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Guide to the

Robert E. Penn papers

1971-2003 [bulk 1990s]

Sc MG 711

Compiled by Valerie Wingfield, 2017.

Summary

Creator: Penn, Robert E.

Title: Robert E. Penn papers

Date: 1971-2003 [bulk 1990s]

Size: 25.28 linear feet (61 boxes); 32.9 megabytes (1183 computer files)

Source: Donated by Robert E. Penn, 2002 and 2003.

Abstract: Robert E. Penn, Jr. (1948-) is an African-American LGBT activist, a writer, and a producer. The Robert E. Penn papers, dating from 1971 to 2003, reflect Penn's work as an activist; his work as Assistant Director of Education, HIV Prevention for the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC); his work as the author of the The Gay Men's Wellness Guide for the National Lesbian and Gay Health Association (NLGHA); his family and personal life; and writings. The collection holds clippings, correspondence, manuscript drafts, notes, posters, printed matter, and audio and visual materials.

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Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Compiled by Valerie Wingfield, 2017.

Creator History

Robert E. Penn, Jr. (1948-) is an African-American LGBT activist, a writer and a producer. Penn was born in Kansas City, Kansas and raised in Indiana; the son of Robert E. and Lois Penn, a Baptist minister and teacher, respectively.

Penn attended Harvard University for two years, while also studying sculpture and photography at HFBK University of Fine Arts of Hamburg, Germany, during a junior year abroad. Penn decided to leave Harvard University in 1970 for personal and professional reasons. He earned both his B.A. (1977) and M.B.A. (1979) from New York University. Penn is fluent in French.

Penn is a life-long advocate for equal human rights for all people. His work primarily focuses on African, African-American, African Diasporic, and LGBT communities. During the mid-1980s, he left his MBA position in corporate America and worked for international programs of Save the Children (SCF) US from 1985-1988, and for domestic programs of the National Organization for Women Legal Defense and Education Fund (NOW LDEF) from 1988-1990. From 1990 to 1996, Penn served as Assistant Director of Education, HIV Prevention for the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC). In this capacity, he developed health, wellness and preventive programs for people of color.

While employed at the GMHC in 1995, Penn along with his Portuguese counterparts, developed a three-day AIDS Prevention Training for Portuguese educators, doctors, teachers, and AIDS activists. That same year, Penn gave a presentation about the GMHC at the 8th Brazilian Conference of Gays and Lesbians.

In 1996, Penn entered into an agreement with the National Lesbian and Gay Health Association (NLGHA) to produce the *Gay Men's Wellness Guide* (1997). This guide is considered a landmark publication.

Penn also participated in The Audre Lorde Project (ALP). In 1996, Penn was contracted for four months as an independent contractor to conduct a "Gay Men of Color Needs Assessment for New York City."

A prolific advocate, writer, lecturer, and world traveler, Penn's writings of novels, poetry and screenplays include *Magadien*, *Art*, *AIDS, America: NYC Black Men Fight AIDS since the 1980s*, *The Three Brothers*, *Stepping Out on Faith*, *Telling OUR Stories*, *Art from Adversity*, *Status Is Everything*, *Desert King*, *City of the Century*, *Gray Was Comfort*, *It's How You Sign It*, and *Sex Is Easy*.

Scope and Content Note

The Robert E. Penn papers, dating from 1970 to 2003 (1990s bulk dates), reflect Robert Penn's work as Assistant Director of Education, HIV Prevention for the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) and as a writer. Files include lectures, materials concerning outreach programs and travels abroad to educate the public about HIV and AIDS, and drafts of his published and unpublished works. Correspondence with his family and personal life is represented to a lesser extent.

GMHC files also reflect Penn's position as Assistant Director of Education, HIV Prevention. Files include Penn's presentation "Positive Sex is Safer Sex Education," interview questions used by HIV and AIDS activists, a committee report from the People of Color Resource Committee initiative, and material concerning peer education training. Related material also focuses on Penn's initiatives in Brazil and

Portugal about raising awareness of AIDS and HIV.

The Gay Men's Wellness Guide files are extensive with detailed information about the subjects covered for the publication.

