

**The New York Public Library
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center
Billy Rose Theatre Division**

Guide to the

Arthur Bell papers

1966-1984

*T-Mss 1984-004

Compiled by Susan Malsbury, May 2012

Summary

Creator: Bell, Arthur

Title: Arthur Bell papers, 1966-1984

Size: 9.28 linear feet (23 boxes)

Source: Donated by Arthur Bell, 1984

Abstract: Arthur Bell (1939-1984) was a writer, journalist, and gay rights activist who lived in New York City. Bell was a founder of the Gay Activists Alliance and wrote for many gay and mainstream presses, including the popular column "Bell Tells" in the *Village Voice*. The bulk of the papers reflect Bell's work as a writer and contains correspondence, photographs, research material, scrapbooks, and typescripts.

Access: Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photography and photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

Copyright information: For permission to publish, contact the Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Preferred citation: Arthur Bell papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Original folders were retained and often have notes from Bell written on the outside cover. Material was reboxed.

Related collections

Arthur Bell papers, 1970-1978. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Creator history

Arthur Bell (1939-1984) was a writer, journalist, and gay rights activist who lived in New York City. Bell was born in Brooklyn to Samuel Bell, a manufacturer of children's clothing, and, Claire Bodan Bell, a designer. When Bell was in junior high school the family moved to Montreal. Bell returned to New York City in 1960 and found a job writing jacket copy for children's books. He soon became director of publicity for children's books at Viking Press, later leaving Viking Press to work at Random House. Joining the struggle for gay rights, he was one of the twelve founders of the Gay Activists Alliance in 1969 and served for a time as chairman of its publicity committee, often using the pseudonym 'Arthur Irving.'

In 1970, he left Random House to write full time, after accepting an offer by Simon & Schuster to write a book about his experiences in the gay liberation movement. This book, *Dancing the Gay Lib Blues: A Year in the Gay Liberation Movement*, was published the next year and at the same time, Bell ceased his activities with the Gay Activists Alliance. Throughout the 1970s, Bell wrote consistently for both the gay and mainstream press including *Esquire*, *Gay*, *the New York Times*, and *Playboy*. Bell wrote a bi-weekly column for *Gay Power* and a weekly column called "Bell Tells" for the *Village Voice*. This column had a broad scope and covered opening and closings of restaurants and galleries, reports on gay issues, and celebrity and society gossip. Bell was known for his lively, highly personalized, almost novelistic style in his writing which he proposed as an alternative to what he regarded as a lackluster journalism then in use.

Bell interest in crime reporting was initiated by an *Esquire* piece he wrote on the mass murders in Houston, and he started writing articles on crimes against gay men in New York City, particularly the attacks and murders that would occur at, and around, bars, bathhouses, and other gay meeting places. While many people appreciated the light Bell's reporting shed on this issue, many readers thought Bell's articles were sensationalist and negatively depicted gay life. Bell was often seen as a polarizing figure in the gay community. In 1978, Bell published *Kings Don't Mean a Thing: The John Knight Murder Case* about the murder of a newspaper heir in Philadelphia. Parts of Bell's articles inspired the film *Cruising*, though Bell protested the film's interpretation of gay culture and that it was shot in the East Village.

In 1964, Bell met gay rights advocate and author Arthur Evans and the two had a relationship until 1971. The character of Arthur Klang in *The West Side Gang* is based off of Bell. Bell died in 1984 from complications related to diabetes, a disease he struggled with throughout his adult life.

Scope and content note

The bulk of the collection reflects Bell's work as a writer. The original folder titles were retained and reflect Bell's habit of labeling a folder by its subject rather than article title. In addition to these subject files, there are files on both of his books, on movies he reviewed, on gay and mainstream publications he wrote for, and more general files including correspondence, news clippings, photographs, publicity material, and scrapbooks. The subject files contain correspondence, holograph notes, news clippings, printed matter, and typescripts. Files often include correspondence from readers responding to an article, and have both negative and positive reactions to his work. This is particularly the case on the subjects pertaining to gay culture. Often there are cards or letters from the interviewee, such as Joan Blondell, Ellen Burstyn, and Wendy Carlos, responding to the published interview. The file on *Cruising* contains a leaked copy of the script and material regarding the campaign against the shooting *Cruising* in the East Village. Prospective works are also represented, such as a prospectus for a biography of Lenny Bruce, and two unpublished collections, one on celebrity reporting and the other on journalism, and prospective ventures, like Bell's short-lived stint hosting a cabaret night at the West Village bar Reno Sweeney.

