

John Grier Varner:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Varner, John Grier, 1905-1978
Title:	John Grier Varner Papers
Dates:	1798-1978
Extent:	12 document boxes (5.04 linear feet)
Abstract:	These papers document the literary research and life of the American educator and scholar. They consist mostly of transcriptions and photocopies of manuscript material created by nineteenth-century literary figures, including Sarah Helen Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe. Also present are printed materials, scrapbooks, and correspondence.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-4338
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research. Part or all of this collection is housed off-site and may require up to three business days' notice for access in the Ransom Center's Reading and Viewing Room. Please contact the Center before requesting this material: reference@hrc.utexas.edu.

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Gift, 1979 (G227, G246, G288, G596)
Processed by:	Jennifer B. Patterson, 1992, updated by Hagan Barber, 2012
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

John Grier Varner was born March 30, 1905, in Mount Pleasant, Texas. He grew up in Denton, and received his B.A. from Austin College in 1926. After teaching in Mississippi and Tennessee for four years, Varner entered the University of Virginia as a graduate student. He received an M.A. and finished his Ph.D. coursework before accepting a position as Assistant Professor of English and Director of Musical Activities at Washington and Lee University in 1938. Two years later, he completed his dissertation, a biography of the poet and spiritualist Sarah Helen Whitman, and received his Ph.D.

Varner's earliest scholarly interest was Edgar Allan Poe. His first contribution to the literary community was *Edgar Allan Poe and The Philadelphia Saturday Courier*, published in 1933. Varner edited five of Poe's earliest published short stories in this book. The women associated with Poe, like Sarah Helen Whitman, Frances Sargent Osgood, and Maria Gowen Brooks, also intrigued Varner, and he studied them as well.

World War II cut short Varner's research of 19th-century literature. In 1943, he joined the State Department and was sent to Latin America because of his proficiency in Spanish. Based in Venezuela, Varner and his wife Jeannette travelled and lectured all over the area for the next 3 years. In 1947, the U.S. embassy offered him a position as cultural attach, and he also joined the staff of the University of Texas as Visiting Associated Professor of English and Director of English for Foreign Students.

Returning to Austin a few years later, Varner and his wife began to publish books about Latin America. The first of these was *The Florida of the Inca* (1951), which translated and edited Garcilaso de la Vega's account of the DeSoto expedition. The book received scholarly and popular acclaim.

Three years later, Varner and his wife travelled to Spain to begin work on a biography of de la Vega. Varner continued to work on this massive project for the next 14 years, completing and publishing *El Inca: The Life and Times of Garcilaso de Vega* in 1968. Poor health soon forced him to retire, but Varner continued to find new projects, and was finishing the draft of another book, *The Dogs of Conquest*, when he died on September 13, 1978.

Scope and Contents

Twelve boxes of correspondence, printed material, creative works, and scrapbook material, 1798-1978 (bulk 1931-39), document the literary research and life of John Grier Varner (1905-1978). The material is arranged in two series -- the first, entitled General (five folders, 1936-78) includes materials relating to Varner's activities and interests, and the second, entitled Research and Works (eleven boxes and eleven folders, 1798-1972, bulk 1931-39) represents Varner's research of Sarah Helen Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, and other nineteenth-century literary figures. Varner's

original arrangement has been maintained where possible, especially in the second series.

The vast majority of the materials in the Varner Papers are transcriptions and photostats of manuscript material created by nineteenth-century literary figures, and used by Varner in his research. These copies include the works and correspondence of Sarah Helen Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, George Washington Eveleth, and John H. Ingram, among others. Especially well documented is Varner's research of Sarah Helen Whitman (1803-78), the Providence poet and spiritualist who was briefly engaged to Edgar Allan Poe. Also found in the collection are Varner's research notes, as well as correspondence, published and unpublished creative works, and printed materials he accumulated about the subjects he studied.

