

**Agnes McDonald's Letter to Dan Tompkins**

**May 7, 1939**

**Hunter Library MSS 80-14**

**Transcribed and Edited by  
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**For ENGL 618: Research Methods in English  
Western Carolina University  
Instructor and General Editor: Dr. Brian Gastle  
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## Introduction to Series

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography were prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English at Western Carolina University. The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship
  - a. Effectively find and use advance research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to subject.
    - Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
  - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
    - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively.
  - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
    - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
  - Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is presented as submitted by the students. While these students take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are always possible. As these students learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires checking of sources and corroboration by authoritative sources.

It is hoped that the transcription and annotations of WCU Special Collections material will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, and other patrons and users of WCU's Special Collections materials.

## **Introduction**

The following transcription is of a three-page letter from “Agnes” to “Dan” on May 7, 1939. While it is known that “Dan” refers to Dan Tompkins it can only be hypothesized through census work that “Agnes” refers to Agnes M. McDonald. Within the letter, Agnes requests a summer job as either a reporter for the Jackson County Journal, of which Tompkins was the then editor, or as a teacher at Western Carolina University.<sup>1</sup> While Tompkins did not work at Western Carolina University, it can be inferred from this letter that he was a link between Agnes and then president of the college, Dr. Hunter. Unfortunately, though Agnes was extremely qualified for both positions according to her qualifications laid out within her letter, local directories show her staying in Greensboro, North Carolina, presumably not receiving and/or not accepting a job offer from Dan Tompkins. Agnes’s qualifications included Master’s work at Duke University as well as teaching for ten years by 1939. Agnes M McDonald would remain in Greensboro, North Carolina until at least 1943, keeping her position at Greensboro Senior High School.

## **Editor’s Note**

The following document is a diplomatic transcription of the letter from Agnes to Dan. Due to either time or conditions of the location of the letter before Western Carolina University’s Special Collections Department, there is a large hole in all three pages of the text. This hole is thought to be from mold. Since this is a diplomatic transcription of the letter as much care has been taken as possible to include as much of the letter and writing as possible. This does mean that in certain locations there are words that are cut off in the middle as well as sentences that may or may not make complete sense due to losing portions of the text. In the case of the missing text the transcription is marked with “[...]” in order to signify where text was lost. Furthermore, all spelling and punctuation has been kept as the original author intended.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information regarding Tompkins may be found in the manuscript collection notes for the Tompkins collection in Hunter Library, Western Carolina University, MSS# 80-14.

[MS page #1]

406 Blandwood Ave.  
Greensboro, N.C.  
May 7, 1939

Dear Dan,

I know you think that I don't  
Appreciate everything [...] <sup>2</sup>  
for us during the po... [...]   
trust I do. The teacher [...]   
will always remember [...]   
things you did for us.

I would have written before  
now, but I have been so busy.  
After I returned from Raleigh the  
doctor told me I could not teach  
for at least a week if not two.  
Being a school teacher I thought that  
school could not run without me so  
back I went—for a short while—the  
next thing I knew I was in bed  
trying to have or not have—I don't  
know which—pneumonia. I escaped  
but next time I will listen to the  
doctor and save some time. I have  
fully recovered now and I am  
hunting for a summer job. Do you  
need a good reporter?<sup>3</sup> Don't know what

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<sup>2</sup> All sections marked with “[...]” have been destroyed due to mold.

<sup>3</sup> At this time Dan Tomkins owned the *Jackson County Journal*, a newspaper in Jackson County, North Carolina. Tomkins would own this newspaper until 1943 (Western Carolina University Special Collections).

I would report but I would report.

I have not written to Dr. Hunter<sup>4</sup>.  
Not because I am not interested,  
but because I have found out that  
you are too important. I want the  
place at Western Carol [...]   
that I could be an [...]   
faculty, but I don't [...]   
to feel that I am using [...]   
to obtain the place. How would this  
plan work? You tell Dr. Hunter my  
qualifications and if he thinks there  
would be an opening let him write  
to me. If I am not qualified then  
we can let the matter drop where it  
is and I'll just say "Thank you Dan."

I am thirty-two years old, have  
been teaching in North Carolina public  
schools ten years. One year at Pittsboro<sup>5</sup>  
one in Methodist Children's Home in  
Winston-Salem, seven years in Washington  
and one here in Greensboro<sup>6</sup>. I graduated  
from Salem College<sup>7</sup> in 1929 with an A.B.  
I majored in Chemistry and Mathematics.  
I have completed twenty-four hours  
of graduate works at Duke University  
eightien<sup>8</sup> in mathema [...]

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Hunter is believed to refer to Hiram Tyram Hunter, president of Western Carolina University from 1923-1947, the only Dr. Hunter as an institution head at this time (Wood and Blethen).

<sup>5</sup> A small town in Chatham County, North Carolina located outside Raleigh, North Carolina

<sup>6</sup> This was at Greensboro Senior High School (ancestry.com).

<sup>7</sup> Salem College is a women's college in Winston-Salem, North Carolina that was founded in 1772 (Salem Academy and College).

<sup>8</sup> This is believed to be a misspelling of the word "eighteen."

in education. In other words, I finished everything except my thesis.

It will be almost impossible for me to go to school this summer, but if I were given a place I would expect to go to school each [...] had completed my degree [...] hand each of you is wor... [...] Carolina in the accredited<sup>9</sup> [...] would never allow myself to be connected with an educational institution to which I could not be an asset. That may sound conceited, but I love teaching too much to stay at the bottom.

If there is a possibility of there being an opening. I would like to know as soon as possible so that Mr. Smith<sup>10</sup> could fill my place before all the teachers have signed contracts for next year.

Sincerely yours  
Agnes.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Western Carolina University received its accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (SACSS) in 1946. Prior to this accreditation the school was a teacher's college (Wood and Blethen).

<sup>10</sup> Unknown.

<sup>11</sup> While she does not sign her name, it is thought that "Agnes" is Agnes M McDonald (ancestry.com).

## Works Cited

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