

C Porter, Sylvia F. (1913-1991), Papers, 1939-1991
3977 16 linear feet, 3 video cassettes, 6 audio cassettes

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INTRODUCTION

The papers of Sylvia Porter, a personal finance columnist who wrote for the New York *Post* and New York *Daily News*, consist of her columns, books, speeches, and other writings. Correspondence and publicity clippings concerning the Sylvia Porter Organization and her involvement in President Ford's efforts to curb inflation in the 1970s are also included.

DONOR INFORMATION

The Sylvia F. Porter Papers were donated to the University of Missouri by her husband, James F. Fox, on 23 June 1994 (Accession No. 5443). The collection is part of the National Women and Media Collection.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sylvia Porter was born Sarianni Feldman to Russian-Jewish immigrants, Rose and Louis Feldman, on 18 June 1913, in Patchogue, New York. Her mother was a suffragist and her father was a doctor who died when Sylvia was 12 years old.

Stunned by the collapse of the stock market during her freshman year at Hunter College in 1929, Porter changed her major from English literature to economics and graduated magna cum laude with a Phi Beta Kappa key in 1932. That same year she married Reed F. Porter.

She went to work at a small investment firm on Wall Street learning the ropes of government securities while also taking graduate courses at New York University School of Business Administration. Porter began writing in specialized financial magazines under the byline S.F. Porter in order to hide the fact that she was a woman. It wasn't until 1942 that she revealed her full name to her readers.

Starting in 1934 she wrote a weekly column in the *American Banker* on government securities and later started her own information service on government bonds called *Reporting on Governments*. In 1935 she began writing occasional columns for the New York *Post* and by 1936 she was named financial editor of the paper.

In 1940 Porter was summoned to Washington, D.C., to meet with Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, who told her of his plans to issue government bonds similar to the Liberty Bonds issued during World War I. Porter, remembering how her parents lost a significant amount of money due to fluctuations in these bonds, refused to support the idea. During this meeting the two came up with the idea for the non-negotiable, guaranteed U.S. Savings Bond that is still in use today.

Her column was syndicated beginning in 1947 and would eventually reach 40 million readers in 450 newspapers around the world. In 1978 she moved her column from the *Post* to the *Daily News*.

Between 1965 and 1982 Porter wrote monthly articles for the *Ladies Home Journal*. She also wrote scores of books including, *How to Make Money in Government Bonds* (1939), *How to Live Within Your Income*, with J.K. Lasser (1948), and *Sylvia Porter's Money Book* (1975).

In addition she wrote a yearly tax guide from 1960 to 1987 and numerous magazine articles. She also edited *Reporting on Governments*, *Sylvia Porter's Active Retirement Newsletter*, *Sylvia Porter's Personal Finance Magazine* and served on the editorial board of World Book Encyclopedia from 1961 until the board was dissolved in 1982.

Because Porter was so successful at translating economic “bafflegab” for common people, she was admired and respected by politicians and policy makers in Washington, D.C., who often entered her columns into the *Congressional Record* or asked her advice on fiscal issues. In fact Lyndon Johnson asked her to become his Treasury Secretary in 1964 and Gerald Ford invited Porter to speak at the White House Conference on Inflation in 1974 and chair the Citizens’ Action Committee to Fight Inflation.

In 1987 the Sylvia Porter Organization was incorporated to manage all of Porter's publications and business dealings. The corporation farmed out most of Porter’s writing assignments to ghost writers although she made a final review of every word before any of her publications went into print. The corporation was dissolved shortly before Porter’s death on 5 June 1991.

She received numerous awards and honorary degrees including Woman of the Year in 1975 and Woman of the Decade in 1979, awarded by the *Ladies Home Journal*.

Porter divorced Reed Porter in 1941. In 1943 she married G. Sumner Collins and they adopted a daughter, Cris, in 1949. Collins died in 1977 and two years later, Porter married James F. Fox.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Sylvia F. Porter Papers are arranged into eight series: **Correspondence**, **Speeches**, **Publicity**, **Scrapbooks**, **Subject Files**, **Citizens’ Action Committee**, **Writings**, and **Audio/Visual**.