Bell's correspondence documents his transition from working at Random House to becoming a full time writer, and has letters from readers, other writers, invitations to shows or parties, and a small amount of personal correspondence. Noted correspondents include William Atherton, Kitty Kelly, Burt Reynolds, Don Shewey, Randy Shilts, Frank Sinatra, Liz Smith, and Elly Stone. There are two scrapbooks, one on MGM (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) and the other, colorfully called "The Family Circle International Steam Kit," is of various celebrities. Personal files hold a file on an accident when Bell was hit by a taxi and herbs he was taking to help maintain his diabetes. Photographs are comprised of publicity photographs of Bell and others, publicity stills from films, and snapshots. Subjects include Jack Carter, Arthur Evans, Jim Owles, and Elizabeth Taylor, a trip to Paris, and an unidentified protest in Washington D. C. The file on Andy Warhol contains an exhibition brochure for the exhibit "Andy Warhol and James Wyeth Portraits of Each Other" and is signed by Warhol.

Arrangement

Collection is arranged alphabetically by subject or name.

Key terms

Subjects

Celebrities
Gay men -- New York (State) -- New York
Gays -- Crimes against
Journalists -- New York (State) -- New York

Places

East Village (New York, N.Y.)

Names

Bell, Arthur

Special formats

Clippings
Photographs
Scrapbooks

Container list

- b.1 f.1 Academy Awards, 1981
- b.1 f.2 Accident, 1979
- b.1 f.3 Ali, Muhammad, 1977
- b.1 f.4 Ann-Margret, 1975
- b.1 f.5 Arden, Eve, 1972-1973
- b.1 f.6 Asexuality, 1978-1979
- b.1 f.7 Bars, 1977-1979
- b.1 f.8 Basso, Little John, 1972
- b.1 f.9 Baths, 1977
- b.2 f.1 Blondell, Joan, 1971-1980
- b.2 f.2 *Boys in the Band*, 1972-1974
- b.2 f.3 Bronfman, Samuel, 1976-1979
- b.2 f.4 Bruce, Lenny, 1971-1972
- b.2 f.5 *Burnt Offerings*, 1975-1976
- b.2 f.6 Burstyn, Ellen, 1980
- b.2 f.7 Caan, James, 1974
- b.2 f.8 Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC), 1977
- b.2 f.9 Capote, Truman, 1966-1979
- b.3 f.1 Carlos, Wendy, 1978-1979
- b.3 f.2 Cerf, Bennett, 1972
- b.3 f.3 Channing, Stockard, 1975-1977
- b.3 f.4-5 Collection of Movie Star Interviews, 1971-1981 (Unpublished.)
- b.4 f.1-2 Collection of Movie Star Interviews, 1971-1971
- b.4 f.3 Collection of Journalism, 1971-1979 (Unpublished.)
- b.4 f.4-5 Correspondence, 1968-1984
- b.5 f.1-5 Correspondence, 1968-1984
- b.5 f.6 *Cosmopolitan*, 1973-1974
- b.6 f.1 Couples, 1973
- b.6 f.2-5 *Cruising*, 1979-1980
- b.7 f.1-3 *Dancing the Gay Lib Blues: A Year in the Homosexual Liberation Movement*, 1971-1972
- b.7 f.4 Dayton, 1979
- b.7 f.5 Disney, 1981-1982
- b.8 f.1 *Dog Day Afternoon*, 1975-1976
- b.8 f.2 Dreyfuss, Richard, 1975
- b.8 f.3 Duvall, Robert, 1982-1983
- b.8 f.4 *Elite*, 1974-1977
- b.8 f.5 *Equus*, 1976
- b.8 f.6 *Esquire*, 1972-1975
- b.8 f.7 Everards Baths, 1979-1982

