



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

Truman Capote papers regarding "Houston Diary"

1973-1974

MssCol 24831

Processed by Susan P. Waide, 2019

Summary

Creator: Capote, Truman, 1924-1984

Title: Truman Capote papers regarding "Houston Diary"

Date: 1973-1974

Size: .46 linear feet (2 boxes)

Source: Purchased from Bonnie Miskolczy, 2018.

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*. John O'Shea (John Matthew O'Shea, 1929-2014) was a married Long Island banker who became Truman Capote's lover and business manager in the early summer of 1973. The Truman Capote papers regarding "Houston Diary," 1973-1974, consist of materials pertaining to Capote's writing interest in the mass murders committed in Houston, Texas by Dean Corll, discovered in August 1973, and his intended coverage of the 1974 trial of Elmer Wayne Henley, one of Corll's accomplices. Capote's trial coverage was to be syndicated by the Washington Post under the title "Houston Diary," but the project did not come to fruition. The collection, created in part and apparently maintained by John O'Shea, contains letters received by Truman Capote from members of the press; two holograph manuscripts by Truman Capote relating to the Washington Post project; O'Shea's business papers concerning publishing negotiations, chiefly with the Post; a scrapbook of newspaper and magazine clippings; loose clippings; and photographs. Correspondents include Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee and Village Voice journalist Arthur Bell.

Preferred citation: Truman Capote papers regarding "Houston Diary", Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Susan P. Waide, 2019

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*. John O'Shea (John Matthew O'Shea,

1929-2014) was a married Long Island banker who became Truman Capote's lover and business manager in the early summer of 1973. For a time he held the position of Executive Vice President of Capote's corporation Bayouboys, Ltd.

John O'Shea dealt with publishers seeking Capote's coverage of what became known as the Houston Mass Murders, discovered in August 1973. The Texas murders were committed by serial killer Dean Corll over a period of several years, some with the assistance of two teenage accomplices, Elmer Wayne Henley and David Owen Brooks. Henley killed Corll in self-defense on August 8, 1973, and contacted the police that day. He and Brooks then led police to the burial locations of the young male victims, and the story immediately broke in the national press. By the end of August 1973 there were 27 known deaths.

O'Shea negotiated a lucrative contract with the *Washington Post* to cover Henley's trial in Houston, Texas, scheduled for January 1974. The syndicated articles would be called "Houston Diary." Capote and O'Shea traveled to Houston to attend pre-trial hearings on January 14. As recounted in Gerald Clarke's *Capote: A Biography* (1988, page 449), when Henley was first brought into the courtroom, the author of *In Cold Blood* remarked "I've seen this before," and immediately left. Capote was hospitalized shortly thereafter, the illness serving to break the contract. Henley's first trial took place in San Antonio in July 1974, and Brooks was tried in 1975.

Custodial History

The papers were found by the seller upon her inheritance of a house in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which had been rented by Truman Capote and John O'Shea in 1976. The scrapbook and a file labelled "Houston Diary" were left behind in a closet.

Scope and Content Note

The Truman Capote papers regarding "Houston Diary," 1973-1974, consist of materials pertaining to Capote's writing interest in the mass murders committed in Houston, Texas by Dean Corll, discovered in August 1973, and his intended coverage of the 1974 trial of Elmer Wayne Henley, one of Corll's accomplices. Capote's trial coverage was to be syndicated by the *Washington Post* under the title "Houston Diary," but the project did not come to fruition. The collection, created in part and apparently maintained by John O'Shea, contains letters received by Truman Capote from members of the press; two holograph manuscripts by Truman Capote relating to the *Washington Post* project; O'Shea's business papers concerning publishing negotiations, chiefly with the *Post*; a scrapbook of newspaper and magazine clippings; loose clippings; and photographs. Correspondents include *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee and *Village Voice* journalist Arthur Bell.

There are three original letters received by Capote from journalist Arthur Bell, editor Rob Cole of the *Advocate*, and Houston attorney Charles Owen Melder, 1973, as well as copies of articles written by Bell, mailed to Capote in January 1974. Capote's holograph manuscripts consist of a promotional piece written in the third person, "Truman Capote's Houston Diary," (4 pages, in ink), 1973, and an introductory writing entitled "Houston Diary / 2020 Lamar Street" (6 pages, in pencil), 1973 or 1974, both with his emendations. The promotional piece includes his reasons for covering the trial, and his intended writing approach. The document bears John O'Shea's filing comments, and is accompanied by a typed copy on *Washington Post* letterhead, 1973 December 16, with minor changes from the holograph text. O'Shea's business papers, 1973, include his notes and his annotated copies of letters and documents, among these a letter from Ben Bradlee of the *Washington Post* to Capote, 1973

September 12. Photographs, 1973 or 1974, are 5 x 7 inch black-and-white copies of photographs of Dean Currell and his family, unidentified and undated.

Key Terms

Subjects

Authors, American -- 20th century
Murder literature
Serial murders -- Texas -- Houston

Occupations

Authors.
Editors.
Journalists.

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Manuscripts for publication
Photographs
Scrapbooks

Names

Bell, Arthur (Arthur Irving)
Bradlee, Benjamin C.
Capote, Truman, 1924-1984
O'Shea, John, 1929-2014
Washington Post Company

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Truman Capote letters received 1973-1974
Truman Capote writings
- b. 1 f. 2 "Truman Capote's Houston Diary" 1973
- b. 1 f. 3 "Houston Diary / 2020 Lamar Street" 1973 or 1974
- b. 1 f. 4 John O'Shea business papers 1973
- b. 1 f. 5 Photographs 1973 or 1974
- b. 1 f. 6 Loose clippings 1973-1974
- b. 2 Scrapbook 1973 August