

Barbara Mailer Wasserman:

An Inventory of Her Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

- Creator:** Wasserman, Barbara Mailer, 1927-
- Title:** Barbara Mailer Wasserman Papers
- Dates:** 1914-2015
- Extent:** 11 document boxes (4.62 linear feet), 1 osf
- Abstract:** The Barbara Mailer Wasserman papers were created between 1914 and 2015 and comprise correspondence, manuscripts, journals, photographs, and printed matter documenting the life and work of the American editor and writer Barbara Mailer Wasserman.
- Call Number:** Manuscript Collection MS-05386
- Language:** English and French
- Access:** Open for research. Researchers must create an online Research Account and agree to the Materials Use Policy before using archival materials. The typed journal from 1959 to 1961 is to be restricted from access until fifteen years after Barbara Mailer Wasserman's death, unless her literary executor grants access at an earlier date.
- Use Policies:** Ransom Center collections may contain material with sensitive or confidential information that is protected under federal or state right to privacy laws and regulations. Researchers are advised that the disclosure of certain information pertaining to identifiable living individuals represented in the collections without the consent of those individuals may have legal ramifications (e.g., a cause of action under common law for invasion of privacy may arise if facts concerning an individual's private life are published that would be deemed highly offensive to a reasonable person) for which the Ransom Center and The University of Texas at Austin assume no responsibility.
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Administrative Information

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Repository: [Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin](#)

Biographical Sketch

Barbara Mailer was born in Long Branch, New Jersey, on 6 April 1927 as the second child of Isaac Barnett "Barney" Mailer and his wife Fanny Schneider Mailer. Barbara's only sibling was the future author Norman Mailer, four years her senior. In 1928, the Mailer family moved to Brooklyn, New York, where both children attended public schools. By the time Barbara graduated from high school and was admitted to Radcliffe College in 1943, the United States was engaged in the Second World War. Radcliffe was, due to its relationship to Harvard, on an accelerated wartime scholastic program, permitting Barbara to graduate in January 1947.

By the summer of 1947 Norman was, as an army veteran, attending the Sorbonne in Paris with the assistance of the G.I. Bill; his parents were also in Paris, Barney working for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee on behalf of war-displaced European Jews. By 1948 Barbara was also in Paris, and at the urging of Norman became part of a successful one-time effort to assist several anti-Franco Spaniards trying to enter France illegally.

Back in Brooklyn by 1949, Barbara worked to ease herself out of her mother's benevolent control, using for a time a visit to her good friends Adeline and Mark "Lucky" Naiman in Chicago. There she initially worked as a waitress in a hotel coffee shop and later as a Bureau of Labor Statistics interviewer. After returning to New York she obtained an office job at the Yardney Electric Corporation, one byproduct of which was her humorous essay "Mr. Yardney and Mr. Bodkin."

While continuing with her plans to distance herself from her mother, Barbara met Larry Alson at a party in early 1950. After dating for some time, the two classical music buffs jumped at the opportunity to go to France to attend the first Pablo Casals Bach Festival. By July, still in France, the couple decided (almost offhandedly as Barbara describes it) on marrying, with the ceremony taking place in Nice on the first of August.

Barbara Alson's first long-term salaried employment was in 1952 with CBS-TV's Public Affairs Department, as secretary to Irving Gitlin. The department had been created to answer CBS's "public service obligation" and its first documentary series, *The Search*, had gotten off to a rocky start. This led the network to bring in Gitlin with enough authority to appoint people who he felt could work to his vision and deliver quality programming in a timely manner.

Barbara worked for CBS through 1954, handling much of the research and writing for *The Search*, leaving before the birth of her son, Peter Alson, in April 1955. Once Peter arrived, Barbara cut back on her work hours to spend more time with her son.

For most of the 1960s Barbara Alson divided her work time between freelancing for Irving Gitlin Productions and part-time work for Jerry Cooke Inc. In a curriculum vitae she described her work for Gitlin as "reading and evaluating scripts and books as potential film properties, researching and writing presentations." For "journalistic photographer" Cooke she served as in-office executive assistant, maintaining picture files, indexing photographs, and conducting sales. Other similar projects are to be found in the CV for this period.

As busy as the decade of the 1960s was for Barbara she found time to assemble *The Bold New Women*, a selection of contemporary feminist writing that was published by Fawcett in 1966, and reissued in a "revised [and enlarged] edition" in 1970 by the same publisher.

