

Jack Kerouac:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator	Kerouac, Jack, 1922-1969
Title	Jack Kerouac Papers
Dates:	1948-1982
Extent:	1 box (.42 linear feet), 3 galley folders, 65 audio tapes
Abstract	The collection is composed of proofs for <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 are cassette tapes from a 1982 Kerouac <i>On the Road</i> conference.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-02282
Language:	English.
Access	The <i>On the Road</i> journal is circulated in photocopy form only. Advance appointment required to use audio materials.

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchases and gifts, 1963-1990
Processed by	Chelsea S. Dinsmore, 2000
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The 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, 1948-1982, is composed of galley proofs for *Desolation Angel* and *Excerpts from Visions of Cody*, as well as page proofs of *Excerpts*, and a typescript of "Two Space Poems." In addition there is a notebook journal written by Kerouac while preparing to write *On the Road*. Because of the fragility of the notebook, photocopies of the material are available for research use. There are also three letters from Kerouac and two letters from friends of Kerouac to third-parties.

Elsewhere in the Ransom Center are two vertical files containing biographical information and literary criticism of Kerouac's work. Also present are 65 cassette tapes from a 1982 Kerouac *On the Road* conference.

Related Material

Other materials associated with Jack Kerouac may be found in the following collections at the Ransom Center:

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

box * *Desolation Angels*, two sets of unrevised galley proofs 1965, 262pp (* removed to galley folders 1-2)

box 1 folder 1 *Excerpts from Visions of Cody*, page proofs 1960, 129pp (galley proofs 1959, 42pp, removed to galley folder 3)

**Journal written during first stages of *On The Road*, holograph notebook, 79pp
1948-49 (Access restricted due to fragility.)**

Photocopies of *On The Road* journal

box 1 folder 3

box 1 folder 4 Two Space Poems, typescript poems, includes holograph note to Clarence Major ca. 1959, 1p

Correspondence

Kerouac to Neal and Carolyn Cassady 1954

box 1
folder 5

Kerouac to 'Irving' 1958

Kerouac to Mr. Rosenthal nd

Carolyn Cassady to John - 1980

Charles Bukowski to John - 1980