized that I had too little experience to write for the better markets, but that there might be a chance at the very bottom. Therefore, I aimed at the small denominational magazines and was able to sell them short stories and fact articles—enough of them to pay for my upkeep. In the meantime I studied everything I could find on writing—text-books, dismal writers' magazines, and all. I wrote essays, sketches, and short stories for practice. I walked the streets of Nashville, roamed in the hills, attended auctions, revivals, market days on the square, court-trials, and so on and so on, filling looseleaf binders with notes. Most of it, even the Sunday School stories, was excellent practice.

Part of the support of my family fell to me during the hard years of the drpession and it was necessary for me to grind out enormous quantities of this denominational hackwork because there was a ready market for it. One magazine, The Challenge, a weekly Baptist story paper for late teen-age

and adult readers, I was finally writing almost in its entirety except for the inspirational editorials. Under a variety of pseudonyms, I wrote each week for this magazine: (1) A short story (2) A serial chapter (3) A fact article (4) Pages on art--music--books, scientific developments or travel (5) Short filler articles. This meant approximately 30,000 words a month contributed to this one source, at from a fourth to a half-cent a word. Also I turned out shorts and articles for other denominational magazines. All told, between 1930 and 1938, I wrote and sold more than 1,600 short stories, serials, articles, and sketches to such markets.

I tried to learn something from every story and article and to do each as well as possible within the narrow editorial specifications of the magazines. Whenever I could squeeze time from the grind, I wrote short stories intended for the quality markets. As a reaction to the sweetness and light of my bread-and-butter work, these stories were brutal sledgehammer things, bristling with rapes, killings, lynchings, and general savagery. I began getting notes from editors instead of form rejection slips. Here are two that are typical, one from Henry Goddard Leach, the other from Whit Burnett: "Well written, dramatic, but too grim"—"These are both excellent stories, but my God! Such raw meat could not be sent through the mails!"

Then Story took one, Harper's another, Household a third. But it was extremely difficult to follow these leads. This everlasting hack-work had to be done before anything else because we had to eat and the stuff was certain to sell. And by the time I had done 30 or 40 thousand words of it a month, I had practically nothing left in me.

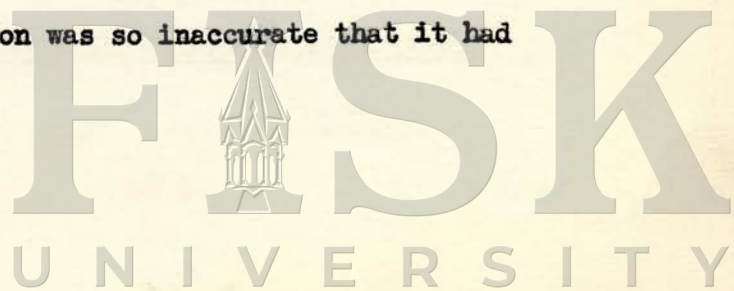
In 1937 I submitted four chapters of a novel, Wayfaring Stranger,

to Harper's and received an advance and a contract for that and two more novels. (See Progress To Date section of the Plan of Work)

In the spring of 1938 the Washington office of the Federal Writers' Project had me appointed state editor of the Tennessee Project. My job was to prepare the Tennessee Guide for press. To give an adequate idea of the experience gained in this work, it is necessary to describe briefly the quality of the project as I found it.

The Tennessee Guide, a 265,000 word volume, had been in preparation for two-and-a-half years. None of the material had been accepted as press-copy by the Washington editors. I found that, as it stood, it was an amazing jumble of frilly-to-illiterate writing, sweeping generalizations, groundless suppositions, and doubtful blocks of figures. Also there were whole pages copied word for word and without quotes from easily available source books. Especially was this true of the essay section. Two out of three of the professional writers on the project, after trying vainly to make headway, had quit in disgust. One of the editors who preceded me had been a railway mail clerk before he had been discharged for drunkenness. The project had been a catch-all for persons too incompetent or aged to stay on other projects. The director was an ex-Cambellite preacher who could not spell three consecutive words correctly, did not know a phrase from a sentence, and yet insisted on rewriting all copy. His second-in-command was an ex-bootlegger's delivery boy and rubber prophylactic salesman. (I am aware that this sounds like wild exaggeration, but it is only a tiny fraction of the howling reality). Fortunately these two men were discharged before it was too late.