Penn's articles, novels, and screenplays (both published and unpublished) include *City of the Century*, *Gray Was Comfort*, *It's How You Sign It*, and *Sex Is Easy*, Penn also retained some assorted subject-related printed matter.

Penn's writings also holds some notebooks on personal reflections and subjects of interest.

The professional correspondence documents Penn's efforts to solicit support for his writings through fellowships at artist colonies such as the Ragdale Foundation and efforts to find publishers for his writings. Personal correspondence is between Penn and his parents, other relatives, acquaintances, or friends.

The audio and media material consists of a recording of the novel *Flirtations* and VHS tapes of television segments mostly relating to HIV and AIDS awareness.

The electronic records are mostly correspondence and book inserts regarding the *Gay Men's Wellness Guide* and to a lesser extent the Audre Lorde Project and assorted writings. Some of this material may be duplicates of current files.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged in the following sections: Gay Men's Health Crisis, Subject Files, Gay Men's Wellness Guide, Writings, Correspondence, and Printed Matter.

Key Terms

Subjects

Activists
African American authors
African American gay men
African Americans -- Diseases
African Americans -- Social conditions
AIDS (Disease) -- United States -- Prevention
AIDS activists
Authors, American
Authors, Black
Gay men's writings, American
HIV infections -- United States
National Lesbian/Gay Health Conference

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Correspondence
Drafts (documents)
Notebooks

Names

Penn, Robert E.
Gay Men's Health Crisis, Inc.

Container List

Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)

- b. 1 f. 1 AIDS in Africa 1993
- b. 1 f. 2 Community Outreach Project 1996
- b. 1 f. 3 Contact Lists 1989-1996
- b. 1 f. 4-8 Correspondence 1990-1996
- b. 1 f. 9 Evaluation Report. Think About It 1992
- b. 1 f. 10 Focus Group Evaluation. What is HIV? What is AIDS? 1995
- b. 1 f. 11 Interviews With Activists 1993-1994
- b. 1 f. 12 *It Is What It Is* 1993
Discussion Guide.
- b. 2 f. 1-8 Notes 1990s
- b. 2 f. 9 Peer Education Training 1995
- b. 2 f. 1 People of Color Resource Committee Initiative 1994
- b. 3 f. 1-2 Penn, Robert. Positive Sex 1995
Lecture.
- b. 3 f. 3 Posters 1990s
- b. 3 f. 4-5 What's In It For Me? 1992
Workshop.

Subject Files

- b. 3 f. 6 Adodi 1993
Summer retreat.

Audre Lorde Project

- b. 3 f. 7-8 1996
- er. 1 1996

Brazil

- b. 4 f. 1-4 Conference of Gays and Lesbians Who Work With AIDS 1995
- b. 4 f. 5-6 Three Day Training 1994
- b. 4 f. 7-9 HIV/AIDS Prevention 1990s
Printed Matter.
- b. 5 f. 1 Colorado Black and Lesbian Leadership Forum 1997
- b. 5 f. 2 Japan. Information on HIV/AIDS 1995
- b. 5 f. 3 Martinique Conference on AIDS 1996
- b. 5 f. 4 Memorial Documentation Center 1991
- b. 5 f. 5 National Black Lesbian and Gay Conference 1998
- b. 5 f. 6 National Lesbian and Gay Health Conference 1995-1998
- b. 5 f. 7 National Lesbian and Gay Writer's Conference 1998
- b. 5 f. 8-12 Portugal. Three Day Training 1994-1995
- b. 6 f. 1 Pride Institute at Solutions 1997
- b. 6 f. 2-4 Removing Barriers to Health Care 1997
- b. 6 f. 5 Save the Children 1987

Gay Men's Wellness Guide

Gay Men's Wellness Guide (cont.)

