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Guide to the Joseph Longstreth Papers Relating to Caryl Chessman

WA MSS S-3743



Sarah Lerner

July 2019

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: WA MSS S-3743

CREATOR: Chessman, Caryl, 1921-1960 , author

TITLE: Joseph Longstreth papers relating to Caryl Chessman

DATES: 1953-2015

BULK DATES: 1953-1960

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1.88 linear feet (9 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Correspondence, writings, newspaper clippings, and other papers on publishing and legal matters relating to convicted kidnapper and death-row inmate Caryl Chessman, collected by editor Joseph Longstreth of Critics Associated, 1953-1990.


ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.jlongstreth>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.jlongstreth>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder
 item barcode

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

From the estate of Joseph Longstreth, through Alan Bisbort. Purchased from Lorne Bair Rare Books on the Frederick W. and Carrie S. Beinecke Fund for Western Americana, 2015.

Custodial History

From the estate of Joseph Longstreth, through Caryl Chessman's biographer, Alan Bisbort, author of *When you read this, they will have killed me: the life and redemption of Caryl Chessman*, whose execution shook America (De Capo Press, 2007).

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research

Conditions Governing Use

The Joseph Longstreth Papers Relating to Caryl Chessman is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Joseph Longstreth Papers Relating to Caryl Chessman. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

The Joseph Longstreth Papers Relating to Caryl Chessman have been arranged into series, retaining folder titles present at time of acquisition. Several original folders have been separated into multiple folders for preservation purposes. Original folders with annotations were retained in the collection. Supplied folder titles are bracketed.

Joseph Longstreth (1920-2003)

Joseph Longstreth (1920-2003) founded the literary agency Critics Associated. In 1953, he became the editor for Caryl Chessman, convicted robber, kidnapper, and rapist; he later became Chessman's literary executor.

Caryl Chessman (1921-1960)

Caryl Chessman (1921-1960) of Saint Joseph, Michigan, was sentenced to death in California for a series of crimes committed in the Los Angeles area in 1948 January. Charged as the "Red Light Bandit", he was convicted under the "Little Lindbergh law", which defined kidnapping as a capital offense under certain circumstances. While spending 12 years on death row, fighting his conviction, Chessman wrote 4 memoirs: *Cell 2455 death row* (1954), *Kid was a killer* (1960), *The face of justice* (1957), and *Trial by ordeal* (1955).

Content Description

Correspondence, writings, newspaper clippings, and other papers on publishing and legal matters relating to convicted kidnapper and death-row inmate Caryl Chessman, collected by editor Joseph Longstreth of Critics Associated, 1953-1990. Includes approximately 2,100 autograph and typescript letters, some signed, 1953-1990. Present are: 400 letters between Chessman and Longstreth discussing finances, publishing matters, and legal proceedings, 1953-1958; correspondence between Longstreth and Chessman's attorney Rosalie Asher, discussing Chessman's life, literary output, finances, mental state, and legal proceedings, 1956-1990; and letters to domestic and foreign publishers, including contracts, royalty statements, legal documents, and marketing and promotional material, 1958-1961. There are also letters addressed to Longstreth from Chessman supporters, 1957-1962. Other papers in the collection include Chessman's typescript appeal to the State Supreme Court of California, undated; 2 short stories, an essay, and an afterword written by Longstreth, undated; and materials pertaining to Chessman's royalties, undated. Collection also includes approximately 750 autograph and typescript pages of unpublished novels and short stories written by Chessman, circa 1948-1960. Accompanied by newspaper clippings about Chessman, 1958-1960, and 2 videocassette tapes: The death penalty (A&E, 1996) and a collection of newscasts about the Chessman case made by Longstreth, undated.

Arrangement

Organized into five series: I. Correspondence, 1953-1985. II. Newspaper clippings, 1954-1960, undated. III. Other papers, 1953-2015, undated. IV. Writings, 1957-1966, undated. V. Audiovisual materials, 1996, undated.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1953-1985

Series I contains correspondence between Joseph Longstreth and Rosalie Asher, Caryl Chessman's lawyer, and between Longstreth and Chessman. Letters document discussions of finances, publishing matters, and legal proceedings. Also included is correspondence between Longstreth and Bernice Freeman, a reporter from the San Francisco Chronicle; Frank Olson; historian Harry Elmer Barnes; Frances Couterier, who was romantically involved with Chessman in absentia; and Longstreth's attorney, John Thorne. There are also letters to domestic and foreign publishers, including contracts, royalty statements, legal documents, and marketing and promotional material. Present are letters addressed to Longstreth from Chessman supporters.

Series I is arranged alphabetically by individual or subject.

	Rosalie Asher	1954-1985
b. 1, f. 1-6	R. Asher (6 folders)	1954
b. 1, f. 7-14	Correspondence: Joseph Longstreth and Rosalie Asher (8 folders)	1955
b. 1, f. 15-20	R. Asher (6 folders)	1956
b. 1, f. 21-26	Asher (6 folders)	1957
b. 2, f. 27-29	Asher (3 folders)	1958
b. 2, f. 30-33	Asher (4 folders)	1959
b. 2, f. 34-38	Asher correspondence (5 folders)	1960
b. 2, f. 39-42	Asher (4 folders)	1961
b. 2, f. 43-50	Asher (8 folders)	1962-1965
b. 2, f. 51-53	Asher (3 folders)	1972-1985
	Caryl Chessman	1953-1958
b. 3, f. 54-60	Chessman (Cal 2d 455) (7 folders)	1953-1954
b. 3, f. 61-69	Chessman (9 folders)	1954-1955
b. 3, f. 70	Chessman	1956
b. 3, f. 71	Chessman	1957
b. 3, f. 72-73	Chessman (2 folders)	1958
	Other	1953-1982
b. 3, b. 74	Harry Elmer Barnes	1960-1961
b. 3, f. 75-76	Couterier (2 folders)	1954-1958
b. 3, b. 77	George Davis	1956-1957
b. 3, f. 78	Bernice Freeman	1954-1959