At least half of the essay section was so inaccurate that it had



to be discarded outright. Many of the essays, then, had to be started from scratch. It was up to me to do them from research to press copy, and to do it I had to acquire a comprehensive background in the more important phases of the development of Tennessee, and--incidentally--absorbed much more than could be compressed in a 90,000 word essay group. In addition to the essays, I had to rewrite most of the city and tour copy. This, too, demanded considerable research which I had to do myself.

As soon as the Guide was completed, I concentrated on life histories for the Life In The South Series, planned by the University of North Carolina Press. I wrote and collaborated on fifty of these. The first volume, These Are Our Lives, contained nine stories upon which I had worked. The others have been accepted for future publication by W.T. Couch, Director of the Press. Life Histories gave me flesh-and-blood illustrations of the social and economic problems I had studied in preparing essays for the Guide.

When life history work was temporarily suspended, Washington sent me to Birmingham to rewrite the essay section of the Alabama Guide. Here, my experience with the Tennessee Guide was repeated. When reorganization of the Writers' Projects was begun in July, I returned home and began work on two books: (1) A survey of a West Tennessee farm community, employing the life history technique (2) A volume of Tennessee folk tales. Both were sponsored by the University of North Carolina Press.

The volume of folk tales, God Bless The Devil!, has just been sent to press. Of the twenty-six stories, I wrote sixteen, edited the others, and contributed an appendix of idiomatic words and expressions. At present I am working on the farm community survey, which I hope to have done by April.



SUPPLEMENTARY PUBLICATION LIST

In the TENNESSEE GUIDE (Viking Press):

Folklore: The Living Past

The Working Man

Commerce And Industry

Natural Setting

History And Government

Religion

Education

Agriculture

Music

Nashville

Note: In addition, I rewrote and reorganized the remaining essay, city, and tour copy, supplementing it with much new material from my own research. Thus, the sections which I did not write from start to finish can be counted as collaborations.

In THESE ARE OUR LIVES (University of North Carolina Press):

I'd Rather Die

COLLABORATIONS:Lived Too LongIt's A Christian FactoryOn The Road To Sheriff...And CostsThe Grand WaysEasier WaysWeary Willie

Two other stories from which I cut my by-line, rather than have it appear on all of the Tennessee stories, are:

Solid TimeTill The River Rises

Note: Collaboration ^{is} the case of these stories did not mean simple reorganization and rewriting. It was necessary to go over the brief first sketches sent in by the field workers, then send detailed questionnaire for each case. Often three and four sets of questions had to be sent before one interview was satisfactory for final writing. These questions, of course, were over and above the general questionnaire prepared by Couch's staff for all field workers. After the shorthand notes on each interview had been transcribed, I then reorganized the story, cutting repetitions and meaningless digressions, and eliminating as far as possible the mechanical question-and-answer feel, left by the questionnaires.

In GOD BLESS THE DEVIL! (to be published by University of North Carolina Press):

PrefaceYoung Melvin

A Real Hunk Of Dreaming

He-Coon

Time To Call Titus Millsaps

Fiddler's Dram

The Hag Of Red River

De Ways Of De Wimmens

Snake Country

Little Eight John

Luster An De Devil

Pompey An De Lawd

Old Horny's Own

Fool Killing Shep Goins

They Say At The Liars' Bench: A List Of
Idiomatic Expressions

COLLABORATIONS:

Even Stephen

To The Last Breath Of Fight

Six Hundred Honest Pounds

Note: This book has just been delivered to the University of North Carolina Press. It will be printed in early spring. I have a complete set of carbon copies if they are required for inspection by the Fellowship Committee.

The above statements concerning Federal Writers' Project books can be verified by:

William R. McDaniel, Director,
Tennessee Writers' Project,
George Peabody College For Teachers,
Nashville, Tennessee.

W. T. Couch
Box 510,
Chapel Hill, N. C.

PLEASE RETURN
TO
JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND

STATEMENT OF PLAN OF WORK

(1) DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

WAYFARING STRANGER (tentative title; estimated length, 150,000 words) is laid in Cardiff (Nashville in all but name), an old Southern market town in the process of industrialization. David Sevier's family might be called the Southern middle class in microcosm. His grandparents are transplanted country folk and literally represent the recent agricultural past of the family. Grandmother Ferguson's mind lives in the old days when she was a farm-wife. Grandfather Ferguson is the backwoods past of hard drinking and tall tale telling, of mighty eating, rough horse-play, of great good humor that can suddenly turn into blind furies.