Correspondence

- b. 6 f. 6-12 1995-1998
- b. 7 f. 1 1995-1998
- er. 3 1995-1998

Drafts

- b. 7 f. 2-8 1997
Draft lacks index.
- b. 8 f. 1-6 1997
2nd draft.
- b. 9 f. 1-6 1997
"Partial master."
- b. 10 f. 1-6 1997
This draft continues to box 11 folders 1 and 2.
- b. 11 f. 1-5 1997
Another partial draft. Folders 3 to 5.
- b. 12 f. 1-7 1997
Partial Draft
- b. 13 f. 1-2 1997
- b. 13 f. 3-4 **Uncorrected Proof** 1997
Bound volume.

er. 2 **Book Inserts**

- b. 14 f. 1 **Dust Jackets** 1997
- b. 14 f. 3-5 **Permissions** 1997
Permission requests to use other authors' work for publication.
- Promotion of Guide** 1997-1998
- b. 15 f. 1-4 **Requests For Submissions** 1996-1997

Research Files 1990s

The research files hold a range of topics that Penn used for his research.

- b. 15 f. 9-13 **Access to Health Care - Addition**
- b. 16 f. 1-19 **Adoption - Cancer**
- b. 17 f. 1-20 **Center for Disease Control (CDC) - HIV/AIDS**
- b. 18 f. 1-6 **HIV/AIDS**
- b. 19 f. 1-20 **Images - Pedophilia**
- b. 20 f. 1-17 **Plastic Surgery - Travel**
- b. 21 f. 1-10 **Tuberculosis - Youth**
- b. 15 f. 6-8 **Reviews (comments) of Manuscript** 1996-1997
Pre-publication reviews by colleagues and friends.

Writings

The files hold drafts of novels, poetry, screen plays, short stories, notes and journals.

- b. 22 f. 1 *Against Hope* 1992
- b. 22 f. 2 *Bedtime Story* 1991
- b. 22 f. 3 *Books* 1994
- b. 22 f. 4-8 *City of the Century* 1993
- b. 22 f. 9 *The Church Picnic* 1991

Writings (cont.)

- b. 23 f. 1 *Country* 1991
Adapted from *Home Boys*.
- b. 23 f. 2-3 *Dues* 1991
A draft entitled *Overlord* was filed with *Dues*. This appears to be an alternate title of *Dues*.
- b. 23 f. 4-5 *Facts, Friends, and Family. A Collection of Poems* 1992
Flirtations
- b. 23 f. 6-8 1993
With notes from Ben Gates.
- b. 24 f. 1-3 1993
Edits and comments by others.
- b. 24 f. 4-7 1995
- b. 24 f. 8 *Ghostwriter* 1991
- b. 25 f. 1 *God and Country* 1990
- b. 25 f. 2-8 *Grand Prize Summer* 1990, 1991
The 1993 version had a variant title, *Gray Was Comfort* (Sixteen Short Stories) and *Full Range of Gray* (a novella).
- b. 26 f. 1-6 *Gray Was Comfort* 1992, 1993
Short stories. see also: *Grand Prize Summer*.
Home Boys
- b. 26 f. 7 1989
- b. 27 f. 1-4 1989
- b. 27 f. 5-8 *Hope*
- b. 27 f. 9 *Housewarming*
In Darkness Met
- b. 27 f. 10 1989
- b. 28 f. 1-6 1989
- b. 28 f. 8 *It's How You Sign It* 1993
- b. 28 f. 9 *Later* 1989
Look Both Ways
- b. 28 f. 10-11 1996
- b. 29 f. 1-2 1998
- b. 29 f. 3 *Love Of My Life* 1994
- b. 29 f. 4-9 *Manifest Distiny* 1991-1992
- b. 30 f. 1 *Mike* 1989, 1990
- b. 30 f. 2-3 *Mile 95* 1982
- b. 30 f. 4 *The Neighborhood* 1989
- b. 30 f. 5 *Next Door or Across the Street* 1991
- b. 30 f. 6 *Out With Ibo* 1993
- b. 30 f. 7-9 *Outside* 2001
Poems
- b. 30 f. 10-12 1990s
- b. 31 f. 1-3 1990s
- b. 31 f. 4-8 *Promise* 1998

Writings (cont.)