Varner's life and activities are less well documented. There are only five folders of records, and they consist mainly of printed materials accumulated by Varner. Significantly absent from the collection is Varner's later research on Latin American topics, as well as any personal papers.

A strength of the Varner Papers derives from the opportunity it offers users to learn about the research process, especially in the early twentieth-century. For example, Varner's correspondence about Sarah Helen Whitman illustrates how a researcher tracks down information and follows up on sources. Another potential area of research is that of nineteenth-century literary figures, and especially Sarah Helen Whitman, since Varner gathered his transcriptions and photostats from many different repositories and private collections.

Series Descriptions

Series I. General, 1936-1978 (1 box)

The materials in this series reflect Varner's life and teaching career, and it is divided into two subseries. The first of these, entitled Varner Personal, includes a small amount of printed material, correspondence, and other documentary evidence that relates to Varner's interests and activities. It appears that Varner gathered these materials out of personal interest only. They offer little insight into his personal life and include play programs, Christmas cards, exhibition catalogs, and newspaper clippings. By far the most significant document found in this subseries is a biographical piece written after Varner's death. Also found in this series, under the subseries Teaching, are a few student papers that Varner kept for their content.

Series II. Works and Research, 1798-1972, bulk 1932-1939 (11 boxes)

Series II makes up of the bulk of the collection. This series has been further divided into five subseries, each of which reflects an area of Varner's research in American literature.

- A. General
- B. Whitman, Sarah Helen
 - Correspondence of J. G. Varner
 - Research
 - Individuals/Persons

- Places
- Spiritualism
- Works
- C. Poe, Edgar Allan
 - Works
 - Research
- D. *Notable American Women, 1607-1950*
- E. Other works and research

Subseries A. General, 1931-1970, bulk 1931-1939

The first of the subseries contains correspondence and research notes that relate to Varner's areas of study as a whole.

Subseries B. Whitman, Sarah Helen, 1798-1958

This subseries is the largest in the series, and fills over eight of the twelve boxes in the collection. The papers in this subseries have been further arranged into three groups to impose further order. The first group is titled Correspondence, 1932-58, and these records document the many sources and leads that Varner followed while working on his dissertation. While much of the correspondence originated in research libraries, some of it derived from his attempts to obtain copies of letters and works held in private collections. Important correspondents in this subseries are Josiah K. Lilly, Dorothy Spofford, and John Cook Wyllie. The correspondence follows Varner's original alphabetical arrangement.

The second group, titled Research, makes up the bulk of the series. In this group are the transcriptions and photostats, research notes, and gathered material that Varner used in his study of Sarah Helen Whitman. These records have been further grouped by topic, since Varner's study generated research notes that only indirectly related to Whitman's life. The first of these topics has been titled Research on Individuals/Persons. Most of the records relate to Sarah Helen Whitman's life and work. Four boxes of papers, arranged by Varner both chronologically and by subject, bring together Whitman's correspondence and creative works from 1816 until her death. However, Varner generated correspondence, notes and other research materials while studying associates of Whitman, like George Washington Eveleth, John H. Ingram, John Winslow Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, and Whitman's ancestry, all of which are included in this subseries.

Another area of interest to Varner was the places in which Whitman lived and travelled. Accordingly, a second topic has been titled Research by Place. Varner used the records grouped in this heading to document Whitman's life in Providence, Rhode Island, as well as how and where she would have travelled in the nineteenth-century. Of particular interest in this group are the printed materials that document the history of Providence.

The final area of research is that of Spiritualism, which Whitman practiced throughout her life. These records include Varner's research into the important figures and beliefs of Whitman's day, as well as correspondence and research notes about the state of spiritualism in the 1930s.

The third and final group in this subseries is titled Works. Found here are Varner's bound dissertation *Sarah Helen Whitman: Seeress of Providence* (1940), the draft of the above, and his thesis, *Poe and Mrs. Whitman: A Study of the Documents of Sarah Helen Whitman* (1938?).