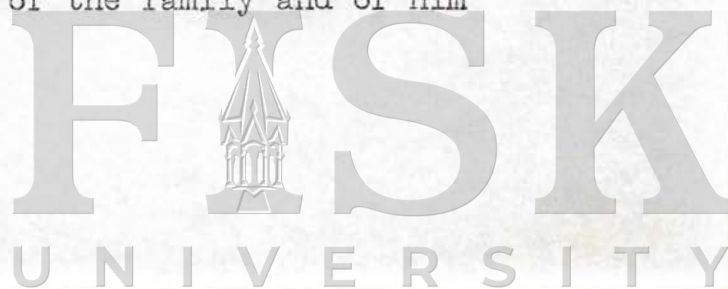
The Sevier family is dominated by Hetty, a heavy positive woman of almost savage vigor who is determined to lift the family by its bootstraps. Hetty is the antithesis of imagination. Her mind cannot reach beyond things felt, seen, tasted, heard. Her devouring ambition takes the form of Managing and Perfect Motherhood. Her home must be the

cleanest, largest, and most ornately stuffed in the neighborhood. Her children, by their manners, grades in school, and so on, must always reflect glory on their mother who made them what they are. The children are extensions of herself which she industriously attempts molding to carry out the various aims which she, in her own person as a woman, is unable to accomplish. This is the central thread of Hetty's story. At first Hetty is religious in an off-hand conventional manner, but finally there is room in her for nothing but worship at her own shrine. When her wishes are crossed, Hetty sees a blasphemous revolt against divinely ordained authority. She feels sincerely justified in taking the harshest measures to crush that revolt.

Joseph Sevier, a quiet gentle little man, a skilled artisan, was swamped by the burly Scotch-Irish Fergusons after he married Hetty. He is an inarticulate figure moving in the background, a means to Hetty for begetting children and supporting them. The home is Hetty's, not his, and to all intents he is there only under sufferance.

Thomas Sevier, David's older brother, is a logical second generation development of Hetty--intelligent, methodical, matter-of-fact, ambitious. Mary Sue is Hetty's foggy ideal of Perfect Womanhood, got from cheap novels, movies, and the Methodist Church. She is pretty, mindless, prudish, babbling and exceedingly ignorant.

David Sevier is the odd one of the family and of him



Hetty is half-proud, half-resentful. Because he is not docile, he absorbs Hetty's notions unevenly and never achieves the unquestioning certainties which lead Thomas in straight lines toward the goals he has chosen.

The novel opens when the Seviars move from a crowded section of Cardiff to a subdivision on the outskirts of town where Hetty makes a down-payment on a great dilapidated old brick house, once the home of an Old Family. For a time Hetty is able to juggle finances enough to present a picture of apparent prosperity. Against this background unfold David's childhood and adolescence.

Before David's birth, Hetty has read several volumes of great orations in order to implant in him a genius for oratory. He was to be a great lawyer, as Thomas was to be a great minister of the Gospel, as Mary Sue was to marry the wealthy son of some Old Family. To Hetty's deep despair and bewilderment, David cannot be persuaded or coerced into reciting successfully in public the little speeches which she deems the first step toward his appointed career. He either bogs down completely or stops in mid-flight to make faces, jump up and down, and otherwise furnish impromptu amusement for his audience.

When David learns to read, he projects himself into a land of make-believe peopled by his fancy. For a time, he almost ceases to live in the everyday world. Until adolescence sets in, David constantly has gods and heroes

as companions.

One of David's strong traits is a passion for experiment. He pens rabbits and guinea pigs together to see if they will breed a new species. He feeds the cow all manner of weeds and leaves and the chickens strange seeds and berries, then examines the milk and eggs for some miraculous change in quality. He sets thrush eggs under flickers and watches eagerly to see how the changelings will fare. He collects all the old bottles of medicine about the house mixes their contents with the steeped juices of weeds and flowers, and sips it to see what will happen. He tries to make silver by melting leadfoil and glass together. He boils green corn in a can to discover if whiskey will result. He attempts to fly and to learn the Water Baby's secret of breathing under water. He draws a cabalistic ring in a secret clearing in the woods, recites the Lord's Prayer backward, and waits for Baalzebub to appear. He believes that some day--probably tomorrow--he will surely find a food, a fairy spring, or an incantation which instantly will make him bull-strong, all-wise, and possessed of ten dollars. He is always on the lookout for it.

