



The New York Public Library  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

**Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party : autograph manuscript draft and typescript (carbon)**

circa 1958-circa 1973

MssCol 186026

## Summary

**Creator:** Capote, Truman, 1924-1984

**Title:** Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party : autograph manuscript draft and typescript (carbon)

**Date:** circa 1958-circa 1973

**Size:** .21 linear feet (1 box)

**Source:** Purchase, 2021

**Abstract:** Truman Capote (1924-1984) was a celebrated American author whose major works include *Other Voices, Other Rooms*; *Breakfast at Tiffany's*; and *In Cold Blood*. "Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party," a short story written by Truman Capote, is based on the 1955 accidental shooting death of New York banker William Woodward Jr. by his wife Ann Woodward, under questionable circumstances. As early as 1958 Capote listed persons whose stories would figure in his novel *Answered Prayers*, the first being Ann Woodward. In 1973 *Ladies Home Journal* commissioned a two-part series of popular "blind items," brief, thinly-veiled stories from real life. The first set was published in January 1974, but a second set, including the story of "Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party," was rejected. Capote reworked some of the rejected material into "La C&#xF4;te Basque, 1965," the tale of a gossip lunch at the well-known New York City restaurant. It incorporates important elements of the Willows story, using the surname Hopkins. "La C&#xF4;te Basque, 1965" appeared in the November 1975 issue of *Esquire* magazine as an installment of Capote's novel *Answered Prayers*. It was republished as "La C&#xF4;te Basque" in *Answered Prayers: the Unfinished Novel* (1987), joining two other *Esquire* installments from 1976. The collection (2 folders in one box), dated circa 1958-circa 1973, comprises an incomplete and untitled autograph manuscript draft (19 pages) of "Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party," a short story written by Truman Capote with his revisions, and a titled carbon copy typescript (9 pages) reflecting the revisions, with additional sentences completing the text. The draft is written in pen or pencil on two varieties of ruled legal-sized paper (19 pages on rectos only, numbered 2, 3, 5-21). The typescript (pages 1-9) contains text not found in the draft: the first three introductory sentences (page 1), and a paragraph (page 2), filling the narrative gap between manuscript pages 3 and 5. "Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party" recounts the circumstances surrounding the shooting death of Mrs. Willows' son Peter B. Willows by his wife Mary Willows, depicted as a case of murder. Although the items are not dated, the fully-developed story can be traced to Capote's writings for the 1973 commission from *Ladies' Home Journal*, if not to an earlier time.

**Preferred citation:** Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party : autograph manuscript draft and typescript (carbon), Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

**Related Materials:**

Related collections include the Truman Capote Papers; Manuscripts and Archives Division; New York Public Library

## **Creator History**

Truman Capote (1924-1984) was a celebrated American author whose major works include *Other Voices, Other Rooms*; *Breakfast at Tiffany's*; and *In Cold Blood*. "Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party," a short story written by Truman Capote, is based on the 1955 accidental shooting death of New York banker William Woodward Jr. by his wife Ann Woodward, under questionable circumstances. As early as 1958 Capote listed persons whose stories would figure in his novel *Answered Prayers*, the first being Ann Woodward. In 1973 *Ladies Home Journal* commissioned a two-part series of popular "blind items," brief, thinly-veiled stories from real life. The first set was published in January 1974, but a second set, including the story of "Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party," was rejected. Capote reworked some of the rejected material into "La Côte Basque, 1965," the tale of a gossipy lunch at the well-known New York City restaurant. It incorporates important elements of the Willows story, using the surname Hopkins. "La Côte Basque, 1965" appeared in the November 1975 issue of *Esquire* magazine as an installment of Capote's novel *Answered Prayers*. It was republished as "La Côte Basque" in *Answered Prayers: the Unfinished Novel* (1987), joining two other *Esquire* installments from 1976.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The collection (2 folders in one box), dated circa 1958-circa 1973, comprises an incomplete and untitled autograph manuscript draft (19 pages) of "Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party," a short story written by Truman Capote with his revisions, and a titled carbon copy typescript (9 pages) reflecting the revisions, with additional sentences completing the text. The draft is written in pen or pencil on two varieties of ruled legal-sized paper (19 pages on rectos only, numbered 2, 3, 5-21). The typescript (pages 1-9) contains text not found in the draft: the first three introductory sentences (page 1), and a paragraph (page 2), filling the narrative gap between manuscript pages 3 and 5. "Mrs. Willows' Dinner Party" recounts the circumstances surrounding the shooting death of Mrs. Willows' son Peter B. Willows by his wife Mary Willows, depicted as a case of murder. Although the items are not dated, the fully-developed story can be traced to Capote's writings for the 1973 commission from *Ladies' Home Journal*, if not to an earlier time.

## **Key Terms**

### **Occupations**

Authors

### **Subjects**

Authors, American -- 20th century

Murder literature

Short stories, American -- 20th century

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Manuscripts (documents)

Manuscripts for publication

Short stories

Typescripts

**Names**

Capote, Truman, 1924-1984