The **Correspondence** series contains letters written to Porter from her literary agents, lawyer, and organizations requesting that Porter write an article or give a speech for them. This series also contains correspondence between Porter and various members of White House administrations praising Porter for her work. Letters from presidents Eisenhower, Johnson, and Ford are included. A few letters of a personal nature are scattered throughout the series but the bulk of the correspondence is business related. The series is arranged chronologically.

The **Speeches** series is arranged chronologically and includes speeches given by Porter throughout her long career. Topics of these speeches include equality of women in the workplace and economic and consumer education. In some cases she gave the same speech on multiple occasions and the dates of these other addresses are noted on the original speeches.

The **Publicity** series consists of clippings from newspapers and magazines about Porter. This series, arranged chronologically, documents Porter's rise from a part-time columnist in the 1930s to a financial guru in the 1970s and 1980s. Up until the mid-1980s most of the articles focused on Porter’s gender and would be useful to researchers studying women employed in “traditionally male” occupations.

The **Scrapbooks** series contains more publicity clippings and correspondence that Porter felt was worth organizing. Included in this series are articles she wrote for *The Export and Import Journal of America* during the late 1940s. Most of the scrapbooks are arranged chronologically but others, listed at the end of the series, consist of materials related to various publications of hers.

The **Subject Files** series is arranged alphabetically by topic and includes awards and honors given to Porter, biographical and family information, and photographs and sketches of Porter. This series also contains photographs and the program from the christening of the cargo ship, *S.S. Hope Victory* in 1945. Porter was the maid of honor at the launching.

The **Citizens' Action Committee** series consists of minutes, speeches, correspondence, and newspaper clippings concerning Porter's participation in President Ford's program to curb inflation. Called Whip Inflation Now, or WIN, the program promoted corporate and consumer responsibility, community gardens, recycling, and energy conservation. This series is arranged chronologically.

The **Writings** series contains Porter's newspaper columns, magazine articles, tax guides, and books, including an unpublished novel she wrote in 1940 entitled, *Those Who Never Sing*. This series also contains the *Reporting on Governments* newsletter and yearly articles written by the editorial board of World Book Encyclopedia of which Porter was a member for 20 years.

User's manuals for computer programs bearing Porter's name and works published by the Sylvia Porter Organization such as *Sylvia Porter's Personal Finance Magazine* and *Sylvia Porter's Active Retirement Newsletter* are also in this series. Correspondence relating to several of these publications is also included.

Of special interest to World War II researchers are the book, *If War Comes to the American Home*, and the articles, "The Nazi Chemical Trust in the United States," and "The Morgenthau Plan." In the book Porter explains the economic realities of the coming war and how they will affect the American household including rationing, bond sales, and price and wage controls. In "The Nazi Chemical Trust" Porter claimed the I.G. Farben Company, which had subsidiaries in the U.S., was the economic and political force behind Hitler. "The Morgenthau Plan" was used as a chapter in the book, *Let Germany Earn the Peace*, and detailed Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau's economic reconstruction plan for Germany after the war.

The topics of Porter's newspaper columns vary widely but they do help document the lives of the Baby Boomer generation from an economic standpoint. She wrote about the costs of marriage and child rearing, how to buy a home, and the rise of suburbia in the 1940s and 1950s. Other topics include school funding and overcrowding in the 1950s, the teenage driven economy in the 1950s and 1960s, paying for college, health insurance, and planning for retirement. Porter also wrote extensively on women in the workplace and discrimination against older workers. With these columns she helped establish the concepts of personal finance and consumerism.

Unfortunately the first 12 years of her column are missing from her papers, but Porter did keep a complete run of her columns from 1947, when she first became syndicated, through 1991, when she died. Also, the run of *Reporting on Governments* is missing issues from the early 1950s, late 1960s, and early 1970s. The Writings series is arranged alphabetically by title, except for her newspaper columns, which are arranged chronologically at the end of this series.

The **Audio/Visual** series consists of a series of personal finance audio cassettes produced by the Sylvia Porter Organization, two television commercials advertising *Sylvia Porter's Personal Finance Magazine*, a video tape on investment strategies, and a video of Porter's appearance on the "Today Show" in 1979.

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