

Russell Banks:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Banks, Russell, 1940-
Title:	Russell Banks Papers
Dates:	1960s-2012
Extent:	110 document boxes, 1 oversize box (osb), 19 serial boxes (53.76 linear feet), 2 galley files (gf)
Abstract:	The literary papers of American writer Russell Banks include material for his novels and collected short stories, from notes and drafts of works to publication material and reviews; screenplays written by Banks and by others based on his novels; and shorter works, such as articles and essays, introductions, plays, poems, reviews, and short stories. The papers also contain extensive correspondence, as well as articles about Banks, biographical information, diary notes, contracts, published material, and works by others.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-4899
Language:	English, French
Access:	Open for research. Some materials restricted due to condition and conservation status.

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchases, 2002-2012 (R15005, R15098, 12-12-001-P)
Processed by:	Liz Murray, 2003; Daniela Lozano, 2015
Repository:	The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center

Biographical Sketch

Russell Earl Banks was born on March 28, 1940, in Newton, Massachusetts, the eldest of four children, to Earl Banks and Florence Taylor. They lived in New Hampshire but moved back to Massachusetts after Earl abandoned the family when Banks was 12 years old. Banks was awarded a full scholarship to Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, but dropped out in the first semester. Intending to join Fidel Castro's insurgent army, he hitchhiked to Florida, but instead of travelling to Cuba, Banks remained in Florida where he met and married Darlene Bennett with whom he had a daughter, Leona, born in 1960.

Banks and his family moved to Boston, and it was while working at a bookstore there that he began socializing with a literary crowd and trying his hand at writing poetry and stories. He and Darlene divorced in February 1962 and, in October of that year, he married Mary Gunst and they had three daughters: Caerthan (b. 1964), Maia (b. 1968), and Danis (b. 1970). In 1964, Banks enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There, he co-founded the journal, *Lillabulero*, which became a successful literary magazine that ran for nine years. He graduated in 1967 after just three years.

In 1968, Banks began teaching at Emerson College in Boston, and then at the University of New Hampshire at Durham in 1970. In 1975, he published his first collection of short stories, *Searching for Survivors*, as well as his first novel, *Family Life*. The next year Banks was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship which allowed him to take a break from teaching and live in Jamaica from May 1976 to September 1977. His second novel, *Hamilton Stark*, was completed during this time and published in 1978. Banks also used his time in Jamaica to gather material for another novel, *The Book of Jamaica* (1980) which was awarded an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation.

Upon their return from Jamaica, Banks and Mary divorced. Banks began teaching at the University of New England until 1982, then went on to teach at Columbia University, and briefly, at New York University and the University of Alabama. In 1982, Banks was offered a professorship at Princeton University, and he married his third wife, Kathy Wilton, an editor at Harper and Row. They divorced in 1988, after which he married poet Chase Twichell. Works published during this decade include *Continental Drift* (1985), which was awarded the John Dos Passos Prize for Fiction and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist; the short story collection *Success Stories* (1986); and *Affliction* (1989), which was later adapted into a film directed by Paul Schrader.

Banks continued to produce novels in the following decades including *The Sweet Hereafter* (1991), which was adapted into a film directed by Atom Egoyan; *Rule of the Bone* (1995); the Pulitzer Prize finalist, *Cloudsplitter* (1998); *The Reserve* (2006); and *Lost Memory of Skin* (2011). He also published the short story collection, *The Angel on the Roof* (2000), and the nonfiction work, *Dreaming Up America* (2008), an expanded version of an interview, *Amérique: notre histoire*, first published in France in 2006.

Banks has won numerous awards including National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowships, the St. Lawrence Award for Short Fiction, O. Henry and Best American Short Story Award, and the Literature Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He retired from teaching at Princeton in 1997, and he and Chase now split their time between upstate New York and Florida.

Sources:

In addition to material found in the Russell Banks Papers, the following sources were used:

Hennessy, Denis M. "Russell Banks." *Dictionary of Literary Biography Online*, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed 4 December 2015).

McEneaney, Kevin T. *Russell Banks: In Search of Freedom*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010.

"Russell Banks." *Contemporary Authors Online*, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed 7 December 2015).

Scope and Contents

The literary papers of American writer Russell Banks span a fifty-year career from the early 1960s to 2012. The collection includes material for his novels and collected short stories, from notes and drafts of works to publication material and reviews, as well as screenplays written by Banks and by others based on his novels. Also present are shorter works, such as articles and essays, introductions, plays, poems, reviews, and short stories. The papers also contain extensive correspondence, articles about Banks, biographical information, diary notes, contracts, published material, and works by others. The papers are arranged in four series: I. Works, 1969-2012, undated; II. Correspondence, 1960s-2009, undated; III. Personal and Career Related, 1968-2009; and IV. Published Material, 1963-2011.

