



The New York Public Library  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

**Jeannette Watson papers**

1977-2011

MssCol 17777

## Summary

**Cre:** Watson, Jeannette (Bookstore owner)

**Title:** Jeannette Watson papers

**Date:** 1977-2011

**Size:** 7.89 linear feet (13 boxes, 3 volumes, 1 oversize folder); 216 computer files; 53.89 Megabytes

**Source:** Donated by Jeannette Watson, 2007-2011.

**Abstract:** Jeannette Watson owned two independent bookstores on Manhattan's Upper East Side, most notably Books & Co., a literary mainstay from 1977 until its closure in 1997. The Jeannette Watson papers (1977-2011) document her time as a bookseller and publisher under the Books & Co. imprint associated with Turtle Point Press.

**Access:** Advance notice required.

**Preferred citation:** Jeannette Watson papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

## Creator History

Jeannette Watson is a bookseller and publisher who owned two independent bookstores on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Watson's father Thomas J. Watson, Jr. and grandfather Thomas J. Watson both served as chairman and CEO of IBM. Watson graduated from Miss Hall's School in Massachusetts in 1964 and Sarah Lawrence College. With Burt Britton, Watson, having a passion for the written and spoken word, founded the Books & Co. bookstore on Madison Avenue in 1977.

Watson concentrated on offering a carefully selected group of books and author events to her clientele. Books & Co. established itself as a favorite of discerning book lovers until its closure in 1997 due to rent increases from its landlord, the Whitney Museum. However, Watson maintained a presence in the neighborhood, first as an employee and later as owner of the Lenox Hill Bookstore on Lexington Avenue, where she remained until the store shut down in 2005. As Books & Co. closed, Watson

launched the Books & Co. imprint under Jonathan D. Rabinowitz's Turtle Point Press. This press, run by Watson, Helen Marx and Rabinowitz, specialized in both unusual new and out of print works.

Watson remained active in New York City book culture; she became a trustee of the New York Society Library in 1991. Writer Lynne Tillman chronicled the history of Books & Co. and Watson in the 1999 book, *Bookstore: The Life and Times of Jeannette Watson and Books & Co.*. Miss Hall's School bestowed their Distinguished Alumna Award on Watson in 2000.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Jeannette Watson papers (1977-2011) supplement the Books & Co. records held at the New York Public Library and document Watson's career as a bookseller and publisher following the closure of the Books & Co. store.

Items related to the Books & Co. bookstore include correspondence, incorporation records, and blueprints. A card file used to record brief details about individual customers lists account balances for customers such as Arthur Ashe and Woody Allen. A contract outlines the terms of a loan from Watson's father and one photo album depicts the last event held at the store. Researchers interested in the bookstore should also consult the Books & Co. records for more thorough documentary evidence. The daily operations of the Lenox Hill Bookstore under Watson's ownership are represented by reports containing financial details and sales figures; newsletters; event information; and photographs. Watson's rolodexes provide evidence of the breadth of contacts she maintained as an independent bookseller, during a challenging time for independent bookstores.

Personal and professional correspondence comprises the majority of the collection. Most correspondence is filed in rough chronological order. However, letters from Watson's parents, Thomas and Olive, her close friend Leila Hadley Luce, and a handful of others are filed separately. Other notable correspondents are Gloria Vanderbilt, Fran Lebowitz, Brendan Gill, and William Jay Smith. Some items are brief thank you and birthday notes, but other letters are more detailed and pertain to business matters.

Watson's activities as a book publisher under the Turtle Point Press imprint, Books & Co., are represented by files for fourteen individual book titles and catalogs. These files contain shipping orders, copyright inquiries, cover mock ups, publicity materials, mass mailings, and correspondence directly related to the publication. Watson also distributed her *Off the Wall* newsletter, where she announced the imprint's activities and provided her and her friends' new book recommendations.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

Booksellers and bookselling  
Independent bookstores -- New York (State) -- New York  
Publishers and publishing -- New York (State) -- New York

### **Occupations**

Booksellers.  
Publishers.

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Card files  
Correspondence  
Newsletters  
Photographs

**Geographic Names**

Upper East Side (New York, N.Y.) -- Commerce

**Names**

Watson, Jeannette (Bookstore owner)  
Books & Co.  
Lenox Hill Bookstore

## Container List

- Books and Co. (bookstore)
- b. 1 f. 1-8 1977-1997
    - v. 3 1997  
Photographs from last party at the bookstore.
    - o. 1 Blueprints 1978, undated
    - v. 1 Books & Company Inc 1984
    - b. 2 Customer Card File
    - v. 2 Watbritt Books Limited 1977
  - b. 1 f. 9 *Bookstore by Lynne Tillman* 1996-1997  
*Bookstore by Lynne Tillman* 1999  
er.1 (175.1 Kilobytes 2 computer files)  
Cover artwork.
  - b. 3 f. 1 Clippings 1970s-1990s  
Correspondence
  - b. 3 f. 2-5 1979-2008
  - b. 10 f. 1-5 1997-1999
  - b. 11 f. 1-4 2000-2007
  - b. 4 f. 1-6 2007-2011
    - b. 5 f. 1 2009-2010
    - b. 5 f. 2 Anshen, Ruth Nanda 1992-1996
    - b. 5 f. 3 Luce, Leila Hadley 1991-2009
    - b. 5 f. 4 Parties 2010
    - b. 5 f. 5 Watson, Olive 1980-2002
  - b. 5 f. 6-7 Watson, Thomas 1979-1993
  - b. 6 f. 1 Wilkie, Margot 2005
  - b. 6 f. 2 [Unidentified], Ralph? 1986
- Lenox Hill Bookstore
- b. 6 f. 3-10 1996-2004  
Some monthly and financial reports are included.  
  
2000-2002  
er.2 (54.64 Megabytes 211 computer files)  
Financial and photographs. Photographs depict events and the exterior of the bookstore.  
Several photographs of Watson.
  - b. 7 f. 1-4 2002-2005
  - b. 12 f. 3 *Off the Wall Newsletter* 1996-1998
  - b. 7 f. 5-6 *Off the Wall Newsletter* 1997-1999  
Mailing list and Fall 1997 issue.
  - b. 8 Rolodexes
  - b. 9 Roledexes

Turtle Point Press

- b. 7 f. 7-9 1995-2001
- b. 12 f. 1 Book Parties undated
- b. 12 f. 2 Catalogs 1997-1998
- Publications
- b. 12 f. 4 *The Disposition of Father McGreavy* 1999
- b. 12 f. 5 *Dodie Smith reader* 2000
- b. 12 f. 6 *Five Seasons of Obsession* 2001
- b. 12 f. 7 *A Girl from Zanzibar* 2002
- b. 12 f. 8 *The Girl in Glass* 2001
- b. 13 f. 1 *Joan of Arc: In Her Own Words* 1996
- b. 13 f. 2 *A Journey With Elsa Cloud* 1997
- b. 13 f. 3 *The Last Attachment* 2000
- b. 13 f. 4 *Leopardi* 1999
- b. 13 f. 5 *Letters from Lost Thyme* 2000  
*Letters from Lost Thyme* 2000  
er.3 (366.5 Kilobytes 3 computer files)  
Video transcription and transcripts of letters.
- b. 13 f. 6 *The Need to Testify* 1999
- b. 13 f. 7 *Other People's Letters: In Search of Proust* 2005
- b. 13 f. 8 *Rara Avis* 1998
- b. 13 f. 9 *Wine of Astonishment* 1997