- b.8 f.8-9 Festivals, 1979-1980
 - b.9 f.1 Fire Island, 1976-1977
 - b.9 f.2 *Forum Magazine*, 1972
 - b.9 f.3 Gay Films, 1981
 - b.9 f.4 Gay Pride Week, 1972-1980
 - b.9 f.5 Gay Rights Bills, 1974-1983
 - b.9 f.6 *Gay Source*, 1977
 - b.9 f.7 Gay Task Force, 1973-1975
 - b.9 f.8 Gere, Richard, 1978
 - b.9 f.9 Gossip, 1976-1977
 - b.9 f.10 Grahame, Gloria, 1979-1981
 - b.9 f.11 Haiti, 1974
 - b.9 f.12 Herbs, 1982
- b.10 f.1 Hoffman, Dustin, 1974-1983
- b.10 f.2 *Hollywood Reporter*, 1982
- b.10 f.3 Homocides, 1975-1979
- b.10 f.4-5 Houston Mass Murders, 1971-1975
 - b.10 f.6 Hustlers, 1976-1978
 - b.10 f.7 Independent News Alliance, 1980-1981
 - b.10 f.8 Indictment Story, 1972-1973
- b.11 f.1 International Creative Management Agency, 1970-1976
- b.11 f.2 Jaywalking, 1972-1973
- b.11 f.3-4 Kallinger, Joseph, 1974-1975
- b.11 f.5-6 *Kings Don't Mean a Thing: The John Knight Murder Case*, 1978-1979
 - b.11 f.7 Koch, Ed, 1971-1977
- b.12 f.1 Lindsay, John, 1971
- b.12 f.2 Loren, Sophia, 1977-1978
- b.12 f.3 Los Angeles, 1971-1982
- b.12 f.4 MacLaine, Shirley, 1974-1980
- b.12 f.5 McGovern, George, 1972
- b.12 f.6 *Mademoiselle*, 1975-1976
- b.12 f.7-8 Mafia, 1971-1972
- b.13 f.1 *Manhattan Magazine*, 1975-1976
- b.13 f.2 Marketing, 1975-1982
- b.13 f.3 Media Group, 1975
- b.13 f.4 Menage a Trois, 1979-1980

- b.13 f.5 Miller, Ann, 1972-1975
- b.13 f.6 Muggings, 1978
- b.13 f.7-8 Murders, 1977-1979
- b.13 f.9 New Line Presentations, 1974-1975
- b.13 f.10 New Orleans, 1974
- b.14 f.1 *New York Daily News*, 1972
- b.14 f.2 *New York Magazine*, 1973-1980
- b.14 f.3 *New York Native*, 1981-1982
- b.14 f.4-5 *New York Times*, 1970-1976
- b.14 f.6-7 News Clippings, 1970-1978
- b.15 f.1 News Clippings, 1970-1978
- b.15 f.2-3 *Oui*, 1972-1976
- b.15 f.4 *Out Magazine*, 1972-1974
- b.15 f.5-6 *The Outsiders*, 1982-1983
- b.15 f.7 Parnis, Molly, 1980
- b.15 f.8 *People* and *Time*, 1965-1975
- b.16 f.1-2 Photographs, 1971-1982, undated
 - b.23 Photographs, 1967, undated (Contains prints, slides, and negatives.)
- b.16 f.3 Piano Bars, 1982
- b.16 f.4 *Playbill*, 1972-1973
- b.16 f.5-6 *Playboy*, 1971-1980
- b.16 f.7 *Playgirl*, 1974-1975
- b.17 f.1 Political Sex, 1972
- b.17 f.2 Press Passes, 1973-1978
- b.17 f.3 Provincetown, 1970
- b.17 f.4-6 Publicity, 1970-1982
- b.17 f.7 The Rich, 1974-1976
- b.17 f.8 Sadomasochism, 1975
- b.17 f.9 Schwartz, Stephen, 1972-1973
 - b.23 Scrapbooks, undated
- b.18 f.1 Sidney, Sylvia, 1972
- b.18 f.2 Simon and Schuster, 1970-1972
- b.18 f.3 Sinatra, Frank, 1972
- b.18 f.4 Somers, Suzanne, 1980
- b.18 f.5 *A Star is Born*, 1976 (Includes photographs.)
- b.18 f.6 Steenburgen, Mary, 1979-1981

- b.18 f.7 Sweeney, Reno, 1979
- b.18 f.8 Syndication, 1976
- b.18 f.9 Tap Dancing, 1975
- b.18 f.10 Television Show, 1975-1977
- b.18 f.11 Transworld Syndicate, 1975-1978
- b.18 f.12 Unidentified Typescripts, undated
- b.18 f.13 Unwritten Stories, 1971, undated
- b.19 f.1 VID (Village Independent Democrats), 1974-1978
- b.19 f.2-5 *Village Voice*, 1970-1974
- b.20 f.1-5 *Village Voice*, 1975-1979
- b.21 f.1-4 *Village Voice*, 1980-1983
 - b.21 f.5 *Viva*, 1972-1974
 - b.21 f.6 Warhol, Andy, 1976
 - b.21 f.7 Warren, Lesley Ann, 1982
- b.22 f.1 *Warriors*, 1977-1979
- b.22 f.2 Washington D. C., 1975
- b.22 f.3 *Working Girl*, 1978
- b.22 f.4 *West Street Gang*, 1977-1982
- b.22 f.5 Zeock, J. R., 1981-1982