After the birth of Baby George, David is freer of supervision. Spurred by intense curiosity, he wanders away from home at every opportunity. Through the uncritical eyes and mind of a child, he absorbs a vast quantity of the

living around him. He is welcomed in the Negro settlements. The shantyboat folk on the river are his friends. He spends fascinated hours with them as they run their trot-lines or operate their stills back in the canebrakes. He hovers about the chain gang while it mends the county roads, talking to prisoners and guards. He walks into the homes of the gentry, amusing them by his naive chatter and questions. These new adventures and people are as vivid as Thorfin Karlsefne, Sir Galahad, Tarzan of the Apes, Sinbad, and the rest of the bright company which he has met in books. In comparison, school--compound misery of foul air, mob-cruelty, and barely literate teachers--is almost intolerable.

David begins early to wonder about God. During endless buzzing squirmy mornings in Sunday School where he has been sent washed, combed, and warned by Hetty, he learns about the loaves and fishes, shyster Jacob and bumbling Esau, and the sweeter teachings of Christ. In Sunday School the chief emphasis is laid on the God of Love who is fond of children and makes a point of looking out for the sparrows. In church the preacher almost invariably bears down on the raging Bedouin Thunderer of the Old Testament. It seems that Christ is mostly for children and Iaveh Sabaoth for the adults. For him David develops an hysterical fear. He sees him as an immense old man with red-glittering eyes and a long white beard, tobacco-stained at the mouth. He lurks

behind a white cloud spying down to see if any little boys are disobeying their mothers. He fingers a bolt of lightning eagerly. David is extraordinarily cautious about what he does if there is the least speck of a cloud in the sky. As for Christ, David sees him in the likeness of tubercular Mr. Johnson who lives down the street. He sees a pale sickly young man who lets people slap him without striking back. David's current hero is Jess Willard; he doesn't think much of Christ. Later, when he finds that by some strange inexplicable process Jesus and the terrible old gaffer behind the clouds are one and the same, he fears Christ also. Many are the nights he wakes in a sweating cramp of fear from nightmares of being pounced upon by that terrible old man. Though he hears considerable talk about the Devil and is afraid he might be crouching in some dark corner of the cellar, David is not much concerned over him. The Devil is like Old Raw Head and Bloody Bones who can make you scuttle in out of the night when you don't believe in him at all. The old man is David's Devil. There isn't room in his pantheon for another.

When David is twelve he comes into violent conflict with the mores of the family over the subject of Evolution. Evolution has enthralled him, he has read everything he could get on it. He has talked Evolution pretty freely with other boys. He has built up an amazing knack for twisting his features apishly, for swinging through the

trees, for chipping flint. Through the altruistic agency of the neighbors and the pastor of the East Cardiff Methodist Church the family hears about it. Unfortunately for David, the news comes just after the Scopes Trial and the death of William Jennings Bryan. David is hauled on the carpet before the assembled family, lectured, and exhorted to recant. He tries to explain his belief, taking care to point out that he doesn't think Grandfather Furguson is a monkey, which seems to be the family's conception of it. This is rank impudence and beatings follow. David gives in. He abjures. The stuff of the martyrs is not in him.

The experience is a powerful force in David Sevier's life. Jarring him out of his world of fantasy, it crashes him headlong into the world of things as they are. He has been used like a malefactor for holding an honest belief. Moreover, lacking the courage to stand firm, he has fallen dismally in his own eyes.

The trying period of David's adolescence comes when Hetty's plans are beginning the crumble and she is frantically devising schemes to prevent total collapse. Though outwardly the family maintains its front, it becomes in reality a festering pocket of mutual distrust and hate. Hetty will hear of no retreat from her untenable position; a smaller house in a more modest neighborhood is out of the question. No member of the family is quite sane during this time.

No more gods and heroes for David. He finds himself faced with a world where nothing goes according to the rules he has learned. He is entirely unfitted to live with his family or, for that matter, with any family. A period of inward turning and biting self-criticism follows. He magnifies his crimes and shortcomings until, in his own estimation, he becomes a monster of foul and slobbering aspect. His mind is a roaring maelstrom of fantasy, superstition, partially digested philosophy, mysticism, ideals, directionless ambition, shame bewilderment, convictions of superiority side by side with convictions of inferiority. He comes to think that every word he utters will be weighed scornfully and found idiotic. The upshot of it is that he can scarcely talk at all to his elders or strangers without stuttering and pawing the air. He is convinced that never since the day of the Neanderthal Man has such an ungainly, toad-mouthed, repulsive creature been born-- he thinks that people shudder in passing him on the street. As much as possible, he avoids people and is stiffly distant when he cannot escape them. He is often aggressively rude, attacking as his best defence.

