

Neal Cassady:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Cassady, Neal, 1926-1968
Title:	Neal Cassady Collection
Dates:	1947-1965
Extent:	2 boxes (.83 linear feet), 1 oversize flat folder, 5 reel-to-reel tapes, and 1 cassette tape
Abstract:	This collection consists mainly of correspondence. Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac are particularly well-represented correspondents as is Cassady's second wife Carolyn Cassady. In addition, there are a few poems, essays and an autobiographical work by Cassady, poems from unidentified authors and a number of letters written and received by those other than Cassady.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-00712
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research. Advance appointment required to use the sound recordings in this collection

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchases and gifts, 1963-1990
Processed by:	Chelsea S. Dinsmore, 2000
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Neal Leon Cassady, Jr., 1926-1968, was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, while his parents were traveling from Iowa to Hollywood, California. Neal's father earned a living intermittently as a barber, and his mother had been widowed and already had seven children before marrying the senior Cassady. Neal was six when his parents separated and Neal went to live with his father in the slums of Denver.

Exposed at an early age to poverty, alcoholism, and the despair to which men can be driven, young Neal learned to use his intellect to move up in the world. A good reader with an excellent memory, and eager to be liked by authority figures, he did well in school and pushed himself to be a good athlete, playing football and running track. While he was impressing teachers and coaches at school, he was also becoming involved in petty crime, eventually becoming a car thief. He had been arrested six times by the age of 21. Cassady frequently ran away from home and around the age of 15 he began trading in on his good looks and worked as a male prostitute. An attorney, the nephew of one of Cassady's clients, took an interest in his welfare and endeavored to help him better himself. Besides helping him out of legal difficulties he introduced Cassady to Hal Chase, a student at Columbia University.

In 1946 Cassady moved to New York, along with his new 16 year-old wife, LuAnn Henderson. He was to have entered Columbia in the fall, thanks to the intervention of Chase, but did not reach the City until December. Though angry that Cassady had thrown away the opportunity to go to college, Chase introduced him to his friends, including Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. Both men took an interest in Cassady, and he and Ginsberg became lovers, though Cassady denied being homosexual and only had sex with men for money or some other consideration. In the case of Ginsberg, Cassady used him both as a tutor and as an entry into the intellectual crowd he admired.

Cassady only remained in New York for a few months before returning to Denver. In 1948 he finalized the annulment of his first marriage and married Carolyn Robinson, who was pregnant with his child, and took a job with the Southern Pacific Railroad. His attempt to settle down into a more conventional lifestyle was not very successful. Cassady felt stifled by the responsibilities and over the next several years he would take off on several road trips, often with Kerouac, and often lasting for months at a time. In 1950 he married Diane Hansen, who was pregnant, but he had not divorced Carolyn and within a few months abandoned Diane and returned to Carolyn and his job on the railroad.

In 1951 Diane gave birth to a son and Cassady began to feel his life spinning out of control. He wrote a long, confessional letter to Kerouac which altered the way Kerouac viewed writing. Cassady wrote in a spontaneous and unedited manner which conveyed a breathless rush to get the words onto paper. Kerouac was inspired by the method, later calling it spontaneous prose, and he used it for the rest of his writing career.

Throughout the fifties, Cassady's behavior grew more erratic. He ceased to even try to hide his affairs from Carolyn and though he managed to keep his job and support her and their three children, it was clear that he was heading towards some sort of crisis. In 1955 he moved to San Francisco with another woman and in 1958 was arrested on narcotics charges and spent two years in San Quentin.

In the early sixties Cassady met Ken Kesey and the two men became friends, sharing an interest in sports, drugs, and literature. Cassady was deeply admired by Kesey's group of young acolytes, the Merry Pranksters, and he joined their group on many cross-country bus trips. In 1963 he reluctantly agreed to a divorce from Carolyn, but continued to return to see her and their children, until Carolyn asked him to stop in 1965. In January 1968 he went to Mexico to make an avant-garde film. At a cast party on February 3 he took a fatal mixture of alcohol and tranquilizers. He was found unconscious the next morning on nearby railroad tracks and died a few hours later.

Source:

Dictionary of Literary Biography -- Volume 16: The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America. Ann Charters, Ed. (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983).

Watson, Steven. *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995).

Scope and Contents

Correspondence makes up the bulk of the Neal Cassady Collection, 1947-65, supplemented by a few poems and an autobiographical work by Cassady. Organized into three series, the collection is arranged alphabetically by author: Series I. Works and Papers, 1950-63 (.5 box); Series II. Correspondence, 1947-65 (1 box); and Series III. Third-Party Works and Correspondence, 1952-65 (.5 box). This collection was previously accessible through a card catalog, but has been re-cataloged as part of a retrospective conversion project.

The Works series is composed of several poems and essays by Cassady as well as two drafts of his largely autobiographical work *The First Third & Other Works* (1971).

The Correspondence series is divided into outgoing and incoming. Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac are both well represented correspondents as is Cassady's second wife Carolyn Cassady. Individual correspondents are listed in the Index of Correspondents at the end of this guide.