Series I. Works is divided into two subseries: A. Novels, Collections, Screenplays; and B. Short Works and Other Writings. This material is arranged alphabetically by title.

Subseries A. Novels, Collections, Screenplays contains material related to Banks's published novels including *Affliction*, *The Book of Jamaica*, *Cloudsplitter*, *Continental Drift*, *The Darling*, *Family Life*, *Hamilton Stark*, *Lost Memory of Skin*, *The Relation of My Imprisonment*, *The Reserve*, *Rule of the Bone*, and *The Sweet Hereafter*. Also present are typescript drafts of Banks's unpublished first novel, *The Locus*. Screenplays for two of his novels that were subsequently adapted to the screen in 1997, *Affliction*, directed by Paul Schrader, and *The Sweet Hereafter*, directed by Atom Egoyan, are also found in this subseries. Other novels which include screenplay adaptations written by Banks and/or others are *The Book of Jamaica*, *Cloudsplitter*, and *Continental Drift*.

Screenplays and material related to a film based on Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* are also present. Short story collections in this subseries include *The Angel on the Roof*, *The New World*, *Searching for Survivors*, *Success Stories*, and *Trailerpark*. Other works represented here include *Outer Banks*, a novel compilation consisting of *Family Life*, *Hamilton Stark*, and *The Relation of My Imprisonment*; *The Invisible Stranger*, a collaboration with photographer Arturo Patten; and two nonfiction works, *Amérique: notre histoire*, an interview with Banks published in French, and *Dreaming Up America*, the expanded English version of the interview.

Notebooks and a typescript draft for *Lost Memory of Skin* and a typescript draft of *The Darling* contained paperclips on the edges of individual pages used to flag those pages. The paperclipped pages were photocopied and filed with the corresponding material and the paperclips were removed to prevent damage to the paper.

Subseries B. Short Works and Other Writings includes articles for magazines and newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *The New Republic*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The Atlantic*. Article topics cover a wide range of people and places from the Adirondacks, Edinburgh, Seychelles, and the Everglades to Eudora Welty, Billie Holiday, Paul Strand, and Raymond Carver. Banks wrote introductions to works by Nelson Algren, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Frank O'Connor, Michael Rumaker, and Mark Twain. Plays, poems, research material for various projects, reviews, and short stories are also included in this subseries.

Series II. Correspondence is organized in three subseries: A. Chronological; B. Individual Correspondents; and C. Career-Related Correspondence. While Banks kept his correspondence primarily in date order, frequent correspondents were identified separately and housed apart from the chronological files, although there is some crossover between the two. Letters from Bill Corbett, Clarence Major, William Matthews, Joyce Carol Oates, Leon Rooke, Charles Simic, Jonathan Williams, and Arthur Yanoff are particularly numerous. The career-related files found in Subseries C reflect Banks's involvement with the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, the Princeton Writing Program, and the publications *Lillabulero* and *Ploughshares*. Files relating to academic appointments, publishing, requests for literary engagements, editorial and writing projects, and readings are also found in this subseries.

Series III. Personal and Career Related contains material that provides additional information about Banks in the form of articles about him, an autobiographical piece for *Contemporary Authors*, and a diary written between September 1978 and March 1984. Publishing contracts, interviews, lectures and speeches, and works by Jane Anderson, Ray Buck, Brad Mirman, and Joel Tuber are also present.

Series IV. Published Material is made up of literary and popular magazines in which articles by and about Banks, excerpts from novels, interviews, reviews, and stories are published. This material is arranged alphabetically by the title of the periodical, and indexed by title of the work by or about Banks in the Index to Published Material. In cases where both a manuscript and published version exist for the same work, the published version is filed with the manuscript.

The material is in good condition, except for several items in the *Hamilton Stark* section that are mold-damaged. This material is currently restricted until it has been treated by the Conservation Department.

Related Material

Additional materials related to Russell Banks are located in the Ransom Center's Russell Banks Collection and the Paul Schrader Papers.

Separated Material

Books, video tapes, sound recordings, and computer disks received with the papers have been transferred to appropriate departments within the Ransom Center. Sound Recordings are described individually in a list at the end of this finding aid and in a [searchable database](#)

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- C 0555 : audiocassettes : Russell Banks on The Diane Rehm Show
- CD 1362 : compact discs : Russell Banks and Richard Russo, disc 1
- CD 1363 : compact discs : Russell Banks and Richard Russo, disc 2
- CD 1364 : compact discs : The Connection, The Book That Changed My Life: Part Five
- CD 1365 : compact discs : Los Angeles Times Festival of Books
- CD 1366 : compact discs : Russell Banks reads from The Reserve
- CD 1367 : compact discs : The Exchange: Granite State Stories - "Trailerpark"
- CD 1368 : compact discs : This American Life, Show 228
- CD 1369 : compact discs : Title Illegible
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