Other (continued)

b. 4, f. 79-81	Frank Olson (3 folders)	1958-1960
b. 4, f. 82-84	Thorne: Conspiracy case (3 folders)	1959-1960
b. 4, f. 85-97	Letters on Chessman (13 folders)	1953-1959
b. 4, f. 98-99	Trial by ordeal, Chessman correspondence (2 folders)	1955-1959
b. 4, f. 100	Important letters to Joseph Longstreth	1958-1977
b. 5, f. 101-110	Chessman: Enquiries miscellaneous (10 folders)	1958-1961
b. 5, f. 111-112	Unpublishing enquiries correspondence (2 folders)	1960-1961
b. 5, f. 113	Chessman	1961-1982
b. 5, f. 114-115	Chessman (2 folders)	1961
b. 5, f. 116-117	Chessman (2 folders)	1962

Series II: Newspaper clippings, 1954-1960, undated

Series II contains newspaper clippings pertaining to the Chessman case.

Series II is arranged chronologically.

b. 5, f. 118-120	Clippings: Chessman (3 folders)	1954-1960, undated
b. 5, f. 121-124	Newspaper clippings related to Chessman (4 folders)	1957-1960
b. 5, f. 125	[The people vs. Caryl Chessman]	1959 December 27
b. 6, f. 126-131	Chessman: Clippings (6 folders)	1960

Series III: Other papers, 1953-2015, undated

Series III contains financial, legal, and miscellaneous papers pertaining to Caryl Chessman and his published works. There are also publications and ephemera. Included are letters sent from Alan Bisbort, biographer, to Lorne Bair, dealer, explaining how the collection came into his possession.

Series III is arranged chronologically.

b. 6, f. 132	Contract: Chessman	1953-1958
b. 6, f. 133-134	Miscellaneous (2 folders)	1954-1977
b. 6, f. 135	Tax: Chessman	1956-1957
b. 6, f. 136	Royalties	1956-1959
b. 6, f. 137	Chessman ephemera	1959-1960
b. 6, f. 138	Chessman appeal to Supreme Ct. of California	before 1960
b. 6, f. 139	Chessman: Important legal publication reference	1960
b. 6, f. 140	[Publications about Chessman]	1960-1962
b. 6, f. 141	[Publications about Chessman]	1960, 1969
b. 6, f. 142	[Alan Bisbort letters to Lorne Bair, dealer]	2015
b. 6, f. 143	[Miscellaneous photocopies]	undated
b. 6, f. 144	[Miscellaneous photocopies]	undated

Series IV: Writings, 1957-1966, undated

Series IV contains manuscript and typescript works of Caryl Chessman and Joseph Longstreth. Some writings are accompanied by correspondence. Included are unpublished materials.


Series IV is arranged alphabetically.

	Caryl Chessman	1960-1966, undated
b. 7, f. 145	[And evermore the picture altars]	undated
b. 7, f. 146	Art for Arthur's sake, original handwritten story by Caryl Chessman	undated
b. 7, f. 147	Autumn and Eve, original handwritten Caryl Chessman story	undated
b. 7, f. 148	A corpse for Christmas, by Caryl Chessman	undated
b. 7, f. 149	[Corpse for Christmas, Kid was a killer]	undated
b. 7, f. 150	Crisis, typescript of story by Caryl Chessman	undated
b. 7, f. 151	Dust thou art?, A voice from death row; 2 vignettes by Caryl Chessman	undated
b. 7, f. 152	Chapter 28: The face of justice, with annotations by Joseph Longstreth	1966
b. 7, f. 153	The gladiator, the disrobing danseuse, and l'amour, typed story by Caryl Chessman	undated
b. 7, f. 154-162	Kid was a killer (9 folders)	before 1960
b. 7, f. 163	Chessman shorts: The kid was a killer, short story	undated
b. 8, f. 164-174	Nov smoz kapop? (11 folders)	undated
b. 9, f. 175-178	Nov smoz kapop? (4 folders)	undated
b. 9, f. 179	Pedro was a happy man, story by Caryl Chessman	undated
b. 9, f. 180	Young man with a right hand, typed story by Caryl Chessman	undated
	Joseph Longstreth	1957-1960, undated
b. 9, f. 181-183	Calliope Joe (3 folders)	undated
b. 9, f. 184	Joe Longstreth afterword for Face of justice	1957-1960
b. 9, f. 185	Writer: Caryl Chessman, by Joseph Longstreth	1960

Series V: Audiovisual materials, 1996, undated

Series V contains 2 videotapes: The death penalty, produced by A&E, 1996; and a collection of recorded newscasts about the Chessman case, made by Joseph Longstreth, undated.

Series V is arranged alphabetically.

b. 9, f. 186,  39002137164266	Chessman in news 1 Videocassette (VHS) 01:03:06 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm) [Aviary] wamsss-374339002137164266.u.mp4 Audiovisual material. Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.	undated
b. 9, f. 187	"The Death Penalty" 1 Videocassette (VHS) This is a commercial videocassette. It has not been digitized.	1996

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Authors and publishers -- United States
Capital punishment -- California
Crime -- California
Criminals -- California
Death row inmates -- California
Incarceration -- California
Prisoners' writings, American -- California

Occupations

Editors -- United States -- 20th Century

Geographic Names

California

Corporate Bodies

California State Prison at San Quentin
Critics Associated

Contributors

Chessman, Caryl, 1921-1960 , author
Longstreth, Joseph, 1920-2003 , author

Acquired From

Lorne Bair Rare Books , bookseller