

Jack Kerouac:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator	Kerouac, Jack, 1922-1969
Title	Jack Kerouac Collection
Dates:	1948-1980
Extent	1 document box, 3 galley folders (.42 linear feet)
Abstract	The collection is composed of proofs for <i>The Dharma Bums</i> , <i>Desolation Angel</i> , and <i>Excerpts from Visions of Cody</i> , and a typescript of 'Two Space Poems.' In addition there is a notebook journal written by Kerouac while preparing to write <i>On the Road</i> . Also present is a small amount of correspondence.
Call Number:	Manuscripts Collection MS-2282
Language	English
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchases and gifts, 1963-2012
Processed by	Chelsea S. Dinsmore, 2000
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Born in 1922 in Lowell, Massachusetts, Jean Louis Lebris 'Jack' Kerouac was the last of three children born to French-Canadian parents. Raised in a French-Canadian community, Kerouac did not begin to learn English until he entered school at the age of six and he did not become fluent until he entered a public junior high school. At this same school, an eighth-grade English teacher recognized and began to encourage Kerouac's writing talents. This recognition of his potential engendered a passion for literacy and language which stayed with Kerouac all of his life. He became a voracious reader, often skipping classes in high school in order to select his own material at the library. Also a talented athlete, Kerouac became a star on the school football team and was offered football scholarships to both Boston College and Columbia University.

Kerouac entered Columbia in 1940 after a successful year at prep school where he played football, wrote for school publications, and developed a lively interest in jazz. His record at Columbia was not as good. While he enjoyed his Shakespeare class, he failed chemistry, and broke his leg early in the first football season. After his injury, his interest in classes declined further as he spent his time reading the newly discovered works of Thomas Wolfe who would influence him for years to come. In September of 1941, he quit football and school and spent the next several years working at a variety of odd jobs, including a stint in the merchant marine; in February 1943 he enlisted in the Navy. He was honorably discharged a month later as an "indifferent character." During a second stint in the merchant marine Kerouac had a vision of his true role in life, that of "divine scribe" and he conceived the idea for a connected series of stories about his adventures.

Back in New York in the spring of 1944, Kerouac married Edie Parker as a means of raising bond money after a friend, Lucien Carr, involved him as a material witness in a murder case. After a few months of living a "normal" life in Michigan with his wife, Kerouac ran off to join the merchant marine again, but jumped ship and wound up back in New York. By 1945, Kerouac was living with his wife, his friend and mentor William Burroughs, and Joan Vollmer. Kerouac had also formed a close friendship with Allen Ginsberg by this time. Both young men were attempting to overcome the boundaries and conventions of the times and were experimenting with religious practice, sexual preferences, and drugs. Late in the year, weakened by Benzedrine addiction, Kerouac developed thrombophlebitis and spent a month in the hospital before returning home to his family to help nurse his father who had been diagnosed with stomach cancer. The death of his father in 1946 provided a catharsis for Kerouac, who almost immediately after the funeral began writing what would become his first novel, *The Town and the City* (1950).

With the advance money from *The Town and the City* Kerouac moved himself and his mother to Colorado where he began conceptualizing the story which would become *On the Road* (1957), based in part on road trips he took with Neal Cassady. When the advance money ran out Kerouac returned to New York where, in 1951, inspired by a 23,000 word free form letter from Cassady, he taped reams of paper together into a scroll and typed 175,000 words in twenty days--the first complete draft of *On the Road*.

Meanwhile, his marriage to Edie Parker had been annulled and he had remarried in 1950, this time to Joan Haverty. Not long after Kerouac finished his manuscript, Haverty threw him out and filed for divorce, despite being pregnant with Kerouac's daughter.

Kerouac's search for a personal style was finally realized in late 1951 when a friend suggested that he "sketch" pictures with words. This suggestion caused something to click in his mind and allowed him to finally express what he was trying to do. The term he came up with was "Spontaneous Prose," and the first true example of it was *Visions of Cody* (1952), originally part of *On the Road*, but extracted as an independent story.

Kerouac continued to write and to refine his style. His work never received much favor with the established literary critics, especially during the fifties when anything that seemed to support anarchy was vilified. In 1966, Kerouac married Stella Sampas, the sister of his childhood friend Sebastian Sampas. He died in St. Petersburg, Florida, of a ruptured stomach vein in October 1969.

Sources

Dictionary of Literary Biography--Volume 16: The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America. Ann Charters, Ed. (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983).

Scope and Contents

The small Jack Kerouac Collection, 1948-1980, contains galley proofs for *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angel* and *Excerpts from Visions of Cody*, as well as page proofs of *Excerpts*, and a typescript of 'Two Space Poems.' Also in the collection is a notebook journal created by Kerouac while preparing to write *On the Road*. Due to the fragile condition of the notebook, photocopy and digital images are available for research use. Access to the original journal is available only with curatorial permission.

In addition, the collection contains correspondence from Kerouac to Neal and Carolyn Cassady, Star Huffstickler, and Raman K. Singh. The Singh correspondence includes typed biographical questionnaires completed by Kerouac. Also present are photocopies of letters from Kerouac, Carolyn Cassidy, and Charles Bukowski.

Related Material

Other materials associated with Jack Kerouac are located in the following Ransom Center collections:

- Cassady, Neal
 - Corso, Gregory
 - Dahlberg, E.
 - Gifford, Barry
 - Ginsberg, Allen
 - Paterson Society
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Separated Material

The Ransom Center Vertical File Collection contains two folders of biographical information and literary criticism of Kerouac's work. Sixty-five audio cassette tapes from a 1982 Kerouac On the Road conference are housed in the Ransom Center's Sound Recording Collection.

Index Terms

Correspondents

- Bukowski, Charles.
- Cassady, Carolyn.
- Cassady, Neal.

Subjects

- American poetry--20th century
- Beat generation
- Beat generation--Fiction

Document Types

- Diaries.
 - Galley proofs.
 - Sound recordings.
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Folder List

<i>The Dharma Bums</i> , bound galley proof, 1958	box 1 Folder 1
<i>Desolation Angels</i> , two sets of unrevised galley proofs, 262pp, 1965 [*removed to galley folders 1-2]	Folder *
<i>Excerpts from Visions of Cody</i>	
Page proofs, 129pp, 1960	folder 2
Galley proofs, 42pp, 1959 [*removed to galley folder 3]	folder *
<i>On the Road</i> notebook, photocopy of handwritten journal, 79pp, 1948-1949 [*original removed due to preservation restrictions and available only with curatorial permission]	folder 3*
'Two Space Poems,' typescript poems with handwritten note to Clarence Major, 1p, circa 1959	folder 4
Correspondence	
Kerouac to Neal and Carolyn Cassady, 1957	folder 5
Photocopies	
Kerouac to Irving ____, 1958	folder 6
Carolyn Cassady to John ____, 1980	
Charles Bukowski to John ____, 1980	
Kerouac to Mr. Rosenthal, undated	
Kerouac to Star Huffstickler, 1964	folder 7
Kerouac to Raman K. Singh, with typed questionnaires, 1965	folder 8