In the early 1960s the marriage of Larry and Barbara Alson was nearing its end and for her the immediate need for employment became more pressing, hence the work, both ongoing and catch-as-catch-can, became the norm. In 1963, after her divorce from Larry was final she began seeing Al Wasserman, whom she had known in the Gitlin crew at CBS-TV and who was now with NBC.

Wasserman was a significant figure in American documentary filmmaking, having won an Oscar in 1947 for his *First Steps*, a film study in physical therapy for children with disabilities, as well as two personal Emmys for his work on NBC's *White Paper* series in the Sixties. Barbara continued with her freelancing plus managing Jerry Cooke's shop until she and Wasserman were married in 1968, followed by Al's leaving NBC and establishing Wasserman Productions, Inc. in 1969.

Al had founded Wasserman Productions with the intention of moving into the production of feature films, Barbara having closed out her freelance work in order to work with Al in (mostly) script writing and research. The work in industrial and other documentary films had been well supported, but two major projects in producing feature films hadn't worked out and by 1974 Wasserman closed out the venture. In 1976, he joined CBS's *60 Minutes*, from which he retired in 1986.

After working with her husband on Wasserman Productions, Barbara went to Simon & Schuster in 1974, where she became an editor, reviewing and selecting manuscripts for publication. She retired from S&S in 1985, allowing the Wassermans a retirement of entertaining family and friends in New York and on Cape Cod. Other interests for the couple in these years included a return to still photography for Al and family history research for Barbara. Retirement also presented Barbara with the time to assemble a group of personal memories, *The Love of My Life*, published by Arbitrary Press in 2021.

Sources:

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

Wasserman, Barbara Mailer. *Love of My Life* (New York: Arbitrary Press, 2021)

"Al Wasserman Dies; Film Maker and Pioneer of TV Documentaries" (*New York Times*, 10 April 2005)

Scope and Contents

The Barbara Mailer Wasserman papers were created between 1914 and 2015 and comprise correspondence, manuscripts, journals, photographs, and printed materials documenting the life and work of the American writer and editor Barbara Mailer Wasserman.

These papers are in an arrangement created by the Ransom Center and are organized into five series: Series I. General Correspondence, 1940-1995; Series II. Personal Works, 1947-2013; Series III. Literary Freelancing, 1954-1991; Series IV. Simon & Schuster: Correspondence with Authors and Agents, 1977-1988; and Series V. Photographs, Telephone Logs, and Journals, 1914-2015.

Series I. General Correspondence (4 boxes) embraces a collection of largely personal correspondence with family and friends created in the years between 1940 and 1995 [mostly 1952-1992]. Found here are letters from college friends (including Adeline Naiman), domestic employees, many Mailers, Congressman Ed Koch, and Barbara's son, Peter Alson, at summer camp. Many, perhaps most, of the names listed in the Index of Correspondents by forename only, were found on postcards from the 1980s and 1990s.

Series II. Personal Works is divided into two subseries. Subseries A. Biographical Sketches and Memoirs (1 box) comprises drafts of seven of the pieces to appear in Barbara's collection entitled *Love of My Life* (2021); only "My Date with Randolph Churchill" is omitted.

Subseries B. Novels in draft and other writings (1 box) includes drafts of *The Spanish Affair*. This is a novelized version of the account describing the successful attempt made by Barbara and her friend, Barbara Probst Solomon, to help free anti-Franco Spaniards from imprisonment in Spain. Also found in the subseries are two untitled novels in draft, along with materials relating to the revised 1970 edition of *The Bold New Women*, Wasserman's collection of contemporary feminist writings.

Series III. Literary Freelancing (1 box) contains correspondence related to editorial employment sought by Wasserman as well as examples of editorial and writing projects handled by her for various publishers and television networks, including Irving Gitlin and CBS-TV. Also present in the series is a correspondence with P. J. Capelotti which began in conjunction with Capelotti's projected book project for Simon & Schuster and evolved after Barbara Wasserman's retirement into a general correspondence.

Series IV. Simon & Schuster (1.5 boxes) contains correspondence with authors and agents, as well as other materials related to Barbara's editorial work for S&S. The largest portion of this series comprises an extensive correspondence with Sarah Allan Borisch dealing with her novel in manuscript eventually published as *The Protocol*. A slightly smaller correspondence with Philip Wheaton deals with two novels in manuscript offered to S&S that were not accepted.