Subseries C. Edgar Allan Poe, 1933-1943

Two boxes make up this subseries, which represents Varner's study of Poe. These records have been divided into two groups as well, and their arrangement differs from the above subseries. The first grouping in this subseries is titled Works, and Varner's published writings are found here. Of particular interest is the material relating to the first book Varner published, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Saturday Evening Courier* (1933). The records here document the publication process from Varner's earliest research notes and copies of the articles he would edit to the book reviews and publicity the published work generated. Also found in this grouping are smaller amounts of correspondence and research material gathered by Varner while writing articles about Poe. The second grouping has been labelled General Research about Poe, and includes correspondence, research notes, printed documents, portraits, and other gathered records that Varner used to document Poe's life and his relationships.

Subseries D. Notable American Women, 1607-1950, 1961-1972

Found in this subseries is the correspondence, research material, and drafts that Varner generated when he was asked to write short biographies of important nineteenth-century women for this reference source, which was published in 1971. Varner contributed three biographies to this book, and his research of Maria Gowan Brooks, Frances Sargent Osgood, and Sarah Helen Whitman is documented here.

Subseries E. Other works and research, undated

This final subseries includes areas of research that briefly interested Varner, but were never developed further. Subjects of study in this subseries are Delia Salter Bacon, Jane McCrea, and Irving Russell. Bacon and McCrea are related indirectly to Varner's study of Poe and his book *Edgar Allan Poe and the Saturday Evening Courier*.

Index Terms

Correspondents

Anthony, Katherine Susan, 1877-1965.

James, Edward T.

James, Janet Wilson, 1918- .

O'Sullivan, Vincent, 1872-1940.

Power, Minerva Lester.

Spofford, Dorothy.

Sugden, Avis.

Van Male, John.

Wilson, James Southall, 1880-1963.

Wyllie, John Cook, 1908-1968.

Subjects

Authors, American.

Bacon, Delia Salter, 1811-1859.

Brooks, Maria Gowen, 1795-1845.

Eveleth, George Washington.

Ingram, John Henry, 1849-1916.

McCrea, Jane, 1753-1777.

Osgood, Frances Sargent Locke, 1811-1850.

Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849.

Russell, Irving.

Spiritulism.

Whitman, John Winslow, 1798-1833.

Whitman, Sarah Helen Power, 1803-1878.

Document Types

Christmas cards.

Dissertations.

Galley proofs.

Genealogies.

Maps.

Scrapbooks.

Series I. General, 1936-78

Subseries A. Varner Personal

Biographical Information [1978?] **Container 1.1**

Printed material, 1938-1961 **Container 1.2**

Correspondence, 1936-61 **Container 1.3**

Scrapbook material, 1965 **Container 1.4**

Subseries B. Teaching

Student papers, 1958 **Container 1.5**

Series II. Works and Research, 1798-1972, bulk 1932-1939

Subseries A. General, 1931-1970, bulk 1931-1939

Correspondence, 1931-1970, bulk 1931-1939 **Container 1.6**General Research notes about E. A. Poe, S. H. Whitman, G. W. Eveleth, and others **Container 1.7**

Subseries B. Whitman, Sarah Helen, 1798-1958

Correspondence of J. G. Varner

General, 1934-1958 **Container 1.8**A, 1933-1940 **Container 1.9**B, 1932-1948 **Container 1.10**C, 1932-1938 **Container 1.11**D, 1933-1941 **Container 1.12**E, 1933-1937 **Container 1.13**H, 1933-1941 **Container 1.14**L, 1933-1941 **Container 1.15**M, 1932-1938 **Container 1.16**O, 1934-1938 **Container 2.1**P, 1932-1938 **Container 2.2**Q, 1941 **Container 2.3**R, 1932-1937 **Container 2.4**W, 1933-1947 **Container 2.5**