He is disillusioned not only with himself but with others. Until now he has felt that adults lived in a state approaching perfection and infallibility. With a sense of the world having been jerked from under him, he begins to see their mistakes, pettinesses, cruelties, and ignorance.

He sees himself fumbling into an adult world where there seems to be nothing but uncertainties. One after another his idols have toppled. There is no longer anything in which he can put his faith. As his bewilderment grows, he finds himself less and less able to retreat to and lose himself in his old books. There is no truth or beauty or shining deed anywhere. All is confusion, pain, and dingy pretense.

His first reaction, after a time of blind chaos, is an effort to be exactly like his associates. He studies the sport pages of the newspapers until he has the accomplishments and histories of the current crop of lantern-jawed athletes at his tongue's-tip and has become proficient in the sports vernacular. He masters the wierdest twists of the local profanity and a whole oral literature of smut. He practices shadow boxing and the lifting of weights. He learns and uses the clichés of his age group and studiously conforms to all its conventions. He out-guffaws, out-leers, out-swaggers, out-nasties, out-lies them all. He attaches himself to a gang of the tougher boys of the neighborhood. Once he accompanies them when they go "egging niggers." This consists in a raid on Nigertown. Rocks are thrown through windows, outhouses pushed over, a Negro boy who shows fight is badly beaten and left an unconscious pulp beside the road. In the beating David takes no actual part. He is simply along. Later

the memory of this lynching-in-embryo is one of the secret shames which come on sleepless nights to squat on his chest and gibber at him. But the day after the egging-raid he is one of the loudest to boast and magnify the exploit.

Conditions in the Sevier home grow steadily worse. As indicated before, Hetty has trained the children toward their appointed places in life. Thomas was to be a minister of the Gospel; he has been the quiet, studious one. Mary Sue was to catch a wealthy husband. David, the talkative one, was to be a lawyer, and George a doctor. But Thomas has escaped into the North where he has soon abandoned his strivings toward sanctity. Mary Sue has married an out-at-elbows, smirking Baptist drug clerk. David appears to be headed nowhere in particular, but certainly not barward. George, at this stage, seems bound for the prize-ring.

Hetty's extravagance grows wilder as the means for feeding it diminish. There is a monotonous procession of ibate collectors hammering at the door. The lights, gas, water are cut off regularly and David has to sneak out after dark and turn them on again. David works in the afternoon taking a paper route and, later, as a soda-jerker at the corner drugstore. Hetty gets what little he makes, even his school carfare and lunch money. Joseph Sevier's wages are cut sharply. But Hetty's extravagance continues unabated.

School is a major abrasive in these years. Cardiff High School runs along lines discarded in more enlightened parts of the country thirty or forty years before. The method of teaching is as dull as ditch-water and gauged to the abilities of morons. The main object of the system is to pound all students indiscriminately into one shape... to pour into each little human-can so many measures of a kind of dry, lifeless substance called Education and to seal it in hermetically with a bit of sheepskin. It is a prison for the human spirit, a prison given over to severe mechanical drills and a Prussian coercion. It is a factory where the young are plated with a grey alloy of ignorance and insularity; and in the plating-process, for neatness' sake, every knob of curiosity and wonder and originality is painstakingly scraped off. History, taught without any conception of its significance, is a droned succession of dates. History is a drear desert of drear print and drear halftone cuts on drear paper on the margins of which depressed students had squiggled curlicues, Jews' faces, daggers, and bawdy. So it goes with other subjects. David is unable to see that many of the teachers are caught in the web of circumstances as completely as he, that they are often poor, inept, harried creatures who have taken refuge in teaching **because** it required small preparation and was considered genteel.

In revolting against too-strict authority, David

characteristically goes too far. He makes it a point of honor to talk when silence is the law, and a necessary one, to skip R.O.T.C. drill, to study what interests him and neglect what doesn't, to go against the one-way traffic system on the stairs, to wave the red flag in a dozen ways in the stern faces of the disciplinarians. He is constantly shuttling between class and office with damning notes of accusation. He is finally expelled and doesn't go back to school.

What has gone before may have given the impression that David is a dark, too-sensitive young genius who undergoes one persecution after another. If so, it was unintentional. I see David as an active and inquiring youngster, by turns lusty romancer, bully, bullied, saint, and pure devil. The childhood section of the novel, while indicating the beginnings of the family's trouble and forecasting its eventual break-up, portrays what to the child is a timeless and complete world. The picture of the family is more pleasant than it later becomes. Hetty's delusion of godhead has not grown to its later overtopping proportions. Nor is the section dealing with adolescence a picture of unrelieved blackness. David's confusion and the deepening maze of difficulties into which Hetty has led the family are interspersed with material that is by no means grim and tortured.