Series V. Photographs, Telephone Logs, and Journals (2.5 boxes) includes a substantial group of phone logs and personal journals that give insight into Wasserman's friendships, daily life, and thoughts. The photographs are of family; primarily images of Wasserman's brother Norman Mailer. Many of the journal entries in both files are brief, but others are lengthy, providing the gist of conversations and the relationships of a considerable body of friends and associates. Most of the entries refer to people by forename only, but identities are often evident. Also located in this series is a number of

early pieces by Barbara Wasserman comprising a personal reading list from 1945, two undated journal fragments, and an incomplete essay.

Related Material

Additional materials relating to Barbara Mailer Wasserman at the Harry Ransom Center are found in the Norman Mailer Papers and the Adeline Lubell-Naiman Collection of Norman Mailer.

Index Terms

People

Appel, Patricia Loveland.
Borisch, Sarah Allan.
Brower, Millicent.
Capelotti, P. J.
Cartwright, Sally.
Mailer, Norman.
Mailer, Susan, 1949-
Naiman, Adeline, 1925-2011.
Wheaton, Philip D.

Organizations

CBS Television Network
Radcliffe College.
Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Subjects

New York (N.Y.)—Intellectual life.

Places

Cape Cod (Mass.)
Greenwich Village (New York. N.Y.)

Document Types

Correspondence.
Diaries.

Logs (records).

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Manny. Typescript drafts, 2012; with revisions and readers' comments	Container 5.5
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Container 7.5

Capelotti, P. J. Correspondence, 1984-1991

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Series IV. Simon & Schuster: Correspondence with Authors and Agents, 1977-1988

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Brooks, Adrian, and other authors and literary agents, 1978-1986

Container
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Carpenter, Don. Submissions and correspondence, 1979-1981

Container
8.7

Elkin, Sandra and Anka Ehrhardt. Making It as an Adolescent (drafts) and other work; correspondence, 1977-1983

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- Barbara and Myron--4.6
- Beth (and Frank)--2.2
- Bianca--4.6
- Billie and Bob--4.6
- Bly--4.6
- Bob--4.6
- Br--4.6
- Brie--4.6
- Bud (in Lyon; mentions Barbie trial)--4.6
- Carol and Eric--4.6
- Cortland--4.6
- D (mentions Mike)--4.6
- Dan (mentions Christine)--4.6
- Dana and John--4.6
- Daryl (in Australia)--4.6
- David (mentions Clara)--4.6
- Debbie, Tom, Joey and Amy--4.6
- Diana--4.6
- E and Ernie--4.6
- Emily and John--4.6
- Eric (to "Dear Aunt Barbara and Uncle Al")--4.6
- Ethan (U.S. Department of Energy)--8.6
- Eugene--4.6
- Eva--2.2

- Fred (in Paris?, 1940s?)--4.6
- Grace and family--4.6
- Howard (to Barbara and Larry, 1958)--4.6
- James and Gay--4.6
- Jane--4.6
- Jason, Kate and Henry--4.6
- Jay and Diane (grandparents of Gavin)--4.6
- Jerry (CBS)--4.7
- Jill (mentions Jim)--4.7
- Joyce (San Francisco educator)--4.7
- Julie and Malcolm--4.7
- Kate--4.7
- Laura and Perry--4.7
- Lee--4.7
- Libby--4.7
- Louise (law student)--4.7
- Maria and Victor--4.7
- Michael or Mikhail? (mentions Nely)--4.7
- Mitzi (in San Juan, PR, 1966)--4.7
- Nancy and Michael--4.7
- Natelle--4.7
- Osie (mentions brother Cy)--4.7
- P. and M. (1993)--4.7
- Pam, Sam, Clarence and Elizabeth--4.7
- Paul--4.7
- Paul and Lori--4.7
- Pearl--4.7
- Perry--4.7
- Philip and Amy--4.7
- Robbie--4.7
- Roy--4.7
- Shari (in Mallorca, 1988)--4.7
- Steve and Kathy--4.7
- Stephanie and Michael--4.7
- Sue--4.7
- Sue and Stanley--4.7
- Suzanne--4.7
- T (in Marblehead, Mass., 1981)--4.7
- Zola--4.7