Research -- Individuals/Persons

Correspondence from George Washington Eveleth to Sarah Helen Whitman, 1853-1978 [typed transcriptions] **Container 2.6**Correspondence about George Washington Eveleth, 1931-1933 **Container 2.7**

Research materials about G. W. Eveleth	Container 2.8
Correspondence from S. H. Whitman to John H.Ingram, 1874-1978 [typed transcriptions]	Container 2.9-10
Research materials about John Winslow Whitman	Container 2.11
Sarah Helen Whitman Papers [transcriptions and photostats]	
1816-1839	Container 3.1
1840-1848	Container 3.2
1849	Container 3.3
1850-1853	Container 3.4
1854-1857	Container 3.5
1858-1859	Container 4.1
1860-1865	Container 4.2
1866-1869	Container 4.3
1870-Feb. 1874	Container 4.4
March 1874-May 1874	Container 4.5
June 1874-December 1874	Container 5.1
1875	Container 5.2
1876	Container 5.3
1877-1880	Container 5.4
Poems (in alphabetical order) [transcriptions and photostats]	Container 6.1
Creative works, 1828-1864 [transcriptions and photostats]	Container 6.2
Creative works, 1865-1878 [transcriptions and photostats]	Container 6.3
Research notes by subject	Container 6.4

Research notes by date, before 1850-1878	Container 6.5
Materials about S. H. Whitman [transcriptions and photostats]	Container 6.6
General research materials [transcriptions and photostats]	Container 7.1
Drafts about Whitman by Varner	Container 7.2
Research materials about Whitman and E. A. Poe	Container 7.3
Research materials about the family of Whitman	Container 7.4
Research -- Places	
Research materials about 19th-century travel	Container 7.5
Research materials and photographs of Rhode Island and Providence	Container 7.6
Research materials about Massachusetts	Container 7.7
Research materials about New York and Appalachian Mountain Club	Container 7.8
Research -- Spiritualism	
Research notes on Spiritualism [includes transcriptions and photostats]	Container 7.9
Correspondence, 1936	Container 7.10
Printed materials about spiritualism	Container 7.11
Research-Photographic materials	Container 7.12
Works	
<i>Sarah Helen Whitman: Seeress of Providence</i> , University of Virginia, 1940	Container 8
Dissertation draft	
Table of Contents -- Chapter 5	Container 9.1
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Chapters 10-13	Container 9.3

Chapters 14-16 **Container 9.4**

Draft of Chapter VIII, labelled "Chapter IX" **Container 9.5**

Varner's thesis *Poe and Mrs. Whitman: A Study of the Documents of Sarah Helen Whitman*, University of Virginia, [1938] **Container 9.6**

Subseries C. Edgar Allan Poe, 1933-1943

Works

Edgar Allan Poe and the Saturday Evening Courier

Clippings from *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* [photographs] **Container 10.1**

Research materials **Container 10.2**

Correspondence, 1933-43 **Container 10.3**

Prepublication materials **Container 10.4-6**

Publicity and book reviews **Container 10.7**

"Note on a Poem Attributed to Poe," printed material **Container 11.1**

"Poe and Miss Barrett of Wimpole Street"

Correspondence, 1935 **Container 11.2**

Research materials **Container 11.3**

Article and drafts **Container 11.4**

"Poe's Tale of Jerusalem"

Correspondence, 1933-35 **Container 11.5**

Research materials **Container 11.6**

General Research about Poe

Correspondence, 1933-41 **Container 11.7**

Printed materials **Container 11.8**

Research materials **Container 11.9**

Drafts by Varner **Container 11.10**

Portraits of Poe **Container 11.11**

Scrapbook **Container 11.12**

Subseries D. *Notable American Women*, 1961-1972

Correspondence, 1961-71 **Container 12.1**

Research materials -- Brooks, Maria Gowan **Container 12.2**

Research materials -- Osgood, Frances Sargent **Container 12.3**

Research materials -- Whitman, Sarah Helen **Container 12.4**

Printed material, 1972 **Container 12.5**

Subseries E. Other works and research, undated

Research materials about Delia Salter Bacon **Container 12.6**

Research materials about Jane McCrea **Container 12.7**

Scrapbook materials [clippings and transcriptions] about Irving Russell **Container 12.8**