The final section of WAYFARING STRANGER deals with the young manhood of David Sevier, the disintegration of the

Sevier family as a unit during the black years of the depression, and David's finding himself--at least, to some degree, though there is no pat solution to all his problems.

The first half of this section is concerned with the bitter years 1931-33, when David, like hundreds of thousands of young men with no specialized training, drifts from one odd job to another, living from hand-to-mouth, finding no place for himself and little hope that a place can ever be found. It is a time of raging bewilderment, when he is beset by a sense of worthlessness and indefinable guilt. The death of Joseph Sevier and the collapse of Hetty's little home empire occupy a prominent position.

David has a disastrous love affair from which he recovers slowly. As times begin to pick up, he gets a job as salesman for a little fly-by-night neon sign shop--the first in Cardiff. When the company fails, he and several technicians open another on a shoestring. Neon catches on and the plant does fairly well. David marries and begins paying installments on a small home. The novel closes with the birth of his child. He is last seen rather content and wholly busy and possessed of a few certainties. However, he can never free himself of a gnawing fear that poverty, hunger, and helplessness may again swoop down. He now knows that life is neither as good nor as bad as he has expected, but that at least it's damned interesting and he, for one, is glad to have an active bit part in it.

I believe that WAYFARING STRANGER will be worthwhile both as a novel and as a social study. With the exception of Wolfe's LOOK HOMEWARD ANGEL, I have seen no other novel which treats the large urban middle class of the South. It seems to me that problems of this middle class are no less important--if less dramatic--than those of sharecropper and industrial worker.

(2) PROGRESS TO DATE OF PROJECT

WAYFARING STRANGER was begun in January, 1937. Four chapters and an outline were submitted to Harper's in April. On May 24 I received a contract for this and two additional novels and a \$250 advance. The advance made possible six weeks of freedom from hackwork, a period spent in organizing a mass of material I had been collecting during several years for the novel. In July I had to begin grinding out hackwork again.

Severe family illnesses and the birth of our baby greatly increased my obligations. I had no choice but to shelve the novel and devote myself wholly to hackwork. The pressure continued and, aside from adding to my notes, I was unable to carry the book farther.

In June, 1938, when I went on as state editor of the Tennessee Writers' Project, I thought that I would have my evenings and weekends free for the novel. But it was soon clear that the new work demanded as much time and energy as free-lancing. I found that mine was not merely an editing job. I was a general salvager--researcher, writer, and editor--and constantly under driving pressure because, after two-and-a-half years of leisurely piddling, the affairs of the project had reached a critical stage. Under

these circumstances it was impossible to find time for more than brief snatches of work on WAYFARING STRANGER.

Now I know that I shan't be able to finish the book as long as I do work that uses me up as thoroughly as either my present job or free-lancing. A large canvas such as I have chosen for my novel requires absolute and continuous concentration over a period of months.

At present I have approximately 40,000 words ready for final rewriting and as many more in fragmentary passages to be pieced into the narrative. Also I have a bale of notes ready for expansion.

I estimate that it will take me at least eight or nine months to complete the novel. My contract with Harper's is still in force. The novel should be published soon after its completion.

(3) PLANS FOR CAREER

I have two more novels, with Tennessee backgrounds, in the stage of planning and note-making. One is a novel of a pioneer family, covering the seventy-odd years from the settlement of Watauga to the eve of the Civil War. It traces the evolution of a family of illiterate Scotch-Irish squatters to ante-bellum gentle-folk, and the parallel development of an interesting legend of Cavalier descent. The central character is the hardy old grandmother who, through it all, remains the same shrewd pipe-smoking, hard-talking, and essentially honest person she had been as a young woman.

The other novel is laid in the Cedar Barrens and will be built around the founder of one of the small religious sects which spring up perennially throughout the back country.

Also I am planning a survey of a once-prosperous farm community which has been ruined by erosion and leaching. DEATH OF THE SOIL is the title and the slow death of the people who live on that soil is the theme. Springvale, the community, was settled in 1820 by fifteen rather prosperous families from North Carolina, some of whom had

college educations. The descendants of these families are still on the original land grants. They have become an appalling set of degenerates--illiterate, syphilitic, incestuous, with a high percentage of crime and insanity.