The Third-party Works and Correspondence series contains three poems from unidentified authors and a number of letters written by and to people other than Cassady, though often about him. There are a quite a few letters from Ginsberg and Kerouac to Carolyn Cassady and many of the other correspondents were also writing to Carolyn. Individual correspondents are listed in the Index of Correspondents at the end of this guide.

Located elsewhere in the Ransom Center are two Vertical Files containing newspaper clippings with articles about Cassady and the Beat Poets. Also present are eleven photographs of Cassady and his family located in the Literary Files of the Photography Collection and five reel-to-reel tapes and one cassette tape containing material by Cassady located in the sound recording collection.

Other materials associated with Neal Cassady may be found in the Jack Kerouac Collection at the Ransom Center.

Index Terms

People

Cassady, Carolyn
Cassady, Diana Hansen
Ginsberg, Allen, 1926-
Kerouac, Jack, 1922-1969
Orlovsky, Peter, 1933-

Subjects

Beat generation

Document Types

Sound recordings

I. Works and Papers, 1950-1963

A-Z

Box 1 Folder 1

"Adventure in Auto-eroticism via Automobile"

"The History of the Hip Generation"

"Joe and Charlie"

Leaving L.A. by Train at Night, High

There's More of that Kind of Rhyme; That's Rhythm

The First Third

Typescript copy and outline with author revisions and inserts, includes notes by Allen Ginsberg, n.d., 120pp

**Box 1
Folder
2**

Typescript, n.d., 85pp

Folder 3

Legal and financial documents, 1954-63

**Folder
4**

Various notes and fragments

Folder 5

II. Correspondence, 1947-1965

Outgoing, 1947-65

A-Z; Unidentified **Box 1 Folder 6**

Cassady, Carolyn, 1950-65 **Folder 7**

Kerouac, Jack, 1947-59 **Folder 8**

Incoming, 1948-65

A-Z; Unidentified **Box 1 Folder 9**

Cassady, Carolyn, n.d. **Folder 10**

Cassady, Diane Hansen, 1950-51 **Folder
11**

Ginsberg, Allen, 1948-63 **Box 2 Folder 1**

Kerouac, Jack, 1950-65 **Folder 2**

III. Third-Party Works and Correspondence, 1952-1966

Poems by unidentified authors

Box 2 Folder 3

Elegy to the Car

N.Y.-L.A.-S.F.

"Vagina-V is for Vagina, that all girls got..."

Correspondence

A-Z; Unidentified

Box 2 Folder 4

Ginsberg, Allen, 1952-65

Folder 5

Kerouac, Jack, 1952-63

Folder 6

Random House, Inc., 1966 (removed to oversize folder 1)

Folder *

Various envelopes

Folder 7

Neal Cassady Collection--Index of Correspondents

Box and folder numbers are followed by a number in parentheses which indicates the number of items by that person. A single item is indicated where there is no number in parentheses following the box and folder number. Where there is correspondence from Neal Cassady, the number in parentheses is followed by the phrase "from Cassady." So in the example:

Ginsberg, Allen, 1926- --1.6 (3 from Cassady), 2.1 (42), 2.5 (8)

There are 3 letters from Cassady to Ginsberg in box 1, folder 6, 42 letters from Ginsberg in box 2, folder 1, and 8 letters from Ginsberg in box 2, folder 5.

- A.C.L. Railroad--1.6 (from Cassady)
- Arthur, Chester Alan, 1901-1972--1.9
- Bays, Mr.--1.6 (from Cassady)
- Billow, Richard--See Random House, Inc.
- Cassady, Carolyn--1.7 (24 from Cassady), 1.10 (10), 2.4
- Cassady, Cathleen--1.9
- Cassady, Diana Hansen--1.11 (8), 2.4
- Cassady, Jamie--1.9
- Cassady, Neal, Sr.--1.6 (from Cassady), 1.9 (2), 2.4
- Chase, Hal--1.6 (from Cassady)
- Corso, Gregory--2.4
- Ferlinghetti, Lawrence--1.9
- Ginsberg, Allen, 1926- --1.6 (3 from Cassady), 2.1 (42), 2.5 (8)
- Hodgman, Bradley--1.9 (6)
- Holmes, John Clellon, 1926- --1.9, 2.4
- Huncke, Hubert--1.9
- Kaufman, Eileen Kohl--1.9
- Kerouac, Jack, 1922-1969--1.8 (43 from Cassady), 2.2 (29), 2.6 (31)
- Mew, Charles--1.9
- Murphy, Ann--1.9 (7), 2.4 (3)
- O'Connor, J.--1.9
- Orlovsky, Peter, 1933- --1.9, 2.4
- Random House, Inc.--oversize folder 1 (3)
- Snyder, Donald--1.9 (4)
- Solomon, Carl, 1928- --1.9 (4), 2.4
- Sublette, Albert--2.4 (4)
- Wyse, Seymour--1.9