Index of Correspondents

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- Adkins, Nelson F.--1.9
- Annan, Beatrice E. (Brown University)--1.10
- Anthony, Alfred Williams--1.9
- Anthony, Katharine--1.9
- Atlantic Monthly--1.9
- Bailey, Margaret Emerson--1.10
- Ball, Mrs. M. F. (American Academy of Arts and Sciences)--1.9
- Barbow, Clarence A. (Brown University)--1.3
- Barcus, Ann--2.7
- Barrett, Oliver R.--1.10
- Bayless, Joy--1.10
- Beach, Mrs. Raymond S.--1.10
- Beal, Boylston A.--1.10
- Benson, Paul (Brown University)--1.10
- Bishop, William Warner (University of Michigan)--1.16
- Blackwell, Alice Stone--1.10
- Blanchard, Edith H. (Brown University)--1.10, 7.2, 7.5
- Boyd, Allen R. (Library of Congress)--10.3
- Bump, Lucila (Harvard College Library)--1.14, 10.3
- Burns, A. J. (National Railway Publication Co.)--7.5
- Calcutt, Emily--10.3
- Calisch, Edward N.--11.5
- Campbell, Killis--1.11, 10.3
- Catan, Louise G. (Library of Congress)--11.7
- Chace, Miss Louis P.--1.11
- Chase, Lewis Nathaniel--1.11, 2.7
- Chase, Mrs. Louis Andre--1.11
- Chandler, Charles Lyon--1.11
- Chapin, Howard M. (Rhode Island Historical Society)--2.4
- Clemons, Harry (University of Virginia)--10.3
- Coley, F. C. (New York, New Haven, and Hartford)--7.5
- Cox, Ellen F. (Free Library of Pembroke)--1.11
- Crandall, Marjorie (Library of the Boston Athenaeum)--10.3
- Cricher, A. Lane (Department of Commerce)--7.5
- Crockett, W. G. (Medical College of Virginia)--1.6
- Cushman, Esther C. (Brown University)--1.10
- Dalton, Jack (University of Virginia)--1.12
- Damon, S. Foster (Brown University)--1.10
- Davis, Charles B. (Grand Lodge of Maine)--2.7
- Davis, Lambert (Harcourt, Brace, and Co., Inc.)--1.8
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- Dexter Asylum--1.12
- Dielman, Louis H. (Medical College of Virginia) (Peabody Library)--1.6, 2.2, 2.7
- Dix, William S.--10.3
- Dorr, Reta Childe--1.12
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- Eutsler, George W.--10.3