In addition, I plan to do short stories and articles bearing on the problems I have encountered in my section of the South.

LETTERS OF REFERENCE

James R. Aswell

Mr. W. T. Couch, Director, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill

I have known Mr. James Aswell for a little over a year. I became acquainted with him through my work as Regional Director of the Federal Writers' Project.

Mr. Aswell did a large amount of work on the volume These Are Our Lives. He edited all the stories from Tennessee and wrote one story himself. Since I did the final editing, I am in a position to have an opinion on the quality of Mr. Aswell's work. All the manuscripts he submitted were in excellent condition and needed no further work on my part.

I first became aware of Mr. Aswell's ability through reading a story of his in Harper's. Shortly after I read this story, he was dropped from the Tennessee staff for reasons which I considered unjustified. I went to Tennessee especially to investigate and decided that he should be put back on the staff and the man then in charge removed. After much difficulty with WPA officials in Tennessee, my recommendations were carried out, and Mr. Aswell was restored to the staff and given a responsible position with considerably increased salary. Since that time, Mr. Aswell's work has completely justified my good opinion of him.

Only a few days ago, we received a manuscript of tall tales, God Bless the Devil, from Tennessee. I read this manuscript Sunday a week ago, and in my opinion the tall tales in the volume are as good as any material of that kind ever published. A few days later, Mrs. Paine of the Press editorial department gave me a report on the manuscript which I was glad to discover was in accord with my own opinion. We will publish the manuscript either this spring or next fall, 1940.



Mr. Aswell edited all of this volume and wrote a considerable number of the stories.

I consider Mr. Aswell the most promising young writer I have met in the South. He has excellent command of short story and novel techniques and can give form to materials which appear to be hopeless. He can find good stories where other people would not imagine their existence, and he has an unerring dramatic sense. In my opinion, his judgment is thoroughly sound.

I have no hesitation in recommending Mr. Aswell without qualification. I believe he will do honor to any fellowship that can be given to him involving literary work. In my opinion, it would be a terrible mistake not to give him time to do the work that he can do.

It happens that only a few days ago, without being requested by anyone to do so, I wrote a letter to Mr. Moe of the Guggenheim Foundation recommending Aswell. I had heard he intended to apply for a Guggenheim, and I hope very much that he gets either a Rosenwald or Guggenheim. He would profit by having first a Rosenwald and later a Guggenheim; and I think the development of the arts in this area will also profit tremendously by this.

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Mr. Jack H. Boone, Instructor in Fiction, University of Iowa, Iowa City

I have known the applicant, Mr. James R. Aswell, for over four years and was for a time associated with him on the Federal Writers' Project in Tennessee. He is deeply interested in the problems of the South. He is hardworking, conscientious, and worthy; and in his writing as well as in his life he is strictly honest and tolerant. I have had the pleasure of reading published short stories of Mr. Aswell's in Story and Harper's and one which is to be published in Household. In addition, I have read many of his unpublished stories and a chapter or so of Wayfaring Stranger, the proposed book. He shows great talent and originality; and, I honestly believe,

promises to become an outstanding Southern literary figure. Only a hard struggle economically has so far retarded him.

Mr. Aswell's plan of work seems very sound. In so far as I know, few novels of this kind have ever been attempted by writers in the South - a treatment of the large urban middle class. Certainly, as outlined, it will be worth while both as a novel and a social study.

Nashville, a town of the Old South which has slowly felt the encroachment of industrialism, is an ideal setting for a novel. Born and bred here, Mr. Aswell knows the town thoroughly. The young man is self-educated and has had a hard struggle. Only his grim determination to succeed as a writer has kept him at his study despite financial after financial set-back. While unemployed he had the courage to support his family through hackwork rather than to go on relief. He is well read and knows the State of Tennessee as well as anyone writing there today. I know of no other young Southern author who writes with the same ease, smoothness, beauty, and versatility.

Unfortunately his present work on the Federal Writers' Project is a decided hold up to his creative energies, for it is necessary that he be editor-in-chief, re-write man, proof reader, and research man all rolled into one. If he is given the chance to finish Wayfaring Stranger, I am certain he will produce an excellent piece of work, one that will stand up with the best in present-day Southern writing.

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Mr. Cleanth Brooks, Jr., Associate Professor of English, Louisiana State University, and Managing Editor of The Southern Review

I have read a number of Mr. Aswell's stories and think that he has a very rich material from which to work. The Southern Review has been very much interested in him, and all of us here have considered his work

filled with a great deal of vitality and promise.