- b. 32 f. 1 *Reconciliation One Act Play*
- b. 32 f. 2 *Red, Irish and Panamanian* 1991
- b. 32 f. 3 *Reunion* 1989
- b. 32 f. 4-5 *Rite* 1992
- b. 32 f. 6-7 *Seeking Level* 1993
Sex Is Easy
1993
- b. 32 f. 8-10 1993-1994
- b. 33 f. 1-7 1993-1994
- b. 34 f. 1-4 1994
- b. 34 f. 5-7 1993-1994
Incomplete Chapters, Notes.
- b. 35 f. 1-2 Character Chart 1993-1994
- b. 35 f. 3-4 Short Stories for Editing 1990s
- b. 35 f. 5-6 *Smoke, Mirrors, and Noise* 2001
Alternative title *Mirrors and Smoke*.
- b. 36 f. 1-6 *Son* 1992
- b. 36 f. 7 *Sponsorship Lives* 1987
- b. 36 f. 7 *Star Trek Deep Space Nine* 1997
- b. 35 f. 7 *Trip To Seattle* 1989
- b. 35 f. 8 *Uncle Eugene* 1998
- b. 35 f. 9 *Utopia H2, And Duet In Shower* 1991
Victoria's Fall
- b. 37 f. 1-8 Drafts 1989, 1990
- b. 38 f. 1-4 Drafts 1989, 1990
- b. 38 f. 5 Character Chart 1989, 1990
- b. 38 f. 6 Film Sequence 1992
- b. 38 f. 7 Financial 1987
- b. 38 f. 8-9 Research Notes 1987
- b. 35 f. 10 *Vodka and English* 1989
- b. 35 f. 11 *Wanted, Noble Savage* 1992
- b. 39 f. 1-2 *Whittling In The Dark* 1992
- b. 39 f. 3-7 *Windows On Fire* 1992
Winning
1993
- b. 39 f. 8-10 1993
- b. 40 f. 1 1993
- Notebooks
- b. 60 1987-1996
- b. 61 1996-2002
- er. 4 Assorted Writings 1990s
- Correspondence
- Professional
- b. 41 f. 1-7 1989-1992

Correspondence (cont.)
Professional (cont.)

- b. 42 f. 1-8 1993-1994
- b. 43 f. 1-8 1995-1996
- b. 44 f. 1-3 1997

Family

- Penn, Hocker Lois
 - b. 44 f. 4-13 1984-1995
 - b. 45 f. 1-13 1996-2000
 - b. 46 f. 1-6 2001-2002
- Penn, Robert (Sr.) 1971-1982
- Musgrove, Barbara (Penn)
sister
 - b. 46 f. 12-15 1991-1995
 - b. 47 f. 1-5 1996-2001
- Musgrove, Vera Rose
neice
 - b. 47 f. 6-12
- Stembridge, Adeyemi 1993-2002
neice

Personal

The files also contain letters under the correspondent's name.

- b. 48 f. 1-9 1963-1992
- b. 49 f. 1-8 1993
- b. 50 f. 1-9 1994-1995
- b. 51 f. 1-10 1995-1996
- b. 52 f. 1-10 1996-1998
- b. 53 f. 1-9 1998-1999
- b. 54 f. 1-8 1999-2001
- b. 55 f. 1-4 2002-2003
 - b. 55 f. 5 Castro, Ricardo 1994
 - b. 55 f. 6-8 Frazier, John 1995-2002
- b. 55 f. 9-13 Fujinaka, Katsunori 1989-2002
 - b. 56 f. 1 Haile, Alemayehu 1986-1992
 - b. 56 f. 2 Kurz, Herb 1990
 - b. 56 f. 3 McKeon, Tom 1986-1988
- b. 56 f. 4-6 Montant, Pierre 1989-2002
- Reese, Leo
 - b. 56 f. 7-14 1994-1995
 - b. 57 f. 1-15 1995-2000
- b. 57 f. 16 Steve
Last name not indicated.
- b. 57 f. 17 Swinton, William 1992-1993

Printed Matter

- b. 58 f. 1-4 Business Cards

Printed Matter (cont.)

- b. 58 f. 5-9 Assorted Newsletters 1990s
- b. 58 f. 10 Posters 1990s
AIDS/HIV Prevention.