- Eveleth, Mrs. E. S.--2.7
- Farman, E. E. (United States Military Academy)--1.16
- Farnum, Jessica L. (Library of Congress)--1.11
- Farrington, Lewis M. (Department of Mental Health, N.Y.)--2.4
- Feuchtwanger, Lion--11.5
- Flynn, Harry (Richmond News Leader)--10.3
- Foley, Agnes Howard (Enoch Pratt Free Library)--1.13
- Forbes, Allyn B. (Massachusetts Historical Society)--1.16
- Fort Fairfield Postmaster--2.7
- Foster, James W. (Enoch Pratt Free Library)--2.7
- Fraser, A. D. (University of Virginia)--11.5
- Fullinwider, S. P., Jr. (Bureau of Navigation, U.S. Navy)--2.2
- Gilman, Mae (Maine Historical Society)--1.16
- Godard, George S. (Connecticut State Library)--2.4
- Gohdes, Clarence (American Literature)--11.7
- Gray, Austin K. (Library Co. of Philadelphia)--10.3
- Greer, Louise--7.10
- Gregory, Elinor (Library of the Boston Athenaeum)--1.10
- Grimes, H. C. (Chapman & Grimes)--1.8
- Grimshaw, T. (National Spiritualist Association)--7.10
- Haffrer, E. (Denver Chamber of Commerce)--2.7
- Hall, Ethel P. (Maine Historical Society)--1.16
- Hallowell, Katherine M. (Bowdoin College)--2.7
- Hargraves, John (Unity Church)--1.14
- Harrington, Arthur H.--1.14
- Harsof, M. (G. A. Baker & Co., Inc.)--1.10
- Hart, Richard H. (Enoch Pratt Free Library)--1.13
- Hasalden, R. B. (H. H. Huntington Library)--1.14
- Haywood, Oscar (First Baptist Church (New Bern, NC))--1.1
- Heartman, Charles F. (American Book Collector)--11.5
- Heise, Elmer V.--1.14
- Hotson, Clarence Paul--1.14
- Howland, Anne W. (Drexel Institute)--1.12
- Hull, William D., II--1.14
- Hunter, Sarah Hale--1.14
- Jacobs, Warren (Railway and Locomotive Historical...)--7.5
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- Jewish Theological Seminary--11.5
- Jones, H. S. V. (Journal of English and Germanic)--11.7
- Jones, Mildred (Dallas News)--10.3
- Jovanovich, William (Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc.)--1.8
- Kenney, Mildred Anna (Denver Public Library)--2.7
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- Kletsch, Ernest (Library of Congress)--1.11
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- Linscott, Charles E. (Maine State Prison)--2.7
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- New York Times--10.3
- New York University--2.7
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- Oaksmith, Geraldine--2.1
- Olney, Austin (Houghton Mifflin Co.)--1.8
- Osborn, Stanley H. (Department of Health, Connecticut)--2.4
- Osborne, Lucy Eugenia (Williams College)--2.5
- O'Sullivan, Vincent--2.1
- Overholser, Winfred (Department of Mental Diseases, Mass.)--2.4
- Partridge, Ethelda--1.3
- Partridge, Pat--1.3
- Perry, Charles M. (University of Oklahoma)--2.1-2
- Person, Henrietta (Claiborne County Library)--2.2
- Phillips, Mary E.--2.2
- Phillips, R. C., Jr. (Four Arts)--11.2
- Picking, Sherwood (Electric Boat Co.)--2.2
- Pierce, Dorcas Elizabeth (American Antiquarian Society)--10.3
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- Quinn, A. H. (University of Pennsylvania)--2.3
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- Remsen, Gerard T. (Remsen & Remsen)--2.4
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- Schirmer, G., Inc.--1.3
- Schufer, Joseph (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)--10.3
- Schulz, H. C. (H. H. Huntington Library)--1.14
- Scoon, Carolyn (New York Historical Society)--12.3
- Smith, Frank C., Jr. (Thayer, Smith & Gaskill)--2.5
- Smith, Marjorie E. (Library of the Museum of Fine Arts)--1.10
- Spengler, Otto (Argus Pressclipping Bureau)--1.9
- Spofford, Dorothy (Brown University)--
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- United States War Department--2.5
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- Vanamee, Mrs. William (Grace D.) American Academy of Arts and Letters)--1.9
- Van Hoesen, Henry B. (Brown University)--1.10
- Van Male, John--2.7
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- Watson, George H. (New England Railway Publishing)--7.5
- Webber, Mabel L. (South Carolina Historical Society)--1.8, 2.5
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- Whitman, Hendricks H. (William Whitman and Co., Inc.)--2.5
- Whitman, Roscoe L. (Society of Stukely Westcott Descendents)--7.4
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- Whitman, William T.--2.5
- Whitten, Linnora H.--2.5
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