It is almost idle to predict how a first novel will turn out. But I have read the description of Mr. Aswell's project very carefully, and I am certain that his novel will have a great deal of force and power. His stories have indicated that he has a rich background of material and real talent with words.

I do not know Mr. Aswell personally, and there will doubtless be other people to whom you may refer for information concerning his personality. Yet I think that there is a positive advantage in appraising a writer only through his work, and I have considered that work, I can assure you, most carefully. It is my considered judgment that the Rosenwald Fund will make no mistake in granting him a fellowship for the project he has in mind.

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Mr. E. C. Aswell, Editor of Harper & Brothers, New York City

The applicant is my brother. Consequently I know him very well and have a very high regard for his abilities as a writer, but in spite of our relationship, I do not believe I am unduly lenient or prejudiced in his behalf.

As an editor of Harper & Brothers, I have read the completed chapters of the novel which the applicant has outlined, and I and my colleagues were so greatly impressed by the quality of the writing, the excellence of the characterization, and the whole feeling which the chapters conveyed of a certain type of middle class life in an industrial Southern town, that we gave him a contract for the publication of the book, and made him an advance of \$250 to help him towards its completion. Since others besides myself were involved in the awarding of this contract and in the editorial judgment on which it was based, I can assure you, if assurance is needed, that the decision was arrived

at in the usual hard-boiled manner by which publishers make up their minds, and that mere sentiment did not enter into it.

The facts which the applicant has outlined about himself, his training, the work he has done and is doing, and the peculiarly difficult personal circumstances that have attended him in the last few years, are altogether true. He has wholly supported himself, his wife, and child by writing for some five or six years. Much of this writing has been published in newspapers and small magazines in the South, although his work has also appeared in Harper's Magazine and in Story. He has also contributed to a volume published by the North Carolina Press entitled These Are Our Lives.

I believe I have never known a writer who worked harder at his writing than my brother, unless it was Thomas Wolfe. But so much of his time has necessarily had to be taken up in the writing by which he has earned his living that he has not had either the time or the energy left over for the creative work which he wants most to do and which he thought he would be able to do on a part time basis when he signed the contract with Harper & Brothers.

There has been, within the last decade, something approaching a renaissance of literary effort in the South, and many of the literary figures that come instantly to mind as among the best or more significant American writers have belonged to this movement. People like Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Roark Bradford, Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wright, Paul Green, Jonathan Daniels, Erskine Caldwell, and in the more popular field, of course, Margaret Mitchell. As a Southerner, I believe it is no accident that literary activity has been greater in the South than in any other section of the country. The difference between life as it is lived in the South and any image of the good life as it might be lived, is undoubtedly greater there than elsewhere, and the consciousness of this difference has certainly been one of the great urges prompting Southerners to write, just as it

has always been one of the great urges to writers everywhere. The book which my brother proposes to complete if he should be fortunate enough to obtain a Julius Rosenwald fellowship, stems from this source. When it is written and published, as it surely will be some day, if not by one means, then by another, I am confident that it will be recognized as an important, perhaps brilliant, contribution to Southern literature.

Dr. John T. Frederick, Professor of Modern Life and Letters, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

I have examined with much interest the application statement accompanying this report form.

I do not know Mr. Aswell personally, but have been very definitely interested in his work, which I have known of in several ways, through friends and through my own reading experience. I regard him as a truly promising young writer, and his proposal for work seems to me well considered, mature in conception, feasible and eminently worth while. I believe that the extension of a fellowship to Mr. Aswell would have more than the usual probability of resulting in a distinguished and valuable contribution. I take pleasure, therefore, in recommending its favorable consideration.

Mr. Whit Burnett, Editor, Story and The Story Press, New York City

I printed James R. Aswell in Story and I think his writing is excellent.

I do not know him personally but have recommended him for work which he handled, I understand, very satisfactorily.

FELLOWSHIPS

April 18, 1940

Dear Mr. Aswell: It is a pleasure to inform you that you have been selected by the Committee on Fellowships of the Julius Rosenwald Fund to receive a grant of one thousand seven hundred dollars (\$1,700) to assist you in carrying forward your creative writing according to the plan presented to the Committee.

Please let us know at once whether or not you can accept this grant. An official announcement of the Committee's selections for the year will be made soon and it can include only those from whom acceptances have been received.

Very truly yours,

GEORGE M. REYNOLDS

GMR:MLJ

Mr. James Robert Aswell
1301 Newman Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee

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